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Vol. 22 Issue 03, Friday 0 March to 16 March, 2023 \$1 www.thesouthasianinsider.com

## Why so many Biharis still work as laborers in Tamil Nadu, Punjab and other states



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## Queens Man Arrested For Defrauding Former Employer Of \$4.4 Million In Fake Invoice Scheme



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## India, world's largest democracy, leads global list of internet shutdowns

(SAI Bureau) India imposed the highest number of internet shutdowns recorded worldwide in 2022, a new report has revealed, in what critics say is yet another blow to the country's commitment to freedom of speech and access to in-

formation. Of 187 internet shutdowns recorded worldwide, 84 took place in India, according to the report published Tuesday by Access Now, a New York based advocacy group that tracks internet freedom.



Contd on page 24

## The dark world of Haryana's Gau Rakshaks

A Media probe was triggered by the discovery of the charred bodies of two men, Junaid and Nasir, from a burnt SUV in Haryana's Bhiwani district on February 16.



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## The Holi shown in these pics does not exist!

Take a look at some of the machine-generated pictures of the Holi celebration by people who never existed.



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5th grade Lee Ave students went to Legislative Building Mineola where Hon Legislator Rose Walker gave a tour and answered questions from all the students attending, while giving them a great experience seating them in Legislative Chambers, and educating on History of the county and more.  
Picture : Harry Malhotra



Exclusive Pictures of Holi Celebrations by Town of Oyster Bay  
Pictures by Harry Malhotra



Deepak Bansal, Chairman of IAAC was recently honored by Asian Jade Society. Seen with Deepak are Joy Thomas of Suffolk Police Department and Sharanjit Singh Thind, Former Commissioner Nassau County Human Rights Commission.



Dominican Independence Day was recently celebrated with cultural programs at the Town of Hempstead. Here are some exclusive pictures.



# CON EDISON FINALIZES SALE OF ITS CLEAN ENERGY BUSINESSES

(News Agency) NEW YORK - Consolidated Edison, Inc. ("Con Edison") (NYSE:ED) has successfully completed the sale of its wholly-owned subsidiary, Con Edison Clean Energy Businesses, Inc. (the "Clean Energy Businesses"), including the transfer of substantially all of its assets, to RWE Renewables Americas, LLC. The transaction is valued at \$6.8 billion. "Con Edison's focus is on New York," said Timothy P. Cawley, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Con Edison, Inc. "We are leading the transition to a clean energy future, while maintaining a safe, cost-effective system that delivers world class reliability for our customers." Con Edison continues to make significant investments in clean energy transmission projects, building electrification, energy efficiency, electric vehicle infrastructure, battery storage and other technologies. In addition, Con Edison wants to invest in and operate renewable generation in New York. "To help New York reach its ambitious clean energy goals, we continue to seek state approval of utility-owned renewable generation to benefit our customers and all New Yorkers," Cawley added. This press release contains forward-looking statements that are intended to qualify for the safe-harbor provisions of Section 27A of the Securities Act of 1933, as amended, and Section 21E of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended. Forward-looking statements are statements of future expectations and not facts. Words such as "forecasts," "expects," "estimates," "anticipates," "intends," "believes," "plans," "will," "target," "guidance," "potential," "consider" and similar expressions identify forward-looking statements. The forward-looking statements reflect information available and assumptions at the time the statements are made, and accordingly speak only as of that time.

Consolidated Edison, Inc. is one of the nation's largest investor-owned energy-delivery companies, with approximately \$16 billion in annual revenues and \$69

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## PIONEERING USE OF STATUTE RESTORES HOME TO DEED FRAUD VICTIMS

(News Agency) Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced that a house in St. Albans was returned to its rightful owners, a disabled veteran and his family, through the first-ever use of a state law enacted to protect deed fraud victims. District Attorney Katz said: "This is the first time the law has been applied in New York State. The homeowner was wronged by a criminal scheme targeting the title of his family's generational home for financial gain. The action taken by my Housing and Worker Protection Bureau spares this family the distress and delay of having to go to civil court to get the property deed back." In January 2023, Jasmine Morgan was convicted of filing a false deed for the St. Albans home on 198th Street and selling it without the owners' knowledge or consent. One of the rightful owners, a disabled veteran, discovered the ruse when his son went to check on the property and found it was

under construction. After a hearing, Supreme Court Justice Jerry Lannece, who presided over Morgan's conviction, granted a motion filed by the Queens District Attorney's office to restore the property deed to its rightful owners. New York State Criminal Procedure Law 420.45, enacted in August 2019, allows district attorneys to file a post-trial motion in Supreme Court on behalf of a victim when there is a conviction for offering a false instrument for filing in the first or second degree. By taking this action on their behalf, victims of real estate schemes are spared the burden of further legal proceedings in civil court to restore their property deeds. District Attorney Melinda Katz established the Housing and Worker Protection Bureau during her first year in office to focus on investigating and prosecuting crimes related to homeownership, predatory lending, wage theft and workplace safety.

mission, Inc., which falls primarily under the oversight of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and through its subsidiaries invests in electric transmission projects supporting its parent company's effort to transition to clean, renewable energy. Con Edison Transmission manages, through joint ventures, both electric and gas assets while seeking to develop electric transmission projects that will bring clean, renewable electricity to customers, focusing on New York, New England, the Mid-Atlantic states and the Midwest.

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# Abode of Light: Sant Rajinder Singh Ji Maharaj releases poetic treasure

(South Asian Insider Bureau)  
New Delhi, February 28: This evening in a glittering event at the Siri Fort Auditorium in Delhi, attended by thousands of spiritual seekers from India and abroad, world-renowned Spiritual Master and internationally recognized best-selling author, Sant Rajinder Singh Ji Maharaj along with Hon'ble Shri Hardeep Singh Puri, Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs and Petroleum and Natural Gas launched the illuminating book *Abode of Light* (Manzil-e-Noor). The book is the English translation of ninety-six verses penned in Urdu by the great poet-saint, Sant Darshan Singh Ji Maharaj, in praise of Guru Nanak Dev Ji Maharaj and his teachings. This was published to commemorate the 500th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev Ji Maharaj and won the Urdu Academy Award for poetry.

"It gives me immense joy to release this book, *Abode of Light*, which shares Guru Nanak Dev Ji Maharaj's message, so everyone can find the Light within leading to peace, happiness, divine love and unity," Sant Rajinder Singh Ji Maharaj said. "The teachings of Guru Nanak Dev Ji brought

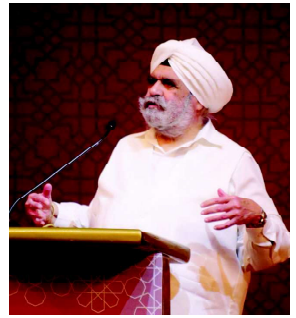


Light into the lives of many, turning them to being spiritually uplifted. Guru Nanak Dev Ji was indeed an *Abode of Light*."

Quoting a few verses from the book, Sant Rajinder Singh Ji Maharaj expounded that Guru Nanak Dev Ji Maharaj's divine love and Light illuminated millions and showed them the path of God-realization. "Guru Nanak Dev Ji Maharaj wanted us to truly recognize ourselves and lead a life of Oneness with God. He gave the profound message of gender equality and honest living, which

we must imbibe in our lives. It is my prayer that the grace of Guru Nanak Dev Ji Maharaj be with each of us, and this book brings light into the lives of everyone worldwide," he said. Shri Hardeep Singh Puri congratulated Sant Rajinder Singh Ji Maharaj for the "commendable work" saying that the "book touches the core of one's sensibilities". "I consider it as a deep privilege to now having become a part of this book's journey, which underlines the universal applicability of Guru Nanak Dev Ji's message. The book con-

taining 96 verses is inspired by the eternal and divine message of peace, oneness, sewa and coexistence preached by Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji Maharaj. The Urdu language verses are translated in English with transliteration in Devnagari and Roman scripts making it easy for all to read and understand. Sant Rajinder Singh Ji Maharaj has done a tremendous work in translating this book and has succeeded in bringing the message of Guru Nanak Dev Ji Maharaj to a larger audience. The sagacity,



wisdom and humility of poet-saint Sant Darshan Singh Ji Maharaj's work has been honored by Sant Rajinder Singh Ji Maharaj" Shri Hardeep Singh Puri said. The event culminated on a beautiful note as Sant Rajinder Singh Ji came among the audience members and signed many copies of the book. Sant Rajinder Singh Ji is the head of non-profit organisation, Science of Spirituality and is internationally recognized for teaching meditation to millions, through meditation seminars, books, DVDs, audiobooks, articles, appearances on TV, radio, and Internet broadcasts and social media. His books include *Detox the Mind*, *Meditation as Medication for the Soul*, and *Inner and Outer Peace through Meditation*.

## SLAM THE SCAM: HOW TO SPOT GOVERNMENT IMPOSTERS

(By Nilsa Henriquez)

Social Security Public Affairs Specialist in Queens, NY Do you know how to spot a government imposter scam? Knowing how to identify potential scammers will help safeguard your personal information.

There are common elements to many of these scams. Scammers often exploit fears and threaten you with arrest or legal action. Scammers also pose as Social Security or other government employees and claim there's a problem with your Social Security number (SSN) or your benefits. They may even claim your SSN is linked to a crime.

When you identify a potential scammer:

Hang up right away or ignore the message.

Never give personal information or money.

Report the scam immediately to our Office of the Inspector General at [oig.ssa.gov/scam-awareness/report-the-scam](http://oig.ssa.gov/scam-awareness/report-the-scam). If you owe money to Social Security, we'll



mail you a letter with payment options and appeal rights. We only accept payments electronically through Pay.gov, Online Bill Pay, or physically by check or money order through our offices.

We will never do the following:

Threaten you with arrest or legal action because you don't agree to pay us money immediately. Promise a benefit increase in exchange for money.

Ask you to send us gift cards, prepaid debit cards, wire transfers, internet currency, cryptocurrency, or cash through the U.S. mail. Scammers con-

tinue to evolve and find new ways to steal your money and personal information. Please stay vigilant and help raise awareness about Social Security-related scams and other government imposter scams. For more information on scams, please visit [www.ssa.gov/scam](http://www.ssa.gov/scam). Tell your friends and family about government imposter scams. Let them know they don't have to be embarrassed to report if they shared personal financial information or suffered a financial loss. The important thing is to report the scam right away. Together, we can "Slam the Scam!"

## Indian-origin woman dead, daughter severely burned in US plane crash

**An Indian-origin woman lost her life and her daughter and pilot instructor were severely injured in a plane crash in New York. Roma Gupta was killed when the four-seater single-engine plane went down in flames.**

(South Asian Insider Bureau)  
An Indian-origin woman was killed and her daughter was severely burned in a plane crash during a "demonstration flight" in New York, US.

Roma Gupta (63) and her daughter Reeva Gupta (33) were on board the small plane on Sunday as its pilot reported smoke in the cockpit before crashing near Long Island homes, PTI reported. Roma was killed when the four-seater single-engine Piper Cherokee plane went down in flames as it was returning to the Republic Airport on Long Island. Her daughter Reeva and the 23-year-old pilot instructor suffered severe burns and are receiving treatment.

Reeva will have a painful recovery as he has suffered third-degree burns, the report said. The

flight instructor operating the plane was also in critical condition on Monday. The flight path shows the plane went over the South Shore beaches. Then the

pilot reported smoke in the cabin, which he radioed into Republic Airport air traffic controllers, the News 12 New Jersey website reported. Later it was revealed that the plane involved in the crash had passed just two inspections. The Federal Aviation Administration is investigating the crash. Investigators are expected to return to the crash site for a third time today to remove the wreckage for further analysis.





# 12th Outstanding Women's Achievements Awards Gala



(By our staff reporter) New York- Indian American Forum (IAF) recently held their Awards Gala and, honored some distinguished women with the highest caliber. Under the leadership of Chairperson Indu Jaiswal and Gala Chair Shammi Singh, known for their strong commitment and dedication to the community cause, along with the entire team of IAF, were the organizing force behind the GALA, celebrating the success of the outstanding achievements by these distinguished personalities in the presence of many accomplished guests and community leaders.

Special Women Elected Officials New York State Assemblywoman Jenifer Rajkumar and Town of North Hempstead Clerk Ragini Srivastava, respectfully invited and welcomed by Dr. Bobby Kalotee, portrayed women empowerment and success. The community stood together in joy and pride at the celebration of the 12th Outstanding Women's Achievements Gala, part of Women's History Month and International Women's Day Celebrations. Five distinguished women who had excelled in their profession and community services were presented with Out-

standing Women's achievements Awards. Also were presented with Citations from Deputy Supervisor Dorothy Goosby from Town of Hempstead, Joseph Saladino, Supervisor Town of Oyster Bay, Nassau County Comptroller Office Elaine Phillips, Town of North Hempstead Clerk Ragini Srivastava. Honoree Sandhya Bhatia, Branch Manager, Vice president of Flushing Bank is an Experienced Branch Manager with a demonstrated history of working in the financial services industry. She is Skilled in Portfolio Management, Business Relationship, Risk Management,

## Ridiculous: Jill Biden on Nikki Haley's proposal of mental competency test for politicians over 75

**Haley, the two-term governor of South Carolina, is 51, while President Joe Biden would be 82 at the time of his inauguration in 2025 if he is re-elected in the November 2024 election.**



(South Asian Insider Bureau) US First Lady Dr Jill Biden on Monday termed "ridiculous" a proposal from Republican presidential aspirant Nikki Haley that candidates over the age of 75 should undergo a mental competency test. "Ridiculous," Dr Biden told CNN in an interview when asked about such a proposal from Indian American Haley, who announced her presidential run on February 14. Haley's proposal has caught national attention, but she has been slammed by leaders in both the Republican and the Democratic parties. Haley, the two-term governor of South Carolina, is 51, while President Joe

Biden would be 82 at the time of his inauguration in 2025 if he is re-elected in the November 2024 election. Biden, who is already the oldest president in the history of the United States, has not announced his 2024 decision yet, but is most likely to announce it soon. Leading Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump is only a few years younger to Biden. In her presidential campaign so far, Haley has pitched for youth and a new generation of leadership. "We would never even discuss something like that," Dr Jill Biden said when asked about such a proposal from the Republican politician.

## U.S. intel community fears increased India-Pakistan, India-China tension and conflict

(South Asian Insider Bureau) orism emanating from Pakistan. File | Photo Credit: PTI

The American intelligence community has told lawmakers that it apprehends increased tension between India and Pakistan and India and China with the possibility of a conflict between them.

It also noted that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India is more likely than in the past to respond with military force to "perceived or real" provocations from Pakistan.

This evaluation on March 8 forms part of the annual threat assessment of the U.S. intelligence community that was submitted to the U.S. Congress by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence during a Congressional hearing. While India and China have engaged in bilateral border talks and resolved border points, relations will remain strained in the wake of the countries' lethal clash in 2020, the most serious in decades, said the report.

The expanded military postures by

both India and China along the disputed border elevate the risk of armed confrontation between two nuclear powers that might involve direct threats to U.S. persons and interests and calls for U.S. intervention. Previous standoffs have demonstrated that persistent low-level friction on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) has the potential to escalate swiftly, it said.

Relations between China and India have virtually frozen ever since the eastern Ladakh military standoff between the two countries in May 2020.



**Happy Holi message by Neeru Bhambri of IALI**



# 'Meticulously planned theft': Couple jailed for stealing 45 bottles of wine worth \$1.7 million in Spain

The woman, who according to Spanish press reports is a former Mexican beauty queen, checked into the hotel using a fake Swiss passport, the court said.



(SAI Bureau) A Spanish court on Monday jailed a couple for stealing 45 bottles of wine worth over 1.6 million euros (\$1.7 million) from a hotel restaurant in what police called a "meticulously planned" theft.

A bottle of Chateau D'Yquem 1806 worth 350,000 euros was among the wines stolen from the Atrio hotel in Caceres in southwest Spain in October 2021 in the heist which made global headlines. A court in Caceres sentenced the woman to four years in jail and

the man to four and a half years, after finding them guilty of burglary with forced entry.

The court also ordered the pair — who were arrested in July 2022 in Croatia — to pay compensation of 753,454 euros to the hotel.

The woman, who according to Spanish press reports is a former Mexican beauty queen, checked into the hotel using a fake Swiss passport, the court said. After dining in the Michelin three-star restaurant of the hotel, the pair were given a tour of the Atrio's renowned wine cellar before they retired to their room.

At 2 am the woman called the reception and asked the "sole employee" who was

working at the time to make her a salad, according to the court ruling.

The employee at first denied the request because he was alone and because the couple had eaten a 14-course tasting menu, but he ended up agreeing because she kept insisting.

While the employee was preparing the salad, the man slipped into reception and stole an electronic key which he thought would gain entry to the wine cellar, but it was the wrong one.

From outside the wine cellar, the man called his partner and told her once again to distract the receptionist, so she requested a dessert. "The

accused returned to the reception and from a box, he took master key number 27, which he used to open the wine cellar from where he took 45 bottles of wine," the court said.

The man, who reportedly has Romanian and Dutch citizenship, carried the bottles to his room in a rucksack and two large bags before the receptionist returned to his post.

The couple had "meticulously planned" the heist, visiting the restaurant three times to prepare for the raid, Spain's National Police said in a statement when the pair were arrested.

## Former Bank Employee Charged With Million-Dollar Fraud And Embezzlement Scheme



(SAI Bureau) Damian Williams, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and Michael J. Driscoll, Assistant Director in Charge of the New York Field Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI"), announced today the arrest of KEVIN CHIU, a former business relationship manager at a financial institution headquartered in Manhattan, for a years-long bank fraud and embezzlement scheme to steal over \$2 million from his former clients' accounts. CHIU was arrested this morning in Brooklyn and will be presented today before U.S. Magistrate Judge James L. Cott. U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said: "As alleged, for

financial institution to steal millions from his clients, including elderly clients. Today's arrest is yet another example of this Office's commitment to holding accountable those who commit financial frauds, especially those who are in positions of trust within financial institutions."

FBI Assistant Director Michael J. Driscoll said: "The complaint today alleges that Chiu exploited his access to facilitate a years-long scheme to embezzle more than two million dollars from his clients.

Financial crimes like this ultimately undermine the public's confidence in the financial system. Today's arrest should serve as a reminder to anyone willing to take advantage of their employment to steal funds - the FBI will ensure you are held accountable in the criminal justice system."

From at least on or about October 28, 2020, through on or about June 29, 2022, CHIU engaged in a scheme to steal from his clients' accounts by using fraudulent transaction forms to transfer funds out of

their accounts. He asked at least one elderly client to sign blank transaction forms when she was meeting with CHIU in person and provided that client with fake account statements so she would not know the true balance of her account, which CHIU had largely drained. In addition, CHIU transferred stolen funds from some client accounts to others from which he already had stolen to conceal the fraud. In total, CHIU stole over \$2 million from his former clients, several of whom were elderly individual clients.

## Two Defendants Arrested For Stealing Over \$1 Million From ATMs Throughout The Bronx

(SAI Bureau) Damian Williams, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and Keechant L. Sewell, the Commissioner of the New York City Police Department ("NYPD"), announced the unsealing of a two-count Complaint today charging RAMDEO BALLIRAM and LEONARDO ORTIZ with bank theft and conspiracy to commit bank theft in connection with a years-long scheme in which they stole more than \$1 million from Automated Teller Machines ("ATMs") located in commercial establishments throughout the Bronx. BALLIRAM and ORTIZ were arrested today and will be presented before U.S. Magistrate Judge

James L. Cott.

U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said: "As alleged, the defendants carried out a calculated scheme for years, stealing over a million dollars from ATMs in businesses throughout the Bronx. The relentless efforts of this Office and our law enforcement partners have finally put an end to the burglaries and thefts allegedly perpetrated by the defendants, and we will continue to be diligent in seeking justice for those affected by these crimes."

NYPD Commissioner Keechant L. Sewell said: "For nearly two years, these defendants allegedly targeted multiple small businesses in the Bronx — burglarizing, ransacking, and

stealing more than \$1 million. Their brazen scheme undermined public safety throughout an entire borough, and today's complaint is the next step toward holding them accountable for their crimes. Thank you to the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York and all the NYPD investigators who worked together to bring charges in this case."

From at least in or about March 2021 through in or about January 2023, BALLIRAM, ORTIZ, and another individual ("CC-1") engaged in a series of at least 23 burglaries of commercial establishments throughout the Bronx, in which they stole over \$1 million from ATMs.



# Justice Department Announces Application Form for Marijuana Pardon Certificates

(SAI Bureau) Today, the Justice Department is launching an application for eligible individuals to receive certificate of proof that they were pardoned under the Oct. 6, 2022, proclamation by President Biden. On Oct. 6, 2022, the President announced a full, unconditional and categorical pardon for prior federal and D.C. offenses of simple possession of marijuana. The President's pardon lifts barriers to housing, employment and educational opportunities for thousands of people with those prior convictions. President Biden directed the Justice Department to develop a process for individuals to receive their certificate of pardon. The online application will be available on the Office of the Pardon Attorney's website: Application for Certificate of Pardon. The web form allows eligible persons to submit documentation to the Office of the Pardon Attorney and receive a certificate



indicating the person was pardoned on Oct. 6, 2022, for simple possession of marijuana. The President's pardon, effective Oct. 6, 2022, may assist

the pardoned conviction. The application released today may also be helpful as proof of pardon for those who seek to obtain licenses, bonding or employment. As President Biden said at the time of the proclamation, his action intends to "help relieve the consequences arising from these convictions." Those who were pardoned on Oct. 6, 2022, are eligible for a certificate of pardon. Consistent with the proclamation, to be eligible for a certificate, an applicant must have been charged or convicted of simple possession of marijuana in either a federal court or D.C. Superior Court, and the applicant must have been lawfully within the United States at the time of the offense. Similarly, an individual must have been a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident on Oct. 6, 2022. Those who were convicted of state marijuana offenses do not qualify for the pardon.

## Serial Con Artist Sentenced To 51 Months In Connection With Embezzlement Scheme



2018, after the Victim learned about significant expenditures from the Victim's financial accounts, the Victim confronted SHOW HUTSONA, who confessed that she had used the Victim's financial accounts for her own personal use and repeatedly apologized to the Victim. Shortly thereafter, SHOW HUTSONA and the Victim signed an agreement, which stated, among other things, that SHOW HUTSONA had obtained an "additional user card" (the "User Card") and that SHOW HUTSONA "had been using [the Victim's] account since July 2016." The agreement further stated that SHOW HUTSONA needed to repay \$307,498.02 to the Victim.

## Two Men Sentenced in \$30M Foreign Exchange Fraud Scheme

(News Agency) A Massachusetts man and a Florida man were sentenced for their roles in perpetrating a foreign exchange trading scheme to steal \$30 million from their investor

(News Agency) Damian Williams, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that TRACII SHOW HUTSONA was sentenced today to 51 months in prison for her embezzlement of more than one million dollars as part of a confidence scheme. The sentence was imposed by U.S. District Judge Jesse M. Furman.

U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said: "Not long after serving a lengthy sentence for a previous federal conviction, Tracii Show Hutsona betrayed her employer's trust by misusing her employer's financial information to fund her own luxury lifestyle for years. Her desire to live the high life at the expense of her victim has placed her back where she began — facing another substantial federal sentence." According to public court

filings and statements made in Court: Between October 2015 and November 2019, SHOW HUTSONA engaged in a confidence scheme to embezzle over a million dollars from a victim (the "Victim"). The Victim hired SHOW HUTSONA to serve as a personal assistant at the Victim's home and trusted SHOW HUTSONA with access to the Victim's financial information. Just a few months after she was hired, and while SHOW HUTSONA was on supervised release in connection with a previous federal fraud conviction in California, SHOW HUTSONA began using that access to finance her own luxury lifestyle. In February 2016, SHOW HUTSONA opened a credit card account in the Victim's name without the Victim's knowledge or authorization. In September

Patrick Gallagher, 45, of Middleborough, Massachusetts, was sentenced to five years in prison on Feb. 21 and Michael Dion, 50, of Orlando, Florida, was sentenced to four years and seven months in prison today.

According to court documents, Gallagher and Dion devised a scheme in which they would solicit victims to invest in their foreign exchange company, Global Forex Management, by promising them large returns based on previous trading results that they had fabricated. They told the victims that their funds would be traded using an online trading platform provided by a co-conspirator's company, IB Capital. Instead, Gallagher and Dion were working with other co-

conspirators in the Netherlands to steal the victim investors' money. In May 2012, Gallagher and Dion executed their scheme by intentionally creating losing trades for the investors and effectively stole approximately \$30 million from their victims. After fabricating the massive trading loss, Gallagher and Dion routed the stolen money through shell companies they had set up all over the world.

Assistant Attorney General Kenneth A. Polite, Jr. of the Justice Department's Criminal Division and Inspector in Charge Eric Shen of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service's (USPIS) Criminal Investigations Group made the announcement. The USPIS investigated the case. Trial Attorneys Vasanth Sridharan, Tian Huang, and Brittain Shaw of the Criminal Division's Fraud Section prosecuted the case.





# The Future of the Republican Party Is on the Line

Presumably, Donald Trump will never produce the dark secrets promised about Ron DeSantis' past. But his team thinks it already has one — the Florida governor once was a Reagan Republican.

"There's a pre-Trump Ron and there's a post-Trump Ron," someone in the Trump camp told Axios. "He used to be a Reagan Republican. That's where he comes from. He's now awkwardly trying to square his views up with the populist nationalist feeling of that party." In his CPAC speech last weekend doubling down on MAGA, Trump said "we are never going back to the party of Paul Ryan, Karl Rove and Jeb Bush." He didn't mention Reagan, but the inclusion of the Gipper in the hall of shame was heavily implied.

This way of thinking in a Republican primary is something new. Once upon a time, pretty much every Republican wanted to be a Reagan Republican. If the Trump camp gets its way, Reaganism will have gone from passé in 2016 to an affirmative vulnerability in 2024.

There are layers to this intra-Republican debate. It is certainly true that conservatives became overly obsessed with identifying themselves with Ronald Reagan. By the time something becomes an -ism, it is likely to be simplified and ossified, and so it was. Then, there's the sheer passage of time. Reagan left office 34 years ago. As of 2020, more than half of Americans were under age 40, meaning they have no real memory of Reagan. Trying to run again on a version of the Reagan platform would be like doing the same thing with Abraham Lincoln's program in 1899, or someone being a devoted acolyte of Joe Biden in the 2050s.

Neither the pro- or anti-Reagan side tends to do justice to the real, historical political figure, instead creating an uncomplicated archetype to be embraced or rejected. Reagan was right on much, wrong on some things (immigration), and flexible and practical the way a successful practical politician needs to be. Reagan was a free marketeer, but wasn't doctrinaire. He accepted the fact of the New Deal. He was a free-trader, yet acted to protect American auto makers and Harley Davison from Japanese imports. If he was hawkish on foreign policy, he was always prudent. The defense budget grew, and he was insistent on deploying intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe. He pursued missile defense over fierce opposition. He was unsparing in his anti-Soviet rhetoric and armed anti-Soviet guerrillas. He forcefully promoted human rights. On the other hand, he was cautious about deploying U.S. troops overseas, and pulled back from Lebanon after the devastating attack at the Marine barracks in Beirut. Despite calling the Soviet Union an "evil empire," he was willing to talk to Mikhail Gorbachev and even contemplated eliminating nuclear weapons at a summit with Gorbachev in

Reykjavik.

Some populist nationalists tend to think of pre-Trump conservatism as being complacent on social issues. But Reagan allied with the religious right and wrote an anti-abortion book when he was in office. He banned the use of federal funds for abortions overseas. He wanted a constitutional amendment to allow prayer in schools and said, "the truth is, politics and morality are inseparable." If Reagan eventually came to define conventional Republicanism, he took on his party's liberal establishment and brought a populist voice to issues like the Panama Canal and crime. So he is more complex than advertised, but the so-called Zombie Reaganism that the populists inveigh against is a real phenomenon. This thoughtless version of Reaganism doesn't take sufficient account of how circumstances in the country have changed over the last 30 years. Take taxes. The burden of federal income taxes isn't nearly as heavy on middle-class families as it was in the 1970s and 1980s, when inflation pushed them into ever-higher tax brackets. And Republicans have cut taxes so many times, any positive economic effect of further reductions is limited. Nonetheless, for the longest time, the standard Republican approach to domestic policy, with some differences in emphasis, was to cut taxes and reduce the debt, with everything else fading to the background. As it happens, Trump also ran on these two priorities in 2016, although he was only serious about the tax cuts. Not schooled in Republican orthodoxies, Trump mixed in new policies and attitudes, on the border, entitlements, trade and foreign policy. He expanded the Overton window well beyond what most people would have thought possible.

Other Republicans should be similarly coming up with an agenda to meet the challenges of today, not those of the 1970s (although the problems of inflation and crime are common to both eras). All that said, Reagan's achievements are momentous and should be acknowledged as such by all Republican factions. He set the predicate for winning the Cold War without firing a shot. He slayed inflation, both by sticking by Federal Reserve Chair Paul Volcker, despite considerable political pressure to buckle, and by pursuing pro-growth policies that created more supply in the economy. He ended the energy crisis. His administration gave a boost to the nascent conservative legal movement. He brought a new constituency into the Republican Party, the so-called Reagan Democrats (an analogue of Democrats who would vote for Trump), and forced a turn to the center by the Democratic Party under Bill Clinton. He changed the mood of the country. As a sheer political matter, it doesn't make any sense for Trump to assail Reagan by name, given his standing in the party.

# The US central bank is poised to cause untold hardship to millions of Americans

As chairman of the Federal Reserve board, Jerome Powell is making his semi-annual policy report to Congress this week. I have an urgent question for Powell that I hope members of Congress will also ask: how can he justify further rate hikes in light of America's staggering inequality? Powell and his colleagues on the Fed's open market committee are considering pushing interest rates much higher in their quest to get inflation down to their target of 2%. They believe higher interest rates will reduce consumer spending and slow the economy. With all due respect, this is unnecessary — and unjust.

Over the past year, the Fed raised interest rates at the fastest pace since the 1980s, from near zero to more than 4.5%. But consumer spending isn't slowing. It fell slightly in November and December but jumped 1.8% in January, even faster than inflation. As a result, Powell is now saying he may need to lift rates above 5%. A recent paper by a group of academic and Wall Street economists suggests that he will need to raise interest rates as high as 6.5% to meet his 2% target. This would worsen America's already staggering inequalities. You see, the Americans who are doing most of the spending are not the ones who will be hit hardest by the rate increases. The biggest spenders are in the top fifth of the income ladder. The biggest losers will be in the bottom fifth.

Widening inequality has given the richest fifth a lot of room to keep spending. Even before the pandemic, they were doing far better than most other Americans. The top fifth's savings are still much higher than they were before the pandemic, so they can continue their spending spree almost regardless of how high the Fed yanks up rates. That spending is a big reason Powell and his colleagues at the Fed are having so much difficulty slowing the economy by raising interest rates (in addition to the

market power of many big corporations to continue raising prices and profit margins). Those higher rates are flowing back into the top fifth's savings, on which they're collecting interest. But yank up rates much more and we'll impose big sacrifices on lower-income Americans. Powell himself has predicted that at least 2 million people will lose their jobs if he raises interest rates to 4.6% by the end of the year. The study I mentioned a moment ago concludes that "there is no post-1950 precedent for a sizable central-bank-induced disinflation that does not entail substantial economic sacrifice or recession". Well, there's also no post-1950 precedent for the degree of income inequality America is now experiencing. Relying on further interest-rate hikes to fight inflation will only worsen the consequence of America's near-record inequality. The people who will endure the biggest sacrifices as the economy slows will be the first to lose their jobs: mostly, those in the bottom fifth. There's no reason for further hikes, anyway. Inflation is already slowing. I understand Powell's concern. What looked like a steady, albeit gradual, slowdown is now looking even more gradual. But so what? It's the direction that counts.

He should abandon the 2% target rate of inflation. There's nothing sacrosanct about 2%. Why not four? Getting inflation down to 2% is going to cause too much pain for the most vulnerable. Powell should suggest to Congress that it use other tools to fight inflation, such as barring corporations with more than 30% market share from raising their prices higher than the overall inflation rate — as recently proposed by New York's attorney general. Mr Powell, if you're reading, may I be perfectly frank? You weren't elected to your current post. Nor were your colleagues. That's understandable. The Fed needs to be insulated from politics. But you at least owe it to America to do your job fairly. It would be terribly unjust to draft into the inflation fight those who are least able.

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# As Ukraine War Enters Second Year, Russia is Pushed Firmly into Chinese Orbit-And This Will Hurt American World Order

On the day World War II began, George Bernard Shaw wrote, "There will be only two winners: The United States and the Soviet Union." More than eight decades later, as major powers find themselves stuck in a war in Ukraine, there seems to be just one winner this time and that country is not even a direct party to the conflict — People's Republic of China.

This became evidently clear when the G20 ministerial meetings began in India — the first one led by finance ministers in Bengaluru, followed by a two-day summit of foreign ministers in New Delhi starting 1 March 2023. India's endeavour to seek consensus came a cropper — both in Bengaluru and in Delhi — as Russia and China refused to sign a joint statement. The stringent Sino-Russian stand, insiders say, has miffed New Delhi, but the West too cannot escape the blame for rigidly drawing battle lines on Ukraine. Analysts say that throughout the Ukraine War, New Delhi has deftly balanced its ties with Russia and the West, with Narendra Modi successfully positioning himself as a leader who has been courted by all sides. While critics in the West saw India's geopolitical tightrope walk on the Ukraine war as "strategic ambivalence", the fact is it was India's conscious decision, even if a constrained one, to stop Russia from moving closer to China and Pakistan.

India could foresee the geostrategic hazards and dilemmas of the Ukraine war. But the US-led West seemed to be caught in a Cold War time warp, refusing to update its contemporary threat perceptions. Russia still was its Enemy No. 1. Sadly, Biden & Company's obsession with seeing Russia squeezed inside a box, besides ushering in a regime change in Moscow — little realising the improbability of the outcome and the dangerous repercussions if the same was achieved — has been the best-case scenario for China. In a post-pandemic era when the Xi Jinping dispensation should have faced global condemnation and isolation for its Covid-19 role, the Ukraine war provided China with a much-needed distraction. With the Ukraine war, the US has not just given China a new lifeline, but

also killed — at least in the foreseeable future — the possibility of a larger anti-China axis involving Russia. Richard Lourie recalls in his book, *Putin: His Downfall and Russia's Coming Crash*, how American secretary of state James Baker promised Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1990 that if the USSR pulled its troops out of East Germany and permitted the peaceful reunification of the two Germanys, NATO, in return, would not move "one inch east". In the next 30 years, NATO has expanded more than 1,000 km to the east of Germany. As Rajiv Dogra writes in *War Time: The World in Danger*, "A bloc (NATO) that once shared only a slender border with Russia in Norway's northern fringes, now encompasses the Baltic states, former Soviet territories within 200 km of St Petersburg and 600 km of Moscow. Seven of the eight former members of the Warsaw Pact have become part of NATO."

At the core of the Ukraine issue lies Russia's fear of being encircled by the US-led NATO.

The Western attempt to co-opt Ukraine with NATO was a do-or-die moment for proud and history-conscious Russians. According to George F Kennan, best known as an advocate of a policy of containment of Soviet expansion during the Cold War, NATO's eastward expansion was the "most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-Cold War era". The consequence, he predicted, would be a Russia that would "likely look elsewhere for guarantees of a secure and hopeful future for themselves".

The Russophobic West firmly pushed Putin into the Chinese camp. While the West missed no opportunity to insult the Russian President, China on its part showed immense respect to him. Xi and Putin, for instance, have met more than three dozen times since 2013. As Putin himself noted in 2018, the only world leader with whom he had ever celebrated his birthday was Xi Jinping. Xi, on his part, called Putin his "best, most intimate friend". Rebuffed repeatedly, Putin was forced to abandon the

hope for "some sort of alliance with the West". It was a case of missed opportunity for the West, especially the US. After all, Putin had, soon after 9/11, helped the US get bases in Central Asia and facilitated the American troops' transit through that air and land space. He also had reasons to be wary of rising China, especially on the unresolved issue of 600,000 square kilometres of Chinese territory near Vladivostok, occupied by Russia since 1860. Also, Putin had strong reservations about growing Chinese footprints in Central Asia, which the Russians traditionally saw as their strategic backyard. Interestingly, and ironically, this was not the first time the US had saved communist China. In the 1940s, thanks to American author Edgar Snow, who through his writings projected Mao as an "agrarian reformer" waging a concerted war against the Japanese and wanting "friendship with America" — a claim that duped several contemporary Americans, including the Secretary of State George Marshall, who then convinced

President Harry S Truman about the 'goodness' of Chinese communists. It resulted in unenthusiastic American support for Chiang Kai-shek against Mao and his Red army. Had the US supported Chiang wholeheartedly, the China story would have been different in 1949.

The same mistake was repeated in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, when Mao's China was facing a growing Soviet ire. Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger provided China support at a time when the Americans could have allowed the two communist states to fight among themselves and weaken each other. In his review of Kissinger's China book in *The Guardian*, Jasper Becker writes: "If Beijing and Moscow had gone to war, surely it would have been to America's advantage. America might have emerged victorious from the Vietnam War and saved Cambodia from the horrors of Khmer Rouge rule. The longstanding threat of South Korea and Taiwan might have disappeared."

(Contd. on page 27)

## 1980s Again? Punjab Government Needs to Wake Up To Growing Khalistan Threats



Punjab is in a state of crisis as there has been a series of violent incidents that have rocked the trust and faith of the people in its law-and-order machinery. The most telling example is the broad daylight attack on a police station in Amritsar recently. The lame-duck response of the state government reminds one of the late 1970s and early 1980s when a similar approach had resulted in the rise of separatist leader Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.

There seems to be a macabre similarity between the developments in that era and the

present-day state of affairs in the state ever since the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has come to power. It is important to go back and take a relook at what happened in Punjab during the late 1970s and early 1980s because as US thinker George Santayana had said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

In 1977, the Congress decided to nurture Bhindranwale to counter the Akali Dal-led coalition which had replaced Congress rule in the state. Congress leader Zail Singh and Indira Gandhi's son Sanjay Gandhi

were driving this political gameplan with full support from Mrs Gandhi.

There are two significant events where the law and order machinery and the politicians failed and compromised beyond a limit. This helped Bhindranwale to create enormous clout for himself. Not only Punjab but the whole country paid a huge price for this oversight of the political leadership and the law and order establishment.

### CLASH WITH NIRANKARIS ON 13 APRIL 1978

The Akali Dal in the Punjab government had allowed Nirankaris to hold a convention in Amritsar. Nirankaris are considered to be a heretical sect by many Sikhs. Hence this decision of the Akali Dal government didn't go down well with Sikhs. On 13 April 1978, an Akali Dal government minister Jeevan Singh Umaranagal was trying to explain his government's position to an agitated Sikh congregation at Golden Temple in Amritsar when Bhindranwale

announced that he wouldn't let this convention happen.

Mark Tully and Satish Jacob have given an authoritative account of the subsequent developments in Amritsar: Mrs Gandhi's Last Battle, "Bhindranwale stood up and shouted, 'We will not allow this Nirankari Convention to take place. We are going to march there and cut them to pieces... Bhindranwale and an agricultural inspector of the Punjab government called Fauja Singh, then marched out of the Temple at the head of a procession shouting slogans against the Nirankaris.'"

Along the two-mile route to 'Nihangon ka Bunga' where this procession was headed, there was violence on the way but the police remained a mute spectator. 'When the Sikhs reached the convention, Fauja Singh drew his sword and swiped at the neck of Nirankari Guru, Baba Gurbachan Singh.

(Contd. on page 23)



# Russia-Ukraine war and the political economy of a prolonged conflict

**Ukraine which came into existence after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 has had tension on its border with Russia for a long time now. Crimea has been under Russian occupation since 2014.**

**By Kaushal Kishore**

The war started in the last week of February 2022 in Ukraine. It has entered its second year now. All the speculation about its short term is nowhere to stand, and the fall of Kyiv is too difficult to achieve. Ukraine is pushing the Russian soldiers back. The number of dead and wounded victims of this violence is more than three hundred thousand from both sides. Here, the ratio between Russia and Ukraine is 2:1 and the displacement is yet another problem. The number of its victims reached around 15 million with 94 per cent of them from Ukraine. At least one and a half million people are having a shelter in Poland today.

Fears of Russian expansionism are ailing Western Europe. They have coined it to refer to the prevailing crisis. The United States is leading the club of its allies. Moreover, threats of nuclear weapons are being



hurled a few decades after the Cold War. Here, China mentioned chemical and biological weapons as well. Ukraine is fighting the war with the support of NATO. And, Ukrainians are ready to sacrifice their lives fighting the long and difficult battle.

The flag of NATO that came into existence after World War II to promote the two per cent of GDP to develop the military-industrial complex has been flying high. A few days before the first anniversary of the war, US President Joe Biden reached Kyiv. He returned to Warsaw and reaffirmed the unity of NATO and

invited its members to the United States to celebrate the 75th anniversary next year. He has repeated the promise to supply weapons to Ukraine in order to continue the war.

Expansion of the North Atlantic Territory has been on the rise since the Cold War. The United States and the West have been imposing sanctions on Russia. China condemned the same before presenting the 12-point peace plan. The impact of this war is devastating on the world economy affecting the supply chain industry badly. However, the banking and arms business

is making profits out of the war.

Russian President Vladimir Putin recently delivered a State of Nation address blaming the West for this conflict. He also suspended the New START (Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms) policy with the US to control nuclear weapons with immediate effect. The folly of Vladimir Lenin is the definition of Ukraine, in the lexicon of Putin, who has reaffirmed it to be part of old Russia.

Ukraine which came into ex-

istence after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, has had tension on its border with Russia for a long time now. Crimea has been under Russian occupation since 2014. As such, this crisis is referred to as an internal issue in Russia due to the tension and violence in Donbas and other Russian-dominated areas of Ukraine. The war has disturbed peace prevailing in Europe since World War II. In fact, there are many obstacles in the peace process that can settle the prolonged war. The Russian position is at stake with the idea of the inclusion of Ukraine in the European Union and NATO. The population of 35 million people in Ukraine is suffering. It has divided the world into three different camps. China stands with Russia. Then, there are nations like India and Brazil in the third camp. Ukraine produces grain in abundance to export food to countries like Pakistan.

(Contd. on page 23)

## Who can save Pakistan from economic default?

**Is the IMF pushing Pakistan to join the China-Russia alliance?**

**By Hamid Mir**

Famous award-winning Indian journalist Rahul Kanwal recently invited me on his TV show and asked a very difficult question: "Is Pakistan racing down a road that leads to default?" He also referred to the statement of our Defence Minister Khawaja Asif who confessed that Pakistan has already defaulted. I am not an expert on economics, but I took the cover of Finance Minister Ishaq Dar who told me many times on my TV show that Pakistan will not default. I could not resist sharing my personal opinion with Rahul Kanwal and accepted that Pakistan may not default very soon but the lives of common Pakistanis are getting worse day by day due to inflation and price hike. I was amazed to read a statement from famous Indian lyricist Javed Akhtar that he visited Pakistan recently and never saw poverty there. Javed Akhtar recently participated in the Faiz Literary Festival in Lahore. I also met him at the same festival a few years back. I have a lot of respect for Javed



Sahib. I can only request him that next time if he visits Pakistan again, he should give me just 30 minutes and I will take him to places in Lahore not different from the slums of Delhi.

Poverty is a common issue in India and Pakistan. Maybe Pakistanis are facing more price hikes than Indians these days, but there is a difference. The majority of Pakistanis and especially Lahoris are famous for their fine dining and smiling. According to the 2022 world ranking of happiness, Pakistanis are happier than Indians. Last year, I saw these smiling faces even in the flood-affected areas of Sindh and Balochistan. It is difficult to find poverty behind smil-

ing faces, but now these smiles are vanishing due to inflation. Wherever I go, Pakistanis ask me, "Is the country going to default?"

This question is being debated inside and outside Pakistan since the seventh nuclear power and fifth most populous country in the world entered the danger zone last year after the default of Sri Lanka. Pakistan is facing a multidimensional economic crisis due to bad governance, political instability, the war in Ukraine, smuggling of wheat and dollars to Afghanistan and devastating floods. In recent months, diplomatic staff of Pakistan in many countries did not receive salaries on time and the

government started a process of selling properties in Washington DC to raise funds.

Who pushed Pakistan to the verge of sovereign default? Former Prime Minister Imran Khan is blaming the 'imported government' of Shehbaz Sharif for creating the default risk. Khan claims that Sharif's government is sponsored by the US and, at the same time, he says that Pakistan can avoid default only by entering the IMF programme.

Sharif's government negotiated a deal with Russia recently for oil import at discounted rates to ease economic pains. This deal blasted the narrative of Khan that Shehbaz Sharif came to power with the blessing of the

US. Pakistan tried its best to strike a balance between the US and Russia but the US is not happy with the oil deal between Pakistan and Russia. Many people in the Pakistani government think that the US is using the IMF to blackmail Pakistan. Imran Khan is claiming that early elections can save Pakistan from default, but he can't deny the fact that default risk surfaced for the first time when Khan was ruling Pakistan. Can Imran Khan fix the Pakistani economy if he comes into power again? Khan changed four finance ministers and six finance secretaries in his 45-month government. His government was on the top amongst the last four administrations with the highest external borrowing of around \$52 billion in three years and eight months. Nawaz Sharif's PML-N government was in second place with \$49.761 billion in five years. Zardari's government was in third place for borrowing \$25 billion in five years and General Pervez Musharraf borrowed \$17.503 billion in nine years. (Contd. on page 22)



# Opposition Unity Is Overrated. Here's The Math

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin's 70th birthday celebrations turned into a show of "opposition unity" with leaders from the Congress, Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Samajwadi Party and National Conference speaking from one platform in Chennai. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), BRS and Trinamool Congress, all nursing national ambitions, skipped the bash.

As Stalin attempted to provide a platform for like-minded opposition parties to come together, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge executed a strategic backflip. Days after declaring at the Congress plenary session that the grand old party will lead any opposition alliance, Mallikarjun Kharge said who will be PM candidate "is not the question", signalling that unity is paramount. Good move.

Talk of opposition unity usually starts a year or so before every election. In 2019, the parties produced the "one-on-one contest" strategy in which the Congress or any regional party best suited to give the BJP a fight takes the lead in each state.

Near 100 per cent opposition unity was achieved in the 1977 election when many parties merged to form the Janata Party, which allied with the Left parties and some regional forces to defeat the Congress.

The basic premise of alliance talks is that when two parties join forces, the synergies must result in a higher vote share than their combined strength. But normally, any such alliance leads to some disquiet among voters on both sides, thwarting a seamless transfer of votes and resulting in leakages. The 2019 Mahagathbandhan of the Samajwadi

Party, BSP, and RLD in Uttar Pradesh is a case in point.

Research by political scientist Adam Zeigfield reveals that while the Index of opposition unity (IOU) increased from 64 per cent in the 2014 general election to 85 per cent in 2019, the BJP's tally increased from 282 to 303 seats. The IOU indicator denotes the level of opposition consolidation faced by the dominant party or the party in power. It shows that high opposition unity could be counter-productive if not backed by a common minimum program, as voters may see it as an opportunistic alliance.

In the current context, the opposition is already united to the extent possible. 100% opposition unity is a myth, a mirage not worth chasing. Let's see why.

The Congress and its allies (UPA) were winners and runners up in 350-odd seats in 2019, that is almost 65% of Lok Sabha strength. The Congress was no. 1 or no.2 in 261 seats, and the allies in the remaining 90. The BJP and its allies were winners and runners up in around 430 seats in 2019. The numbers dropped as some left the alliance. In around 250 seats, it was a direct UPA vs NDA clash.

The UPA can bank on two new allies - Nitish Kumar's JD(U) and the Shiv Sena (Uddhav faction). Nitish Kumar has been pitching for the Congress to take the lead in talks for opposition unity, while Uddhav Thackeray, after his party's split, has few options left. The opposition parties who matter are fairly united in Bihar, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Jammu and Kashmir. That makes 148 seats or 27% of Lok Sabha.

The Congress faced the BJP in 191

head-to-head contests, primarily in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Assam, Delhi, Himachal, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Delhi and Gujarat. Except in Karnataka, Delhi and Gujarat, regional parties do not have any significant vote share, so opposition unity is not really required. The Congress has to fend for itself. Opposition unity is not possible in Kerala (20 seats), where the CPM and the Congress are locked in a direct fight with the BJP, a distant third. However, even if the CPM wins some seats, it is expected to not back the BJP at the Centre at any cost, having already tied up with the Congress in West Bengal and Tripura. This can be considered a friendly fight among opposition parties.

Then we have two states, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, where the dominant forces, BJD and YSRCP, have shown pro-NDA tendencies and a united opposition is not possible. While the BJD was born out of anti-Congressism, YSRCP is a splinter group of the Congress. The Congress was reduced to one and zero seats in these two states in 2019 and is hardly a threat to either the BJD or YSRCP.

In Uttar Pradesh, a Mahagathbandhan is not possible again, with the BSP and Samajwadi Party breaking up acrimoniously. However, the weakening of Mayawati's BSP gives hope to Akhilesh Yadav. Here again, the Congress has a minuscule vote share and is not likely to severely damage the Samajwadi's prospects.

Then we have the three parties with national plans - AAP, Trinamool and the TRS/BRS of K Chandrasekhara Rao. The

worsening of relations between the Trinamool and the Congress, the complementary vote blocks of AAP and Congress in Delhi, Punjab and to a lesser extent in Gujarat, mean that in West Bengal and Delhi, the opposition may not be united. In Gujarat, there is a lesser impact of AAP compared to Delhi and Punjab.

In Telangana, the BRS and Congress have historically been adversaries and can't join hands. In Bengal and Telangana, the Congress's strength has significantly reduced, and the main contest is between Trinamool/BRS and BJP.

On 185 seats in UP (80), Bengal (42), Odisha (21), Telangana (17), and Andhra Pradesh (25), regional parties will be holding fort against the BJP. The Congress is in no position to severely impact their prospects. Whoever wins in these states, except for Odisha (BJD) and Andhra (YSRCP), is likely to back a non-BJP government at the Centre.

The contours of the battle against the BJP and the opposition are already set, in a way. In 185 seats, it is the regional parties who will drive. In some 250 seats, the Congress and its allies will take on the BJP. In 100-odd seats, the BJP and its allies are not big factors (ranked third or below), though the party is prepping strategy to try and win these to compensate for losses in states where it has peaked. The opposition should focus on preparing a common minimum program and presenting a credible alternative vision to the voter instead of chasing 100% unity, which appears to be Mission Impossible.

## Why JPCs Are An Exercise In Futility

The Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), a state-owned company, has reportedly lost over ? 20,000 crore of investment value out of the total holding of ? 36,000 crore (equity and debt) in Adani companies. That is, for every ? 10 invested, almost ? 6 has been lost. State Bank of India, a public sector bank, has an outstanding exposure worth ? 27,000 crore to the same group.

Both LIC and SBI have built their credibility over decades. They are custodians of the savings of crores of poor and middle-class citizens. It is these savings that are at risk today.

All opposition parties were unanimous that an inquiry needed to be done. The only difference of opinion was on the mode of investigation. Last month in parliament, polar opposites like the communists and the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) were demanding a (time-bound) Supreme Court-monitored investigation. Other opposition parties wanted the inquiry to take the form of a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC). On

March 2, the Supreme Court gave its judgment.

The Left parties and the TMC being on the same page is the rarest of rare occurrences. A Lady Gaga-Pankaj Udhass duet is more likely. But there are times when parties with divergent political ideologies come together on a major issue. I can share another example. In 2016, days after demonetisation, Mamata Banerjee led her MPs on a march from Parliament House to Rashtrapati Bhavan. The BJP's old and trusted ally Shiv Sena, then still very much part of the NDA, were the unlikely participants at that important protest.

A Supreme Court-monitored investigation is what the CPI(M), CPI and TMC have been demanding on the floor of parliament. It is not the 10/10 solution, but it will be far more effective than a JPC. But before I spell out why JPCs are pointless, let me flag the alternate view that suggests the Supreme Court should not have intervened, as this is beyond its remit. This school of thought believes that

any market-related issue should be investigated by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI). Since SEBI was in slumber and did not even follow the tenets of its own preamble, which gives it considerable authority, the Supreme Court-monitored probe was an option worth opting for. Veteran business journalist Sucheta Dalal, though, is still cynical: "Is there a parallel anywhere in the world where corporate honchos/lawyers with deep connections to the business community are appointed to what is supposed to be an investigation exercise?"

Here are three reasons why JPCs are an exercise in futility.

One, the chairperson of the JPC is decided by the Speaker of Lok Sabha and the chairperson of Rajya Sabha, in consultation with each other as may be necessary, and its members are subsequently nominated by each party according to the party's strength. This makes these committees skewed towards the ruling majority because of

their numbers in the Houses. The chairperson of the JPC would have been a BJP MP.

Second, in almost every JPC there is no consensus on the final report. Whenever important amendments are proposed by an opposition MP, the amendments are defeated in the committee by a show of hands. The ruling party uses its brute majority to do this. This has become a trend. Instead of coming to these meetings with an open mind, Members of Parliament representing the treasury benches come and rubber stamp the views of the ruling party. Those in the opposition, holding an alternate view, are outvoted. The only recourse left is to table a dissenting note - for the record. Third, let me pluck out a few examples - from 1987, 1992 and 2001. In the Bofors case of 1987, it was alleged that a Congress member had taken bribes while settling the deal of purchasing the Bofors 'shoot and scoot' guns. (Contd. on page 23)



# Tripura And The Unstoppable Modi Juggernaut

Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) resounding victory in Tripura is a manifestation of the unstoppable Modi juggernaut. Ever since Prime Minister Narendra Modi took charge in 2014, he has paid special attention to the development of the Northeast, with the PM visiting NE more than 50 times in the last eight and a half years. A plan has been prepared to revive the development of the Northeast on the basis of HIRA i.e. 'Highway, Internet & Waterways, Railway and Airways.' PM Modi has changed the 'Look East' policy to the 'Act East' policy. The Modi government has spent a massive Rs 3.45 lakh crore for the Northeast region in the last eight and a half years, which equals the cumulative spending in the 25 years before that. In comparison to the 13th Finance Commission, the 14th Finance Commission has given 183 percent more funds to the Northeast.

In the education sector, Vidyajyoti schools were launched in January 2022 to boost the quality of education; quality augmentation schemes like Nutan Disha, the inauguration of National Law University, National Forensic Science University, three new government degree colleges and two degree colleges were inaugurated as well. The average income of farmers increased by 68 percent from

Rs 6580 in 2015 to Rs 11,096 in 2021, thanks to schemes like PM Kisan and Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana and the declaration of the queen pineapple as Tripura's state fruit.

Under the Ayushman Bharat health scheme, over 13 lakh cards were distributed and claims worth Rs 106 crore were settled for 1.84 lakh beneficiaries. Tripura got its first government dental college under the BJP.

On the women and child welfare front, the BJP government reserved 33 percent of government jobs for women, made education free for female students at government colleges and provided medical facilities to 1.9 lakh pregnant women in Tripura. A new Eklavya Model Residential School (EMRS) was opened and 13 more are being constructed for tribal students of the state. As per BJP's 2018 poll promise, the government set up Tripura Tribal Folk Music College, apart from encouraging education in different tribal dialects.

Among the achievements in the tribal welfare segment is the introduction of the Chakma, Garo, Manipuri and Bishnupriya Manipuri languages, in the higher classes. The foundation stone for an international Buddhist university was laid in south

Tripura. The Darlong community was included in the list of scheduled tribes after the Lok Sabha passed the Constitution Order Bill 2022.

The Northeast no longer suffers from the tyranny of distance, thanks to the dynamic outreach by PM Modi. Setting up of over two lakh houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Rural), 87,217 houses under the PMAY (Urban), and drinking water pipelines for more than 3.93 lakh households under the Modi government's Jal Jeevan Mission in Tripura, are noteworthy. Also, recently, 247 km of six new national highways and four in-principle national highways were upgraded to the double-lane standard with paved shoulders. Over 34,528 people in Tripura benefitted from the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) scheme. The trade volume between Tripura and Bangladesh rose by 158 percent last year and a special economic zone was set up at Sabroom to attract private investments in export-oriented units.

On the governance and law & order front, a special Court was set up in Agartala under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act and new fast-track special courts were set up in Agartala and Kailashahar for the

speedy disposal of cases related to crimes against women and children. Meanwhile, rapes and dowry deaths have declined by 10 percent in Tripura, molestations have come down by 35 percent and incidents of eve-teasing have reduced by 60 percent. Overall, crimes against women have come down by nearly 30 percent. Under the Left government, for 25 years, Tripura was in the throes of "Jungle Raaj." Today, thanks to Prime Minister Modi's far-sightedness, the Northeast has been mainstreamed like never before. Almost 32 percent of Tripura's population is tribal in composition, while in the case of Nagaland, the tribal population is 90 percent of the total population.

The fact that all eight NE states are voting in large numbers for PM Modi's inclusive model of governance speaks volumes about how the Modi model has truly ensured last-mile delivery to those who were barred from even the basic amenities of life under successively repressive Leftist regimes. As for the Congress, it has completely lost its mojo and continues with its splendid track record of winning "moral victories." Suffice it to say, Tripura's election outcome is yet another vindication of how the Modi magic has only strengthened over time.

## Rahul Gandhi's Cambridge Comments Reflect Desperation at Not Being Able to Oust Modi Govt

Two contrasting events were witnessed from a political spectrum. One was the victory rally of Prime Minister Narendra Modi after the party's spectacular victory in Tripura, Nagaland and Meghalaya, and the second was Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's criticism of the Indian government at Cambridge University.

Rahul Gandhi's address at Cambridge University reflected his desperation and frustrations at not being able to do much to oust the Modi government. The bad news of a washout in the three states of Tripura, Meghalaya and Nagaland was projected in the Exit Polls. The results that came later vindicated the Congress' worst fear of a complete washout in states where it expected to perform better. Rahul Gandhi's baseless charges of being spied on by using Pegasus would invite questions as to why he did not get his mobile phone checked if he was so sure. Also, the Supreme Court-appointed committee that looked into the issue could not find anything to substantiate that Pegasus was used. Of the 29 phones that were investigated "malware or poor cyber hygiene" were found in five, but it could not be established if these were Pegasus.

The committee said that the government did not cooperate, but the government had maintained that there was no unauthorised snooping on anyone. It was the job of the committee of experts to probe any wrongdoings and not the government since the charges were against the latter. Rahul's utterances showed that he would believe rumours and not facts.

Similarly, when the world is appreciating India's vibrant democracy, a leader of the Opposition is saying that democracy is in danger. What has prevented Rahul Gandhi from going to the people and garnering support? No one stopped his Bharat Jodo Yatra from taking place. The very fact that he was frolicking in the snow in Kashmir with his sister testify that the situation in the Valley had become much better, reflecting a triumph of democracy.

He spoke about minorities being unsafe in India. This is contrary to facts. The record shows that minorities have benefited more from government schemes. The Minorities Affairs Ministry has asserted that of the 2.31 crore houses built under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana: "31 percent were allocated in 25 minority-dominated areas, 33 percent beneficiary of the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi

were minorities, and out of the nine crore beneficiaries of the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, 37 percent were from the minority communities." This is not discrimination but more care for minorities without adopting the policy of appeasement.

All charges of Rahul Gandhi would prove to be politically motivated and mischievous and based on lies and misconceptions. It is more dangerous when such leaders try to sully the image of the Modi government through such irresponsible utterances. They forget that the Modi government represents the India of today. When the whole world is looking at India as an island of hope in terms of economic recovery and implementation of good governance practices, such statements merely end up helping anti-India forces.

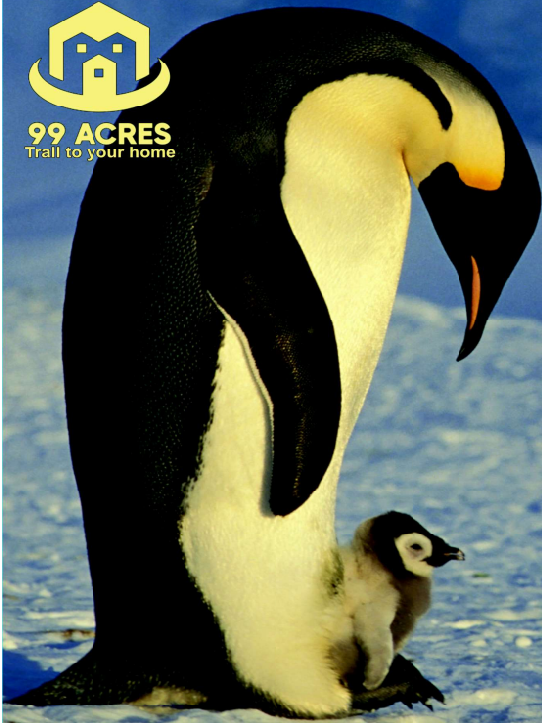
While Rahul was projecting himself as a loser by attacking the Modi government in a foreign land, the Prime Minister was full of positivity about the party, the country and people in general. The BJP's victory in the three states proves something which Modi's detractors would not concede.

Describing the vote as one for progress and stability, Modi said that the secret to the BJP's success lay

in the new formula enshrined in the concept of Triveni (Amalgamation of Three streams). These were: (1) Work done by the BJP governments; (2) Ethics of the BJP governments; and (3) Helping nature of the BJP workers. This Triveni enhances the power of BJP by 1+1+1 which equals 111 times, he said. Rahul should ask himself how many times he or anyone from the Gandhi family visited the Northeast to link with people even during the campaign. If he wishes to understand the Prime Minister, he should merely try to figure how many times he visited or addressed the people of Northeast. Between 2017 and 2022, Modi visited the Northeast 44 times. The landscape of the Northeast is changing with development indicators.

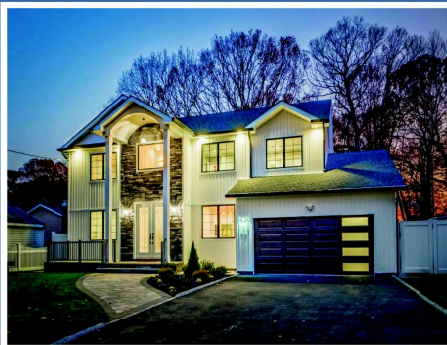
The victory is a vindication that if one works hard to provide solutions, people develop a stake in continuation of the government which is often termed pro-incumbency. Indian politics is becoming mature and only those who would work tirelessly to meet aspirations of people would survive. Political rhetoric or unnecessary criticisms or poison-laced abuses full of hatred would not give political dividends.





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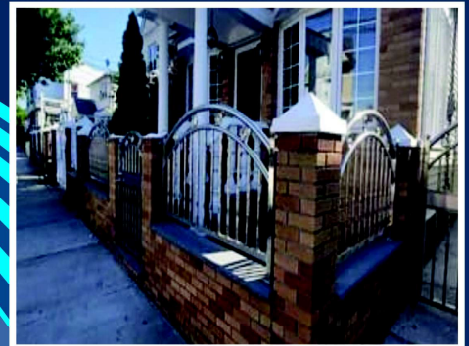
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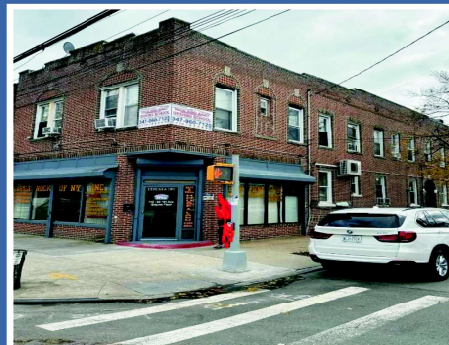
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# Punjab Police cracks down on Amritpal Singh's aides, to cancel arms licences

**Punjab Police has asked the Amritsar district administration to cancel the arms licences of nine aides of Amritpal Singh, claiming that the arms licences were given for self-defence and not for providing security cover to the Khalistani leader.**

(SAI Bureau) Days after the storming of a police station in Ajnala, Punjab Police cracked down on the aides of Khalistani leader Amritpal Singh and recommended that their arms licences be cancelled.

Police have written to the Amritsar district administration, according to sources. Police recommended the cancellation of arms licenses of nine aides of Amritpal Singh, claiming that the licences were given for self-defence and not to provide security



porters, some of them brandishing swords and guns, broke through barricades and barged into a police station in Ajnala on the outskirts of Amritsar city on February 24. They extracted an assurance from the police that Amritpal Singh's aide and kidnapping case accused Lovepreet Singh Toofan would be released. Six policemen were injured in the clashes. After the Ajnala incident, the AAP government and the Punjab Police chief have come under fire from opposition parties for giving in to Amritpal Singh's demands and not taking any action against him and his supporters.

## India's military intel agencies fire fresh salvo against Chinese mobile phones, apps

**The military agencies asked units to "discourage troops and their families from purchasing or using phones from countries hostile to India".**



(SAI Bureau) Military intelligence agencies have issued fresh advisories to their units to ensure that the troops are not using Chinese mobile phones due to the threat from malware and spyware on them. "The formations and units are to sensitise their personnel through various forms and channels to exercise caution with such (Chinese) mobile phone devices," the advisory issued by the defence intelligence agencies said. The military agencies asked units to "discourage troops and their families from purchasing or using phones from countries hostile to India". The advisory has been issued by the forces as there have been cases where malware and spyware have allegedly been found in Chinese mobile phones by the agencies, the sources said. The spy agencies have asked the units and formations to "carry out the transi-

sition to other phones against the phones" mentioned in the list attached with the advisory. The Chinese mobile phones available in the commercial market in the country include Vivo, Oppo, Xiaomi, One Plus, Honor, Real Me, ZTE, Gionee, ASUS and Infinix. The spy agencies have been very active against Chinese mobile phone applications in the past and multiple such applications were deleted from military personnel's phones. The forces have also been acting against Chinese applications and banned a number of them, including micro-blogging site Weibo, WeChat messenger, file transfer app Shareit, popular mobile web browser UC browser, and multiple account logger, Parallel Space. Besides, a number of applications found on popular Chinese smartphone brands are also on the banned list.

cover to the Khalistani leader. Waris Punjab De head Amritpal Singh and his sup-

## PM Narendra Modi mourns Satish Kaushik's 'untimely demise', calls him 'a creative genius who won hearts'

(SAI Bureau) Prime Minister Narendra Modi took to Twitter and mourned the 'untimely demise' of Satish Kaushik. The actor-director passed away in the wee hours of March 9. The news of his demise was shared by Anupam Kher on Twitter. The 66-year-old actor was in Delhi when he suffered a heart attack while travelling in a car. His mortal remains will be brought to Mumbai today, March 9 in the afternoon af-



ter the postmortem, following which the funeral will take place in the evening. PM Modi expressed his sincere grief with a heartfelt note on Twitter that read, "Pained by the untimely demise of noted film personality Shri Satish Kaushik Ji. He was a creative genius who won hearts thanks to his wonderful acting and direction. His works will continue to entertain audiences. Condolences to his family and admirers. Om Shanti (sic)."

## Man caught raping calf in Madhya Pradesh village, case lodged

**A man was caught raping a 2.5 year-old calf in a village in Madhya Pradesh's Rewa district on Saturday.**

(SAI Bureau) In a shocking incident, a cattle farm owner found a man raping one of his calves in a village in Madhya Pradesh's Rewa district on Saturday. Police said the accused committed the unnatural act in the backyard of a house in Malaigawa village on Saturday night. According to the police complaint, the accused tied the calf's legs and raped it. The complainant, Ram Bahadur Kewat, told police that he had left the calf tied to a tree before go-



ing to some work at 7 pm, and when he returned around 11 pm, he found accused Prabhunath Kewat raping the female calf. Kewat said he tried to get hold of the accused but he managed to flee the scene. A case was registered under section 377 (unnatural offences) of the Indian Penal Code and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Vivek Lal said, adding the accused is yet to be arrested.



# Indian defence forces prepare to combat Chinese 'spy balloons' over territory in future

**Indian defence forces have also started discussing the use of the existing radar network to detect such objects over or near any point in the country.**

(News Agency) Indian defence forces are preparing to finalise an action plan to combat Chinese spy balloons if they appear over its territory in future. Top government officials told India Today that a discussion on the subject was underway and details were being studied. The forces are expected to present a consolidated plan of action and response to the government for approval, as per sources. The Indian military has been scrutinising the existing international laws related to such flying objects which operate above 60,000 feet.

"The discussions on the action plan are going in defence forces and details are being studied. It is now becoming clear that such balloons may have a steering mechanism and can be stabilised over the area of interest of the owner," top government officials informed India Today. The forces have also started discussing the use of the existing radar network to detect such objects over or near any point in the country, they said. They are also studying international laws related to such flying objects which operate at above 60,000 feet, the officials said. Soon after the balloon over American skies was taken down, defence officials stated that high-resolution pictures of the object were taken by Indian residents from the ground, as the intent or the origin of the balloon-type object was not clear. It was also not clear whether it had come from Myanmar or China, but it moved away from there after three to four days.

It may be noted that US forces shot down Chinese "spy balloons" over the skies around Carolina in February 2023. Two days after the suspected

balloon was eliminated, Beijing said the hovering object was Chinese. Condemning America's suspicion about the balloon being used for possible espionage on the part of China, Beijing's foreign ministry said the device was gathering weather data and it had gone astray.

## Military expansion along border increasing risk of conflict: US report on India-China

(News Agency) Expanded military postures by both India and China along the disputed border elevate the risk of armed confrontation between the two nuclear powers, a US intelligence report said. The Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community pointed out that previous standoffs between India and China have shown that persistent low-level friction on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) has the potential to escalate swiftly. "The expanded

military postures by both India and China along the disputed border elevate the risk of armed confrontation between two nuclear powers that might involve direct threats to US persons and interests and calls for US intervention," the report said. The report also said that India-China relations will remain strained in the wake of the countries' lethal Galwan clash in 2020, the most serious in decades, even though both sides are engaged in border talks.



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# NIA busts multi-state hawala network funding PFI terror activities, 5 arrested

Five members of the banned Popular Front of India have been arrested by the NIA in connection with the agency's investigations into the Phulwarisharif PFI case of Bihar.



(SAI Bureau) The NIA on Tuesday claimed to have busted a multi-state hawala network funding the Popular Front of India's terror activities with the arrest of five members of the banned outfit in Karnataka and Kerala.

The agency said despite the ban imposed on it on September 27 last year, PFI leaders and members continued to propagate the ideology of violent extremism and were also arranging arms and ammunition to commit crimes. "NIA teams have been carrying out extensive searches in Kasargod (Kerala) and Dakshin Kannada, Karnataka, since Sunday. Searches were conducted at eight locations leading to the seizure of multiple digital devices and incriminating documents containing details of transactions running into several crores of rupees," a spokesperson of the agency said.

The official said Popular Front of India (PFI) members Mohammad Sinan, Sarfraz Nawaz, Iqbal and Abdul Rafeek M of Karnataka and Abid K M of Kerala have been arrested.

The arrest followed tracing and tracking of funds being moved by the PFI across the country, especially in Kerala, Karnataka and Bihar, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) spokesperson said, adding that the agency's investigations into the Phulwarisharif PFI case of Bihar have led to the unearthing of a large network of hawala operatives in south India. "A PFI funding-by-hawala module operating out of Bihar and Karnataka with roots in the UAE has been busted with the arrests of the five operatives," the official said. "PFI cadres in Phulwarisharif and Motihari had vowed to continue PFI

activities in a clandestine manner in Bihar and had also arranged a firearm and ammunition recently to eliminate a youth of a particular community in Bihar's East Champaran district. Three operatives of the module had been arrested on February 5," the spokesperson said.

The official said people arrested from Karnataka and Kerala have been found to be actively involved in PFI's criminal conspiracy to move and channelise illicit funds procured from outside India for distribution among leaders and members of the banned group.

Earlier, seven accused persons had been arrested when they had gathered in the Phulwarisharif area of Bihar's Patna in July last year for training and to carry out acts of terror and violence, the spokesperson said. Pursuing leads since July last year, the

official said the NIA team found that despite the ban on its activities in September last year, the PFI continued to propagate the ideology of violent extremism and were also arranging arms and ammunition to commit crimes. Following the leads, the official said, the NIA investigators reached Nawaz and Sinan, who had been found making deposits in the bank accounts of accused and suspects in the PFI case.

"Dogged pursuit of the money trail and connecting the dots, the NIA managed to unravel the international conspiracy and linkages to the funds while investigating Iqbal and

other associates who had collected illegally generated funds from Dubai and Abu Dhabi and handed them over to Sinan, Nawaz, Rafeek and Abid in India," the spokesperson said. "Investigations have shown that Sarfaraz, Sinan and Rafeek deposited this money in different bank accounts of the accused and the suspects," the official said.

The NIA said further investigations are on to track to trace and choke international as well domestic illicit funding channels of the PFI.

The five accused will be produced in the NIA Special Court Patna, the spokesperson said.

## Clear disclaimers must for ad posts by influencers: Centre's new guidelines

The Department of Consumer Affairs, under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, released a set of guidelines called "Endorsements Know-Hows!" for celebrities, influencers, and virtual influencers on social media platforms.

(News Agency) All celebrities and social media influencers must put clear, prominent, and extremely hard-to-miss disclaimers in their endorsement posts, the consumer affairs ministry's new guidelines said.

The Department of Consumer Affairs, under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, released a set of guidelines called "Endorsements Know-Hows!" for celebrities, influencers, and virtual influencers on social media platforms. The guidelines aim to ensure that individuals do not mislead their audiences while endorsing products or services and that they are in compliance with the Consumer Protection Act and any associated rules or guidelines. The department observed that there is confusion regarding the

words to be used for partnerships. Therefore, for paid or barter endorsements, either of the following disclosures may be used: "ad-

vertisement", "ad", "sponsored", "collaboration", or "partnership". However, the term must be indicated as a hashtag or headline text. According to the guide-

lines, endorsements must be made in simple and clear language, and terms such as "advertisement", "sponsored", "collaboration" or "paid promotion" will have to be used. Individuals must

not endorse any product or service that they have not personally used or in which due diligence has not been done by them.



The guidelines specify that individuals or groups who have access to an audience and the power to affect their audiences' purchasing decisions or opinions about a product, service, brand,

or experience, because of their authority, knowledge, position, or relationship with their audience, must properly disclose them. The disclosure must be placed in the endorsement message in a manner that is clear, prominent, and extremely hard to miss, it said. Disclosures should not be mixed with a group of hashtags or links. For endorsements in a picture, disclosures should be superimposed over the image enough for viewers to notice. For endorsements in a video or a live stream, disclosures should be made in both audio and video format and displayed continuously and prominently during the entire stream. The guidelines advise celebrities and influencers to always review and satisfy themselves that the advertiser is in a position to substantiate the claims made in the adverts.





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# China warns US against suppression or risk 'conflict'

**Relations between the two superpowers have been tense for years over a number of issues including Taiwan, trade and more recently the war in Ukraine, but they worsened last month after the United States shot down a balloon off the US east coast that it says was a Chinese spying craft.**



(News Agency) The United States should change its "distorted" attitude towards China or "conflict and confrontation" will follow, China's foreign minister said on Tuesday, while defending its stance on the war in Ukraine and defending its close ties with Russia.

The US had been engaging in suppression and containment of China rather than engaging in fair, rule-based competition, Foreign Minister Qin Gang told a news conference on the sidelines of an annual parliament meeting in Beijing.

"The United States' perception and views of China are seriously distorted," Qin said.

"It regards China as its primary rival and the most consequential geopolitical challenge. This is like the first button in the shirt being put wrong."

Relations between the two superpowers have been tense for years over a number of issues including Taiwan, trade and more recently the war in Ukraine, but they worsened last month after the United States shot down a balloon off the US east coast that it says was a Chinese spying craft. The US says it is establishing guardrails for relations and is not seeking conflict, but Qin said what that meant in practice was that China was not supposed to respond with words or action

when slandered or attacked.

"That is just impossible," Qin told his first news conference since becoming foreign minister in December.

"If the United States does not hit the brakes, and continues to speed down the wrong path, no amount of guardrails can prevent derailment, which will become conflict and confrontation, and who will bear the catastrophic consequences?"

Qin likened the Sino-US competition to a race between two Olympic athletes.

"If one side, instead of focusing on giving one's best, always tries to trip the other up, even to the extent that they must enter the Paralympics, then this is not fair competition," he said.

## JACKALS AND WOLVES'

During a nearly two-hour news conference in which he answered questions submitted in advance, Qin made a robust defence of "wolf warrior diplomacy", an assertive and often abrasive stance adopted by China's diplomats since 2020.

"When jackals and wolves are blocking the way, and hungry

wolves are attacking us, Chinese diplomats must then dance with the wolves and protect and defend our home and country," he said.

Qin also said that an "invisible hand" was pushing for the escalation of the war in Ukraine "to serve certain geopolitical agendas", without specifying who he was referring to.

He reiterated China's call for dialogue to end the war.

China struck a "no limits" partnership with Russia last year, weeks before its invasion of Ukraine, and China has blamed NATO expansion for triggering the war, echoing Russia's complaint.

China has declined to condemn the invasion and has fiercely defended its stance on Ukraine, despite Western criticism of its failure to single Russia out at the aggressor.

China has also vehemently denied US accusations that it has been considering supplying Russia with weapons.

## ADVANCING RELATIONS WITH MOSCOW

Qin said China had to advance its relations with Russia as the

world becomes more turbulent and close interactions between President Xi Jinping and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, anchored the neighbours' relations.

He did not give a definite answer when asked if Xi would visit Russia after China's parliament session, which goes on for one more week.

Since Russia invaded its southwestern neighbour a year ago Xi has held talks several times with Putin, but not with his Ukrainian counterpart. This undermines China's claim of neutrality in the conflict, Kyiv's top diplomat in Beijing said last month. Asked whether it was possible that China and Russia would abandon the U.S. dollar and euro for bilateral trade, Qin said countries should use whatever currency was efficient, safe and credible. China has been looking to internationalise its renminbi, or the yuan, which gained popularity in Russia last year after Western sanctions shut Russia's banks and many of its companies out of the dollar and euro payment systems.

## US concerned as Chinese propaganda efforts become more like Russia's

**US officials and outside experts think China is increasingly adopting tactics associated with Russia to spread its anti-American propaganda.**

(SAI Bureau) China has long been seen by the US as a prolific source of anti-American propaganda but less aggressive in its influence operations than Russia, which has used cyberattacks and covert operations to disrupt US elections and denigrate rivals. But many in Washington now think China is increasingly adopting tactics associated with Russia — and there's growing concern the US isn't doing enough to respond.

US officials and outside experts cite recent examples of China-linked actors generating false news reports with artificial intelligence and posting large volumes of denigrating social media posts. While many of the discovered efforts are amateurish, experts think they signal an apparent willingness from Beijing to try more influence campaigns as part of a broader embrace of covert operations, according to two people familiar with the matter who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive intelligence. "To us, the attempt is what stands out," one US intelligence

official said.

An increasingly pessimistic mood in Washington about Beijing's expansive political and economic goals and the possibility of war over Taiwan is driving calls for the US to make a stronger effort to counter Chinese influence abroad.

Lawmakers and officials are particularly concerned about countries that comprise the "Global South" in Africa, Asia and Latin America, where both the US and China have huge economic and political interests. Many of those countries have populations that support both sides — what an official called "swing states" in the narrative battle.

"This should be a whole of government effort," said Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi of Illinois, who is the top Democrat on a newly formed House committee focusing on the Chinese

Communist Party. "The CCP is going around the world bad-mouthing the US, bad-mouthing our institutions, bad-mouthing our form of government," Krishnamoorthi said in an interview. "We have to counter this because ultimately



it's not in the best interests of the United States." China's embassy in Washington said in a statement that Beijing "opposes the fabrication and dissemination of false information" and blamed the US in turn for making social media "into its tool to manipulate international public opinion and its weapon to stigmatize and demonize

other countries." "On this issue, it is for the US side to reflect on itself and stop shouting 'catch a thief,'" said embassy spokesman Liu Pengyu. Chinese state media and affiliated channels, as well as social media influencers with vast followings, routinely spread ideas that the US labels are exaggerated, false or misleading. In recent weeks, China's foreign ministry has called attention to the train derailment that released toxic chemicals in Ohio as well as allegations the US may have sabotaged pipelines used to transport Russian gas. The Biden administration has strongly rejected the allegations about the Nord Stream pipelines and defended its response in Ohio.

China has long been seen as less willing than Russia to take provocative steps that could be exposed and more concerned about being publicly blamed. US intelligence judged that Russia tried to support Donald Trump in the last two presidential elections, while China in 2020 considered but did not try to influence the election.



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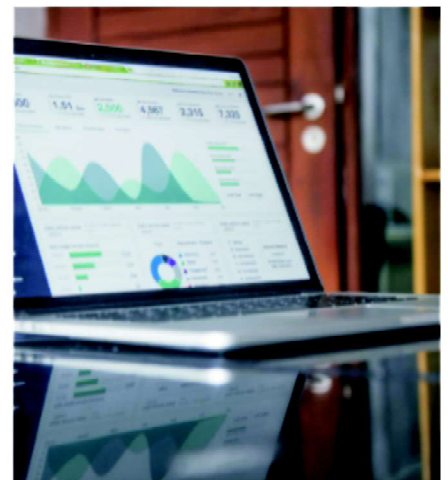
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# 'It was white people who canceled me': Dilbert creator claims 'black America'



(SAI Bureau) Dilbert creator Scott Adams has claimed 'black America' was 'completely fine' with his racist tirade and blamed 'white people that canceled me' after his comic was dropped by

77 newspapers.

Adams last month urged viewers of his YouTube channel to 'get the hell away from black people' and said he had moved to a neighborhood with 'a very low black population.'

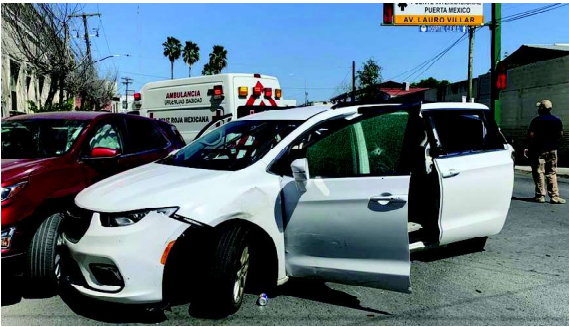
The 65-year-old, who has made millions thanks to his internationally-syndicated comic strip, is not backing down from the comments despite being dropped by 77 papers including The Washington Post and LA Times. 'Black America is completely fine if they see the context,' Adams claimed last night

as he argued his statements were hyperbolic and 'meant to get people riled up.'

'So far every black person I've talked to has said, "I get what you're saying,"' he told Chris Cuomo on News Nation. 'It's almost entirely white people that canceled me. It might be entirely because they're the ones that own the publishing companies and the newspapers.' Among other topics, Adams referenced a Rasmussen Reports survey that had asked whether people agreed with the statement, 'It's

OK to be white.' Most agreed, but Adams noted that 26 per cent of black respondents disagreed and others were not sure. The Anti-Defamation League says the phrase was popularized in 2017 as a trolling campaign by members of the discussion forum 4chan but then began being used by some white supremacists. Adams, who is white, repeatedly referred to people who are black as members of a 'hate group' or a 'racist hate group' and said he would no longer 'help black Americans.'

## 2 Americans kidnapped in Mexico found dead and 2 found alive, officials say



(SAI Bureau) Two of the four Americans kidnapped by armed gunmen in the Mexico border city of Matamoros on Friday were found dead and two were found alive on Tuesday, US and Mexican officials said.

Shaheed Woodard and Zindell Brown were found dead, a US official familiar with the ongoing investigation told CNN. Their bodies will be examined by Mexican authorities prior to their remains being turned over to the US government, the official said.

Latavia Washington McGee, a mother of six, and Eric Williams survived the ordeal, according to the official. They were taken to a Texas hospital for treatment and observation. A Mexican government official said Washington McGee was found uninjured. Williams was shot twice in one leg and once in the other, his wife, Michele Williams, told CNN Tuesday. One person has been detained in connection to the incident, Tamaulipas Governor Américo Villarreal said, but officials would not confirm whether the person is related to a criminal organization.

The victims were found in a

"wooden house" in Matamoros and had been transferred to various places over the days "in order to create confusion and avoid rescue efforts," Villarreal said. The discovery of the Americans' whereabouts comes days after the four were abducted at gunpoint in Matamoros in what is believed to be a case of mistaken identity. The tight-knit group of friends traveled from South Carolina to Mexico so Washington McGee could undergo a medical procedure

across the border Friday, but they never made it to the appointment, two family members told CNN.

The group crossed into Matamoros in the state of Tamaulipas, at about 9:18 a.m. Friday, Villarreal said, but they got lost while trying to locate the medical clinic, according to Washington McGee's close friend, who did not want to be identified. They reached out to the doctor's office for directions on Friday but were struggling to

communicate with the office because they had a poor cellphone signal.

After crossing the border, they were fired upon by unidentified gunmen, "placed in a vehicle and taken from the scene by armed men," according to the FBI. Investigators believe the Americans were targeted by a Mexican cartel that likely mistook them for Haitian drug smugglers, the US official said. The US citizens have no concerning criminal history that has

been identified by investigators, the official said.

An innocent Mexican bystander was also killed in the encounter, US Ambassador to Mexico Ken Salazar said. The woman was hit by a stray bullet almost a block and a half from where the Americans were taken, Tamaulipas Gov. Américo Villarreal said on Tuesday.

Their abduction highlights the ongoing violence that has plagued some Mexican cities during the long-running Mexican drug war as well as the growing business of "medical tourism."

Matamoros has a population of more than 500,000 people and is located just across the Rio Grande from Brownsville, Texas. The US State Department has issued a "Level 4: Do Not Travel" advisory for US citizens thinking of going to Tamaulipas, citing crime and kidnapping.



## Cops continue search for Americans shot at, kidnapped in Mexico border town Police are on the look out for Americans who were shot at and kidnapped from a town along the Mexico border.

(News Agency) Mexican and US authorities reported on Monday that they were collaborating to locate four Americans who were attacked by gunmen in northern Mexico and then abducted shortly after crossing the border, reported global news agency Reuters.

According to the US Embassy in Mexico, the four Americans, who have not been identified, were traveling in a white minivan with North Carolina license plates when they entered Matamoros, Tamaulipas, on Friday.

The embassy appealed to the public for assistance in identifying the kidnappers. The armed men fired at the passengers shortly after their vehicle crossed into Mexico and then forced them into another vehicle before escaping the scene, the embassy stated.

Due to the threat of kidnapping, the US State Department has advised Americans not to travel to Tamaulipas, as Matamoros is situated across the border from Brownsville, Texas. A Mexi-

can official informed Reuters that three men and one woman were abducted. Ken Salazar, the US Ambassador to Mexico, stated that an innocent Mexican died in the incident.

Mexico's president claimed that Americans had entered Mexico to purchase medication. "I believe it will be resolved, I hope so. Mexico's public security ministry is working with the FBI to locate the missing US citizens," President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador was quoted as saying.



## Maldives: Why JP's Decision to Contest Presidential Poll will not Affect Solih Government

(News Agency) The late Saturday (25 February) decision of the Jumhooree Party (JP) in the MDP-led ruling combine in Maldives to contest the September presidential polls on its own will not affect the stability of the incumbent Ibrahim 'Ibu' Solih's government. In the US kind of executive presidency, even if the JP ministers exit the Solih team, it will not upset the government's stability, as the party has only three MPs in the 87-member Parliament, whereas the otherwise divided MDP has 65 members, over 50 of them Solih loyalists.

The not-so-unexpected JP decision came a day after another existing ally, namely, the religion-centric Adhaalath Party (AP) pledged continued support to Solih, who had won the MDP nomination against one-time friend Nasheed, 61-38 percent in nationwide primaries. The AP responded promptly after Solih had written to existing and prospective allies for an alliance. Another ally, the Maumoon Reform Movement (MRM) has deferred a decision on Solih's mis-sive, seeking support, until the return of party founder and former President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom from his overseas trip. At the same time, the Maldivian Democratic Alliance (MDA), which has been lying low after distancing itself from the government of predecessor President Abdulla Yameen before Solih defeated the latter in the 2018 polls, has since pledged its sup-

port for the incumbent. In doing so, the MDA, like the JP, rebuffed the open invitation to support Yameen, nominated by the Opposition PPM-PNC combine but is just now disqualified, pending the disposal of the criminal court sentencing him to five years' imprisonment in the corruption-cum-money-laundering case, from his presidential past.

The MDA has denied reports that support for Solih owed to party founder 'Sun' Ahmed Siyam Mohammed owing \$24 m to the Hilton group of hotels, as per a Singapore arbitration verdict (and undisclosed sums to Chinese banks). A senior party leader also reiterated that the Yameen camp's 'India Out' campaign was 'useless propaganda'. The JP's decision, if taken to its logical conclusion, can make for a multi-cornered contest. One outside possibility is that jailed former President Abdulla Yameen continues to remain disqualified, with his PPM-PNC combine refusing to field an alternate candidate. For now, JP's Gasim Ibrahim met with President Solih one-on-one, as if in response to the latter's open invitation for reiterating the alliance, but with the JP congress' mandate in hand. That was also after Gasim had declared that there was no MDP without Nasheed. Pro-Solih analysts interpret this to mean that Gasim wanted an MDP patch-up but on Nasheed's terms.

## 16 killed, over 120 injured in explosion in Bangladesh's Dhaka


**At least 16 people were killed and over 120 were injured in an explosion at a multi-storied building in Dhaka's Gulistan area in Bangladesh.**



(News Agency) The incident took place at around 4 pm on Tuesday. 11 fire services emergency units are at the location and rescue operations are underway. Injured people have been rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital. DMCH Director Brig Gen Md Nazmul Haque said around 120 people had sustained injuries in the explosion. Hafiz Akter, the additional commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said on Tuesday evening, "We have to cut through the concrete to rescue them. The fire service is working on it." The building, located in the busy Siddique Bazaar, was a commercial building with several offices and stores. The blast reportedly took place in a store selling sanitation materials on the ground floor of the five-storey building. This is the third blast in a week to claim lives after explosions at an oxygen plant in Sitakunda and another building on Mirpur Road in Dhaka.



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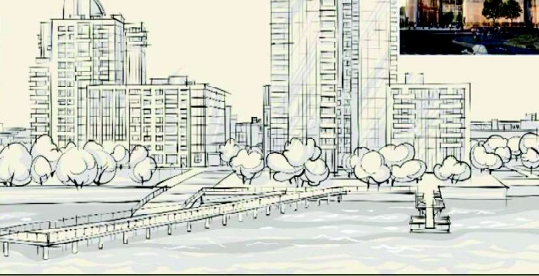
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# Who can save Pakistan from economic default?



Khan promised to make a new Pakistan before the 2018 election but he miserably failed. Khan claimed that he would rather commit suicide before approaching the IMF. He not only made a deal with the IMF in 2019 but also created problems for the country by violating the same deal. Khan announced some subsidies as a political gimmick which ultimately turned into economic landmines for the new government. Khan refused to accept his fall from power last year and pushed Pakistan to the brink. Pakistan was already facing inflation due to the impact of the Ukraine war and then faced a climate disaster which destroyed its agriculture and infrastructure. The Pakistani economy suffered losses of more than \$30 billion due to last year's floods. Pakistan is the eighth largest producer of wheat in the world, but now this country is facing a wheat shortage. The price of roti jumped due to the smuggling of flour to Afghanistan.

Pakistan secured pledges of more than \$10 billion recently from many donors at the Geneva conference for the reconstruction in flood-affected areas. Pakistan needs at least \$20 billion more for the flood-affected areas. It is difficult for Pakistan to service debt of \$274 billion, which is nearly 79 per cent of the GDP. Pakistan needs to repay more than \$8 billion to creditors by March 2023 while foreign exchange reserves are less than \$4 billion.

In this difficult time, Pakistan received a rollover of \$2 billion and additional support of \$1 billion from the UAE. Saudi Arabia also funded \$1 billion worth of oil imports on deferred payments with assurances of more help in future. On the other hand, the IMF quietly asked these two Arab countries to hold their money. The IMF forced Pakistan to impose more taxes through a mini-budget last month. This mini-budget was like a death war-

rant for Shehbaz Sharif but the IMF never approved a deal with Pakistan for a loan of \$1.1 billion. They pressured Pakistan to do more. Impose more taxes. The Sharif government was unhappy with this attitude. The IMF indirectly facilitated Imran Khan who was continuously claim-

**"In this difficult time, Pakistan received a rollover of \$2 billion and additional support of \$1 billion from the UAE. Saudi Arabia also funded \$1 billion worth of oil imports on deferred payments with assurances of more help in future."**

ing that there will be no deal between the IMF and Pakistan. Chinese President Xi Jinping approached the IMF to help Pakistan but they never listened. Finally, the Chinese decided to put their foot down. At this difficult juncture, China rescued Pakistan and approved a \$2 billion loan last week.

I discussed the sword of default hanging over Pakistan with Finance Minister Ishaq Dar. He told me with an angry tone, "We will not default despite the fact that Imran Khan handed over the economic sovereignty of Pakistan to foreign powers by making the central bank autonomous." He is not happy with the IMF but accepted IMF demands to revive the loan program. A deal with the IMF will help to provide a stopgap and rebuild confidence in a way that encourages private flows to resume. Ishaq Dar is not an economist. He is a chartered accountant. Some of the senior cabinet ministers think that "Dar is a disaster for Pakistan". He tried to confront the IMF without a plan. Then, he surrendered to the IMF without any guarantees and faced humiliation.

Some supporters of Dar in the cabinet see a conspiracy behind the failure of Dar.

They consider the IMF as a proxy of the US and the West. The recent attitude of the IMF forced many Pakistanis to find ways of surviving without the IMF like India. Respected Economist Professor Dr Shahida Wizarat recently came up with a book titled "Alternative to the IMF". She

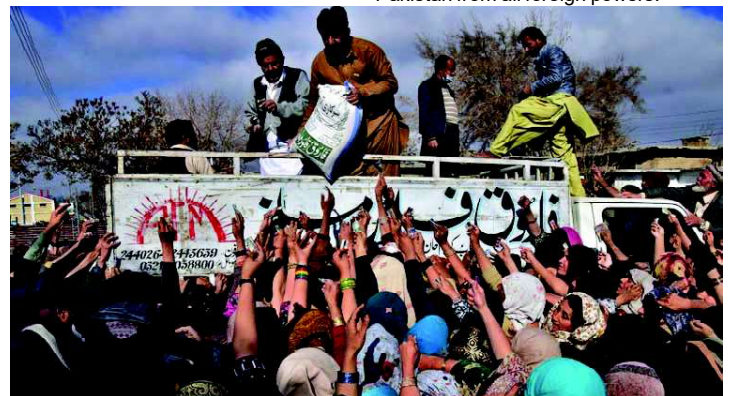
blamed the IMF and World Bank for destroying Pakistan's economy because most of the former Pakistani finance ministers were imported from these two financial institutions.

She suggested making an economic alliance not only with China but also with Russia and Iran. Pakistan should make an economic alliance with China and Russia but Pakistan should not compromise on its sovereignty. There is no harm in joining the China-Russia alliance, but Pakistan needs to do more.

The Shehbaz Sharif government does not

require rocket science to fix the economy. The current crisis could be an opportunity. Pakistan must say goodbye to reckless economic policies its elites have adopted for decades. Stop depending upon foreign aid. Tax havens must end. Traders and big feudal landlords must be brought into the tax net. The population of Pakistan is estimated at more than 225 million but the number of tax filers is just two million. Only one per cent of Pakistanis pay taxes.

At least four million rich Pakistanis don't pay taxes. 3.5 million tax evaders were identified last year. Poor Pakistanis are sliding below the poverty line because of rich tax evaders. The irregular or shadow economy of Pakistan accounts for 40 per cent of GDP. Annual tax evasion in tobacco, medicines, tyres, tea and real estate is more than Rs 310 billion. India has one Gautam Adani, but Pakistan has many who are richer than the state. Javed Akhtar only meets rich people in Pakistan. The majority of Pakistanis are poor, like the majority of Indians. I can show these Pakistanis to Javed Akhtar in every city of Pakistan who can't afford food twice a day. Prime Minister Sharif constituted a committee recently to suggest austerity measures for better utilisation of public money. First of all, he must downsize his biggest cabinet in the world. The number of Pakistani cabinet ministers, advisors and special assistants reached 85, more than the number of Indian cabinet ministers. Pakistan may dodge a default in 2023 with the help of China, but political leaders must come up with some roadmap for reviving the economy. The Supreme Court of Pakistan recently ordered the holding of elections within 90 days of the dissolution of Punjab and KPK assemblies. Pakistan should have a general election at the end of this year. The current parliament will complete its tenure in August this year. Pakistanis should demand an economic roadmap from all the political parties. They should not vote for popular faces; they must vote for a good economic roadmap which can save their future. Pakistanis can save their country from becoming a sandwich between the IMF and China by voting for a plan which can liberate the economy of Pakistan from all foreign powers.





# 1980s Again? Punjab Government Needs to Wake Up To Growing Khalistan Threats

One of the bodyguards shot Fauja Singh dead, and a battle broke out in which twelve Sikhs and three Nirankaris were killed. The twelve Sikhs became martyrs and Sanjay Gandhi and Zail Singh had the issue they needed. The Congress publicity machine projected Bhindranwale as the hero of the attack on Nirankari convention.'

This also led to the birth of Dal Khalsa with Congress' support. Dal Khalsa was the key votary of Khalistan. It is on record that the hotel bill for the first meeting of Dal Khalsa, where the establishment of Khalistan was discussed, was paid by Zail Singh.

In 1980, the Akali Dal government in Punjab was dismissed after Indira Gandhi came back to power at the Centre. The Congress returned to power in fresh Assembly elections. Darbara Singh, an arch-rival of Zail Singh was made Chief Minister of Punjab. On the other hand, Zail Singh was rewarded with the Home Ministry at the Centre.

GBS Sidhu, a former officer with Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), mentions in *The Khalistan Conspiracy*, "Darbara Singh was secular in his politics while Zail Singh not only tolerated communal forces but also compromised with them. He had no qualms about adopting a communal agenda to further both his own and the Congress Party's

interests." Zail Singh backed Bhindranwale to counter Darbara Singh and that had huge implications in the long run.

## CHANDO KALAN EPISODE

On 9 September 1981, Lala Jagat Narain, owner and editor of the newspaper 'Punjab Kesari' was shot dead near Ludhiana. Narain was highly critical of Bhindranwale in his editorials. Bhindranwale along with his two associates were named in the FIR. A Punjab Police team went to arrest him at village Chando Kalan in the Hissar district of Haryana where Bhindranwale was on a preaching mission. Sidhu gives an elaborate account of what followed subsequently "Tipped off suitably, Bhindranwale had already left Chando Kalan with some of his supporters and had headed for his headquarters, Gurudwara Darshan Prakash, Chowk Mehta."

Bhindranwale travelled over 300 km through Haryana and Punjab and reached Chowk Mehta on the night of September 13-14 September 1981. He wasn't stopped at any check post on the way as the then Union Home Minister Zail Singh had himself called the Haryana Chief Minister Bhajan Lal and told him not to arrest Bhindranwale. In fact, one of the senior police officers told Satish Jacob that an official car was sent by

Haryana Chief Minister to drive Bhindranwale back to his Gurudwara at Chowk Mehta.

According to Sidhu, "My batchmate Diwakar Das Gupta (IPS, 1964 batch, Madhya Pradesh cadre) who was DIG (Deputy Inspector General) at BSF (Border Security Force) headquarters in New Delhi had told me at that time that their force tried to stop Bhindranwale at each of their check posts but he received instructions from the home minister's office to let Bhindranwale pass unhindered."

Later Bhindranwale was arrested in this case from his gurdwara but that was also a façade. The Punjab Police meekly surrendered to the terms and conditions put by him. Before the arrest, he gave a fiery speech against the Punjab government to a religious congregation. This led to his followers opening a fire that killed 11 people.

Ironically on 15 October 1981, less than a month after Bhindranwale's arrest, Zail Singh told Parliament that there was no evidence that he was involved in the killing of Lala Jagat Narain. The government released him from prison and he celebrated his release in Delhi with his supporters openly flouting arms in their victory procession on Delhi roads.

According to Sidhu, "There was

considerable evidence to suggest that Bhindranwale's release was ordered by the Home Minister himself." However, a senior Congress politician from Punjab told Satish Jacob, 'It was Mrs Gandhi herself who actually ordered the Sant's release.' This was confirmed by a family member of the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC), who told Mark Tully, 'Santokh Singh himself went and pleaded with Mrs Gandhi for Bhindranwale's release, threatening that it would not be possible to keep the DSGMC loyal to the Congress if Bhindranwale was not set free.'

'Bhindranwale's arrest from Chowk Mehta and his subsequent release in fact helped raise his profile as an important leader of the Sikh community in Punjab and granted him the status of a hero. Bhindranwale himself said after his release that the government had done more for him through his arrest than he could have achieved in years.' The present state of affairs in Punjab and the series of incidents that have happened since the Aam Aadmi Party took over the reins of the state government reminds one of this anecdotal history. The question is whether we would learn from the past so that we aren't condemned to repeat it.

## Russia-Ukraine war and the political economy of a prolonged conflict

It has created a famine-like situation in such countries. India's import of oil from Russia has been increasing from one per cent to thirty per cent. A part of it is being exported to other countries. NATO members like Turkey have sent weapons to Ukraine, and also continued their trade with Russia. As such, the Russian economy is making a profit out of the crisis. If everyone is committed to their own interests, the war is definitely going to continue for a long time.

Hundreds of innocent victims were killed in the Bucha massacre last year in March by Russian troops. The pride of Ukraine appeared thereafter in a new light. Unlike Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, the Ukrainian people came to the battlefield with help from allies. The prisoners are being released from Russian prisons to be deployed on the war fronts. There is no one to take care of the poor victims of this battle. Ukraine rushed to the battlefield, and there are people in Russia to oppose the war. Restoration of the position of 1991 and the reconstruction of Ukraine are in demand. At the same time, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy predicts the

assassination of Putin instead of the fall of the Kremlin.

The fear that the pandemic has created is being nourished by this conflict. It has consolidated the NATO that was fragmented after the United States left Afghanistan. The proponents of non-violence and world peace are keeping silent on the display of the superpowers and increasing the consumption of weapons of mass destruction. The Land of Buddha and Gandhi has definitely failed to address this crisis. However, its leader advised the Russian President to implore peaceful solutions.

It can be raised again during a series of dialogues concerning the G-20 presidency. To establish their supremacy, India's all-weather friend Russia and India's not-so-friendly neighbour China are at the centre of this humanitarian crisis. The peace process required mutual consent and co-operation to address the challenges.

The United Nations has proved inefficient at a critical juncture and limited itself to the relief work. It provides a platform for different camps to display

their agendas instead of restoring peace. NATO has rejected the Chinese peace plan that denounced the mentality of the Cold War era and promised to ensure the safe return of prisoners of war. It also reminds all how to respect the territorial integrity that the UN charter has promised.

Ukrainian President Zelenskyy is trying to meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping to discourage the arms supply from China to Russian troops. It will minimise the destruction of Ukraine. The peace plan seeks the international community to create certain conditions and platforms for the resumption of peace negotiations. Despite all these efforts, to date, no consensus has been reached for peace. Obviously, China and India have been looking for a way out. Russia also wants to get out of the crisis. China has started to create a respectable condition to address the issues and the Russian side responded to it with a warm welcome. NATO stands against it. The United Nations needs to act to restore peace. Can a Chinese plan help President Zelenskyy to save the people of Ukraine?

## Why JPCs Are An Exercise In Futility

The JPC report was boycotted by the opposition highlighting that the committee was packed with members of the ruling party. When the Harshad Mehta scam (1992) surfaced, a JPC was set up to inquire into allegations that Mehta diverted funds to Maruti Udyog Limited and provoked a major fall in the Sensex. However, the recommendations were neither accepted nor implemented. During the Share Market Scam (2001), the Ahmedabad-based Madhavpura Mercantile Cooperative Bank had big exposure to the stock market, courtesy former stockbroker Ketan Parekh. The JPC suggested stock market regulations, which were subsequently diluted.

There have been other cases where a JPC has been formed for investigations. For example, the Joint Committee on pesticide residues in and safety standards for soft drinks, fruit juice and other beverages (2003) and the Joint Committee to examine matters relating to allocation and pricing of telecom licences and spectrum (2011). While only some recommendations were implemented from the former, the latter was mired in controversy.

A time-bound investigation conducted under the supervision of the Supreme Court must get to the bottom of the truth. India is watching. The world is watching.

# India, world's largest democracy, leads global list of internet shutdowns

This is the fifth consecutive year the world's largest democracy of more than 1.3 billion people has topped the list, the group said, raising concerns about India's commitment to internet freedom under its current Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"The responsibility of Indian states for the majority of shutdowns globally is impossible to ignore and a deep problem on its own," the report said. "Authorities in regions across the country are increasingly resorting to this repressive measure, inflicting shutdowns on more people in more places." Nearly 60% of India's internet shutdowns last year occurred in Indian-administered Kashmir, where authorities disrupted access due to "political instability and violence," according to the report. In August 2019, the BJP revoked the autonomy of the Muslim-majority state of Jammu and Kashmir and split it into two federally administered territories, bringing the region under greater control of New Delhi. The unprecedented decision sparked protests and the government has frequently restricted communication lines since, a move rights groups say is aimed at quashing dissent. Apart from Jammu and Kashmir, authorities in the states of West Bengal and Rajasthan imposed more shutdowns than other Indian regions in response to "protests, communal violence and



exams," according to the report. India has the world's second largest digital population, following China, with more than 800 million internet users. The internet has become a vital social and economic lifeline for large swathes of the population and connects the country's isolated rural pockets, with its growing cities.

The disruptions "impacted the daily lives of millions of people for hundreds of hours in 2022," the report said.

## Concerns in India

The Access Now report comes at a time when India's commitment to freedom of speech and expression is under increasing scrutiny.

In January, the country banned a documentary from the BBC that was critical of Modi's alleged role

in deadly riots more than 20 years ago. Indian tax authorities raided the BBC's offices in New Delhi and Mumbai in the weeks that followed citing "irregularities and discrepancies" in the broadcaster's taxes.

But critics of the government were not convinced, instead calling the raids "a clear cut case of vendetta" and accused the BJP of intimidating the media.

Last week, police in New Delhi arrested a senior opposition politician for allegedly "disturbing harmony" after he misstated the Prime Minister's middle name, a move Modi's critics likened to "dictatorial behavior." In recent years, the government has repeatedly justified blocking internet access on the grounds of preserving public safety amid widespread fears of mob violence.

While the country was in the middle of its general election in 2019, with more than 900 million people eligible to vote, some Indians were denied access to the internet for days at a time as they prepared to cast their ballots. Authorities said the blocking was "a precautionary measure to maintain law and order," leading many critics to question India's grand exercise in political freedom during the world's largest election.

During a nearly year-long protest by angry farmers in 2021 over controversial new pricing laws, the Indian government blocked internet access in several districts after violent skirmishes broke out between demonstrators and police. Some individual shutdowns have been challenged in the courts, and there is an effort to

change the country's laws to make such blackouts more difficult to impose.

## Rest of the world

Last year saw more internet shutdowns worldwide than ever before, Access Now said, prompting the group to raise fears of "digital authoritarianism" as governments continue the trend. Apart from India, other countries that saw internet shutdowns last year include Ukraine, Iran and Myanmar. During Russia's invasion of its neighbor Ukraine, the Kremlin cut internet access at least 22 times, according to Access Now, engaging in "cyberattacks and deliberately destroying telecommunications infrastructure." The Iranian regime responded to protests ignited by the death in custody of 22-year-old Kurdish-Iranian woman Mahsa Amini by imposing 18 shutdowns—a move Access Now called "a further escalation of its repressive tactics."

Myanmar, which in 2021 saw the junta remove its democratically elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi, saw seven internet blackouts, according to the report. The Southeast Asian country continues to be rocked by violence and instability, while many are grappling with shortages of fuel, food and basic supplies. The "military persisted in keeping people in the dark for extended periods, targeting areas where coup resistance is strongest," the report said.

# Queens Man Arrested For Defrauding Former Employer Of \$4.4 Million In Fake Invoice Scheme

(SAI Bureau) Bhaskarray Barot was arrested for engaging in a years-long scheme to defraud his former employer out of approximately \$4.4 million. Damian Williams, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and Michael J. Driscoll, the Assistant Director in Charge of the New York Field Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI"), announced the arrest. BAROT was arrested this morning in Queens, New York, on a criminal Complaint and was presented before a magistrate judge in the Southern District of New York. U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said: "As alleged, over the course of years, Barot created fraudulent invoices and processed them for payment at the Manhattan-based company where he used to work as a procurement manager. Barot designed the invoices to closely resemble the invoices that the company received from real vendors and other entities owed payment from the company. But the fraudulent invoices differed in a crucial way: they directed payment into

Barot's pocket. Today's arrest demonstrates that this Office will seek justice for companies that fall victim to corporate theft."

FBI Assistant Director Michael J. Driscoll said: "As the charges today allege, Barot operated a years-long deception, scamming his employer out of millions of dollars through bogus invoices. Duplicious schemes like this bring undue harm to the greater financial community. The FBI will continue to investigate complex financial crimes and hold the transgressors accountable in the criminal justice system." According to the allegations contained in the Complaint, which was unsealed today in Manhattan federal court: [1]

From at least in or about July 2018, up to and including at least August 2022, BAROT engaged in a scheme to defraud his former employer (the "Company") of approximately \$4.4 million through fake invoices designed to resemble those received from legitimate vendors of the Company. BAROT used his position as a procure-

ment manager at the Company to process the fraudulent invoices for payment. When doing so, he often affixed the fake invoices to email messages that he, in some cases, sent in the names of employees of the Company's real vendors so that it would appear as though the real vendors were seeking payment on the fake invoices.

The fake invoices, however, stated that payment should be made to entities with names that often differed slightly from those of the real vendor companies. BAROT then incorporated companies and opened bank accounts in the names of some of the entities listed for payment on the fake invoices so that he could collect the payments that the Company made on the fake invoices.

BAROT repeated these fraudulent tactics with more than a dozen fictitious entities and caused payment to be made by the Company on approxi-

mately 40 fake invoices, totaling approximately \$4.4 million. BAROT, 32, of Queens, New York, is charged with one count of wire fraud, which carries a maximum potential sentence of 20 years in prison, and one count of aggravated identity theft, which carries a mandatory consecutive sentence of two years in prison. The maximum potential sentences in this case are prescribed by Congress and are provided here for informational purposes only, as any sentencing of the defendant will be determined by a judge. Mr. Williams praised the outstanding investigative work of the FBI.

This case is being handled by the Office's General Crimes Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorney Jeffrey W. Coyle is in charge of the prosecution. The charges contained in the Complaint are merely accusations, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.



# The Holi shown in these pics does not exist!



Have you ever wondered how a self-learning machine would perceive Holi, a Festival of Colors? Using Generative AI (a type of artificial intelligence that employs deep learning algorithms to generate new, meaningful data from existing data) we fed a description of Holi into Midjourney, a popular tool similar to OpenAI's DALL-E and Stable Diffusion. By doing so, we were able to observe how the AI would interpret the festival through visuals. We were astonished when the AI-generated incredibly lifelike images of people celebrating the festival of colours. Take a look at some of the machine-generated pictures of the Holi celebration of people who do not exist.

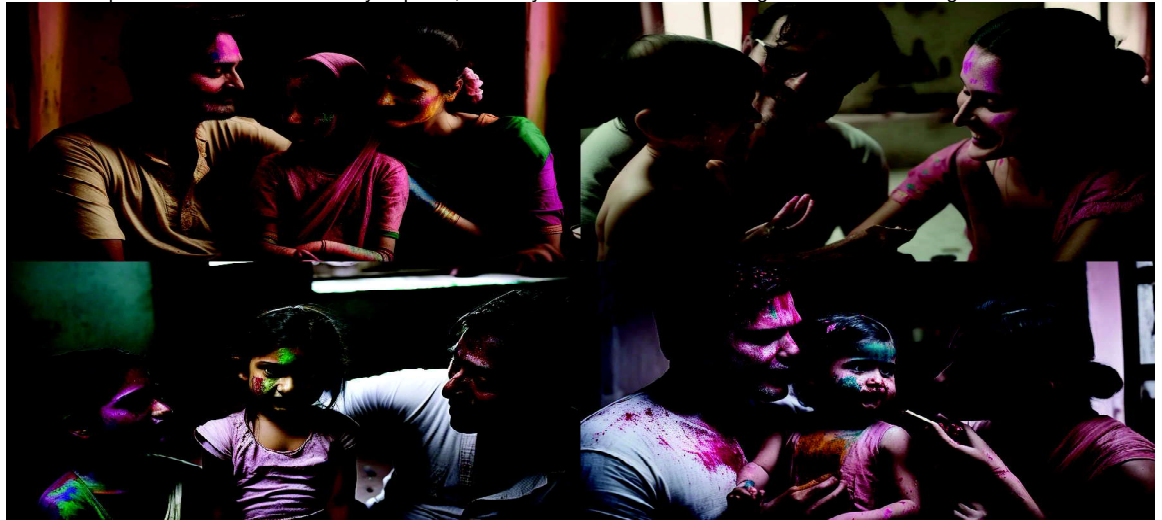
AI is being used in a variety of ways to facilitate creative projects, from helping content creators to developing new tools and applications. For example, AI can be used to generate content ideas and suggest potential storylines for filmmakers, or to automate the editing process for

audio and video recordings. AI-generated art can range from abstract shapes to lifelike portraits and can be used to create images, music, and even poetry. AI can also be used to create new algorithms for music production or to help designers create more complex and intricate designs. Critics claim that AI is sometimes unable to capture the subtle nu-

ances of creativity and emotion that make art great. Additionally, AI art lacks the personal touch of a human artist, and can often feel sterile or generic. AI is also limited in its ability to generate original works and often relies on existing datasets to generate its work. As AI technology continues to progress, these shortcomings will likely improve, but they re-

main a major obstacle to the widespread acceptance of AI art. This type of AI focuses on creating artificial data that can be used to train and develop other AI models. Generative AI can be used to create new images, videos, audio, text, and other types of data. These models are capable of understanding subtle nuances in data and creating new varia-

tions of the existing data that can be used for various applications. Generative AI has been used to create new products, develop new methods for data analysis, and even generate new ideas. Generative AI is an exciting area of research for many computer scientists as it can open up new possibilities for creating new, meaningful data.





# Why so many Biharis still work as labourers in Tamil Nadu, Punjab and other states

**The Tamil Nadu scare has brought into focus an old question: Why are lakhs of Bihari workers still forced to leave home and sweat it out in other states despite years of so-called sushasan? The jobs crisis is an obviously significant factor but the problem runs deeper and wider.**



A few days ago, misleading videos surfaced on social media with claims that migrant workers from Bihar were being attacked in Tamil Nadu, triggering panic and a temporary exodus of part of the workforce.

A quick investigation showed that what was seen in the visuals had taken place earlier, some of it even outside Tamil Nadu. The police registered cases, made some arrests for spreading misinformation and asked social media giants to do damage control. A team of senior Bihar officials also reached the southern state and met their counterparts and representatives of migrant workers. Both chief ministers had to issue "all is well" statements and an appeal for calm.

However, the scare has, in its wake, raised an old question: Why are lakhs of Bihari workers still forced to leave home and sweat it out in Tamil Nadu, Punjab and other states? Especially after years of the so-called sushasan (good governance) of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

The quick answer is: When Nitish Kumar took over in 2005, Bihar had the highest unemployment rate in the country. He promised to change the scene and keep Biharis from moving out in

search of livelihood. In 2022, it only had Jammu & Kashmir and Rajasthan behind it. The scale of Bihar's migrant crisis burst into public view when over 15 lakh workers ran helter-skelter to get home during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic.

In 2005, the poverty rate in Bihar was 54.5 per cent. It was the poorest state in the country. Nitish Kumar promised to eradicate poverty. Today, Bihar remains the poorest state. The poverty rate is 51.9 per cent. As per a NITI Aayog report, over half of Bihar's population is multidimensionally poor. According to data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), Bihar's unemployment rate in February 2023 rose to 12.3 per cent, while the national figure was 7.5 per cent. However, states such as Haryana, Rajasthan and Jharkhand fared worse than Bihar.

Much is blamed on the RJD's so-called jungle raj. But even before Lalu Yadav began his highly controversial rule of Bihar in 1990, the state, with high population growth, had always been underdeveloped and poorly governed.

Illiterate and barely educated young men were forced to move out to work as farm labourers, construction and

sanitation workers, hawkers, watchmen, dhobis, rickshaw pullers, auto-rickshaw drivers and now lift attendants. Along with populous states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar had a surplus labour force for industrially developing Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka or agriculturally progressing Punjab and Haryana. Before that, Kolkata was a strong pull for job-seekers. The change, with Lalu's arrival, was that the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), primarily the Yadavs, had political patronage to cock a snook at the earlier exploiting establishment composed of the so-called upper castes. Political instability was taken care of, but the annual flooding stayed and crime and corruption spiralled. So did joblessness.

When Nitish Kumar came to power in 2005, there was hope. There was a media blitz of sushasan, but things did not change much. Swollen rivers in monsoon continue to ravage vast swathes of land and joblessness remains a significant socio-political issue. This is both despite and because of his sharing power, in instalments, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP and Lalu Yadav's RJD.

Today, Punjab's agriculture,

and also industries to a large extent, is massively dependent on lakhs of Bihari labourers clustered in Bathinda, Amritsar, Jalandhar and Ludhiana. They're the people more willing to clean cattle sheds or do menial labour in factories without asking for too much. The migration has dropped due to greater availability of some jobs in rural pockets in Bihar but this drop has been marginal. Today, many of Delhi's auto-rickshaw drivers and rickshaw pullers are from Bihar districts such as Motihari, Gopalganj, Darbhanga and Samastipur. Nitish Kumar takes pride in the high growth rate of the state's GDP. But have you ever heard America growing at an 8 per cent rate? Only the poorest of the poor have the potential to grow faster. A person earning Rs 10 would see a 10 per cent growth rate if she earns Rs 11.

But it's not only about numbers. There are social aspects to the crisis as well. There is an inherent aspiration that one must work and work hard. And there's also this common refrain: Yahan scope nahi hai (there aren't enough opportunities here).

Then, there's a call that comes from outside, the call of greener pastures, that the situation is better outside Bihar. This call is reinforced

by those returning home during Chhath, other festivals or family functions or social gatherings, who wear jeans, carry smartphones and bring home saved-up money.

When fresh batches of the majboor and the inspired go out, they find the pastures, in slums, are not at all greener. You pay rent, you buy food, you're the usual suspects when crime happens. You're also victims of anti-migrant rhetoric and violence. So, what explains this pull? It's the pull of anonymity. If one has to do so-called menial jobs in Patna or Darbhanga, where one has grown up and studied, there's this issue of shame. Log kya kahenge? The urge is for societally conditioned respectability. The tragedy is, that respectability can only be found in the anonymity of, say, Mumbai's chawls. The consolation is: wahan kaun dekhne jayega? It's also tragic that society has respect for luxury and not for labour. Is it any surprise that those employing servants and driving cars even in mufassil Bihar have people's respect? This gulf is seen to have been bridged, though marginally, when a migrant worker returns home and his daughter's birthday has DJ music and a cake-cutting ceremony, with people clapping on, betraying awe, admiration and envy.

The problem is, the Bihar government is struggling to create jobs for today's adults but isn't planning for today's children who would need employment in a few years.

This is part of the reason we have such massive backlogs. The planning that the government is doing should have been done years ago. No wonder, some of the familiar visuals coming out of Bihar are of job-seeking youngsters torching trains or being thrashed by the police. Or migrant workers scrambling for safety even at the slightest of alarm.



# The dark world of Haryana's Gau Rakshaks

With rogue police personnel, firearms and mob justice at their disposal, Gau Rakshaks rampage through Haryana, mounting violent, or even lethal, attacks on livestock transporters passing through the state, an India Today investigation has found.

The probe was triggered by the discovery of the charred bodies of two men, Junaid and Nasir, from a burnt SUV in Haryana's Bhiwani district on February 16. Junaid, 32, and Nasir, 28, from Rajasthan's Bharatpur district were reported abducted and assaulted in a police complaint a day before, on February 15.

## ARMED THUGS ON RAMPAGE

India Today's investigation has uncovered the alarming truth about how these vigilante groups in general are using guns to ambush cattle-carrying vehicles at night, inflicting serious injuries and even killing their victims.

Ramesh Kumar, leader of a Gau Rakshak squad from Rohtak, confessed that his gang operates in connivance with unscrupulous elements of local police.

"We serve as an ATM for the police," he told India Today's investigative team. "We catch the smugglers, hand them over to the police and the police set them free after taking bribes."

He claimed his men are even accompanied by police to the usual routes of cattle vehicles which they attack with firearms during the night.

## "AIDED, PATRONIZED BY COPS"

According to Kumar, his gang first informs the cops about the movement of any vehicle carrying cattle and the butchers, and when law enforcement signals his men, they step in.

"Do the police tip you off about where to catch them (cow traders)?" a reporter asked.

"Of course, they do. Police don't raid without us accompanying them. We first inform the police about the movement of any vehicle carrying out 'Mother Cow' and the butchers. We act when signalled to stop their overflow," Kumar said.

## READY TO SLAUGHTER

Kumar then made a startling confession about how his Gau Rakshak squad could turn murderous on the slightest suspicion. "We can even slaughter such people if they slaughter the cows. They hurt our sentiments," he said. "I have some 850 men (working under me)."

## SUPPORTED BY FANATICS

We have 23-24 licensed weapons in our organisation. There are many people who just want to serve (the cow). We tell them we need fuel and bullets. We don't need money. Some donate 100 shots, some 50 a month. Some give their own guns on the condition that butchers are killed," he revealed.

## RIFLES, REVOLVERS, PUMP GUNS

Ravi Pujari, another self-proclaimed Gau Rakshak with a group from Palwal, disclosed how his men would ambush live-

stock vehicles at night using pump guns. "If we are standing here and get a tip about such a vehicle with its number, we will try to deflate its tyres, using the spikes. If it doesn't stop, we will fire at it," he explained. "My pump gun can fire eight shots. I empty it in one go."

Reckless in their assaults, Pujari now admitted that his gang has stocked illegal weapons to carry out their deadly raids on livestock transport.

"We need no licensed weapons. We encounter them with illegal firearms. Once shot, it can hit anywhere. It can hit the vehicle. It can hit anyone else."

## INSTIGATING MOB JUSTICE

Thakur Manish, a cow vigilante from Nuh, admitted that their attacks on cattle transporters even provoke mob justice.

"One man is now dead. We beat him six months ago. He died a month-and-a-half ago," Manish confessed. "I wasn't alone in beating (the victim). The public too joined in. We have our network at different locations"

He confessed to using rifles and revolvers for cow protection.

"I have used two kinds (of weapons). A .315 (bore rifle) and a revolver," Manish admitted.

## EXTORTIONISTS DISGUISED AS GAU RAKSHAKS

Senior police personnel India Today investigated revealed these Gau Rakshaks are in fact extortionists.

At Firozpur Jhirka in Haryana's Nuh, DSP Satish Kumar said that the vigilantes are out to blackmail cattle traders.

"If you ask me, they are blackmailers. Blackmailers. They catch a cattle vehicle, strike a deal. When they get their money, they would let it go," Kumar said. "Somebody is bringing the cattle vehicle and making money. He'll pay up to 10,000-20,000-50,000 rupees and will be allowed to go. They are goons."

## POLICE FAVOURING GAU RAKSHAKS?

# As Ukraine War Enters Second Year, Russia is Pushed Firmly into Chinese Orbit-And This Will Hurt American World Order

Again, the US' effort to push China into the WTO has backfired badly. Its \$1 trillion economy in 2001 has become a \$15 trillion economy today, thanks to its WTO entry. The Americans fooled themselves into believing, with obvious Chinese deception, that a market economy would invariably result in free societies, but just the opposite happened. Philip P Pan writes in *Out of Mao's Shadow*, "Prosperity allowed the (Chinese) government to reinvent itself, to win friends, and buy allies, and to forestall demands for democratic change."

In the "post-American world", a term pompously coined by Fareed Zakaria for his 2008 book, which was "not about the decline of America but rather about the rise of everyone else", the US could have accentuated its superpower status by getting right friends and allies. With the imminent rise of China as the biggest competitor of America and Americanism,

The DSP also acknowledged police don't act against them the way they should.

Cops, he admitted, instead favour the Gau Rakshaks.

"They create a law-and-order situation for us. They even mount raids without us accompanying them. They carry licensed weapons," Kumar said.

"What if they beat someone up and bring the victim to the police station? How do you present the case before the court?" the reporter asked.

"We don't accept cases of beaten up people," Kumar replied.

The pattern seems common in other parts of Haryana.

At Dhauj in the state's Faridabad district, additional SHO Dharamvir Singh also corroborated how Gau Rakshaks assault cattle transporters, beat them up mercilessly and then bring their victims to the police.

"Cow protectors are doing some service. But it's not entirely a service. Nobody does that. With pistols in their hands, they think 'let's go out and kill'. Actually they have no right to kill anyone just because they have got pistols," Singh said.

According to Dhauj's additional SHO, the violent attacks are carried out in the guise of religious service.

"They are doing this quite a lot in the Hindu-Muslim name."

This police officer now explained how cops played to the Gau Rakshak gallery.

"So police feel helpless?" the reporter probed.

"Police are helpless. We are Hindus. So should we look at the Hindus or should we side with the Muslims? If we favour the Muslims, we are labelled traitors. But if we look at them (Gau Rakshaks), we aren't doing our job honestly," Singh admitted.

## INJURED VICTIMS IN ILLEGAL CUSTODY

He revealed how the injured cattle transporters are taken into illegal custody for

days, with cases filed against them once they have recovered.

"We don't let them (victims) go but don't register the case immediately till they (the victims) have recovered," he said. "This is inside information. We put him in the lock-up for two-three days, but off the records. We don't show it (the arrest) that time. We show it later."

## EIGHT SUSPECTS IN BHIWANI KILLINGS AT LARGE

Nineteen days after Junaid and Nasir's charred bodies were found in the burnt vehicle in Bhiwani, eight of the nine accused Gau Rakshaks named in the double murder case were still at large.

On March 6, the Rajasthan police offered a Rs 5,000 reward each for information leading to the arrest of the wanted suspects, all belonging to Haryana.

They were identified as Anil and Shree Kant from Nuh, Kalu from Kaithal, Kishore and Shashi Kant from Karnal, Monu and Gogi from Bhiwani and Vikas from Jind.

Only one Gau Rakshak suspect, Rinku Saini, has been taken into custody so far. His questioning led the Rajasthan police to add four more Gau Rakshaks to the list of suspects.

The police probe found the cow vigilantes from Haryana pounced on Junaid and Nasir, suspecting them of being cattle smugglers.

Junaid's cousin Ismail filed an FIR at Gopalgarh in Rajasthan's Bharatpur district on February 15.

The complainant reported that the two men had gone out on a Bolerio the same morning and that an eye witness saw eight to ten men attacking them.

According to the initial FIR, Junaid and Nasir were beaten up badly and driven away in their Bolerio by their attackers through the jungles of Gopalgarh at Bharatpur. Ismail insisted people at the scene identified the attackers as Bajrang Dal workers. Five alleged Gau Rakshaks were named in the Feb 15 FIR

Russia's role could have been a game-changer. But far from winning over Russia, which, along with India, Japan and Australia, would have helped in containing China, the West finds itself stuck with the obsolete Cold War mindset.

In 2014, former ISI chief Hamid Gul, during an interview, pompously said: "When history is written... it will be stated that the ISI defeated the Soviet Union in Afghanistan with the help of America... Then there will be another sentence." After a brief pause, he added: "The ISI, with the help of America, defeated America." Amid the Ukraine War, Xi Jinping may be tempted to think on a similar line — "China, with the help of America, defeated America" — and he won't be overstating a bit. The G20 meetings in Bengaluru and New Delhi show Russia is moving deeper into China's embrace — and this will only weaken Pax Americana.



# Peru's crisis is a cautionary tale for democracies

Peru is seeing some of its worst political violence in recent decades, but the grievances of protesters are all but new; they reflect a system that has failed to deliver for over twenty years. Sparked by the ousting of former President Pedro Castillo last month, some of Peru's most intense protests have taken place in the south of the country where dozens of people were killed in violent clashes with security forces over the last few weeks. This region, around the Andean Mountain range at over ten thousand feet above sea level and home to some of Peru's most famous archeological sites like the ancient ruins of Machu Picchu and the city of Cusco, is also one of the poorest in the country.

In recent days, protesters from this and other rural regions of Peru have started travelling towards the capital, Lima – sometimes for days – to express their grievances to the country's leadership and demand that the current president, Dina Boluarte, to step down. Their anger highlights a much deeper democratic crisis. After years of political bedlam, Peru is a country that has fallen out of love with democracy: both the presidency and congress are widely discredited and perceived as corrupt institutions.

A 2021 poll by LAPOP, a survey research laboratory at Vanderbilt University, revealed that only 21% of Peruvians said they are satisfied with democratic rule, the least in any country in Latin American and the Caribbean except Haiti.

Worryingly, more than half of Peruvians who took part in that poll said a military takeover of the country would be justified under a high degree of corruption.

At the core of the crisis are demands for better living conditions that have gone unfulfilled in the two decades since democratic rule was restored in the

country. Peru is one of the youngest democracies in the Americas, with free and fair elections having been restored only in the year 2001 after the ousting of right wing leader Alberto Fujimori.

Peru's economy flourished both under Fujimori and in the years that followed the restoration of democracy, outpacing almost any other in the region thanks to robust exports of raw material and healthy foreign investments. The term Lima Consensus, after the Peruvian capital, was coined to describe the system of free-market policies that Peruvian elites promoted to fuel the economic boom. But while the economy boomed, state institutions were inherently weakened by a governing philosophy that reduced state intervention to a minimum.

As early as 2014, Professor Steven Levitsky of Harvard University, highlighted a particular Peruvian paradox: While in most democracies public opinion reflects the state of the economy, in Peru presidential approval ratings consistently plummeted during the 2000s, even as growth soared, he wrote in journal *Revista*.

Levitsky highlighted chronic deficiencies in security, justice, education, and other

basic services from Peru's successive governments as threats to the young democracy's sustainability.

"Security, justice, education and other basic services continue to be underprovided, resulting in widespread perceptions of government corruption, unfairness, ineffectiveness and neglect. This is a major source of public discontent. Where such perceptions persist, across successive governments, public trust in democratic institutions is likely to erode," he wrote, an observation that today seems prophetic.

The Covid-19 pandemic only exacerbated this structural weakness at the core of the Peruvian society. Whereas many countries expanded social safety nets to counter the damaging economic impact of lockdowns, Peru had no net to fall back on.

According to the United Nations, over half of the Peruvian populations lacked access to enough food in the months of the Covid-19 pandemic, as the virus swept around the country. Data from Johns Hopkins University also show that Peru recorded the highest per-capita death toll in the world due to coronavirus. The country's economy is back on track

after the pandemic shock – Peru's GDP grew an astonishing 13.3% in 2021 – but public trust in democratic institutions has broken down, just as Levitsky predicted.

A poll published September 2022 by IEP showed 84% of Peruvians disapproved Congress's performance. Lawmakers are perceived not only as pursuing their own interests in Congress, but are also associated with corrupt practices.

The country's frustrations have been reflected in its years-long revolving door presidency. Current president Boluarte is the sixth head of state in less than five years.

Her predecessor Castillo rose to power in 2021's general elections, styled as man of the people who would get the country a fresh start. But polarization and the chaos surrounding his presidency – including corruption allegations and multiple impeachment attempts by Congress, which Castillo dismissed as politically motivated – only exacerbated pre-existing tensions.

## Cautionary tale

Most protesters who spoke with CNN on Wednesday said the country needs a fresh start and demanded new elections across the board to restore a sense of legitimacy to public institutions. But Boluarte and legislators have so far resisted calls for early general elections. On Sunday, the president declared a state of emergency in the areas of the country most affected by the protests, including Lima. The measure is due to last until mid-February but that has not stopped more people from taking to the streets. Peru's Attorney General meanwhile has opened an investigation into Boluarte's handling of the unrest. But even if the current leadership were to go and yet another politician raised to the presidency, the root causes of Peru's unrest persist.





# Sisodia, Lalu under scanner of probe agencies, but what was independent India's first big-ticket scam?

Former Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia has been remanded in judicial custody in the alleged liquor policy scam. Former Bihar CM Lalu Prasad Yadav is facing the heat of probe agencies. But what is independent India's first big-ticket corruption case that dates back to 1948?



Former Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia has been remanded in judicial custody in Tihar Jail. Former Bihar Chief Minister Lalu Prasad Yadav and his family members are being questioned in the land-for-jobs scam. Jharkhand Chief Minister faced questioning in an illegal mining probe. The AAP government in Punjab lost a minister, Fauja Singh Sarari, in January over an alleged extortion case. Then there is the case of a Karnataka BJP MLA's son who

was arrested in a bribery case. But what is independent India's first scam? A little-known company, Anti-Mistates, was entrusted to deliver the Jeeps. Anti-Jeeps arrived, which, according to reports, were rejected by the Indian Army for being sub-standard. The probe into the case was closed in 1955 and soon after that, VK Krishna Menon joined the Jawaharlal Nehru Cabinet. Krishna Menon joined the Nehru Cabinet as a minister without portfolio in 1956 and was made the minister of defence in 1957. The Bharatiya Janata Party has,

the Jeep scam of 1948 has to be India's first big-ticket corruption case.

VK Krishna Menon, then the Indian high commissioner to Britain, reportedly bypassed protocol and signed a deal worth Rs 80 lakh with a foreign firm for the purchase of jeeps for the Army.

Two thousand refurbished Jeeps were ordered at the same price of new vehicles as



Misantes, it is said, had a capital of only £605.

While most of the money was paid in advance, only 155

scams under Congress governments, highlighted the Jeep scam of 1948.

## 160 criminal cases, illegal revenues worth crores: Report card of Atiq Ahmed's family

As many as 160 cases have been lodged against the family of gangster-turned-politician Atiq Ahmed. Properties worth Rs 11,684 crore belonging to Atiq and his family have been seized to date.



More than 160 criminal cases are lodged against family members of mafia-turned politician Atiq Ahmed, according to Uttar Pradesh police. Atiq and his family are in the news after their names cropped up in the recent murder of Umesh Pal, a prime witness in the 2005 BSP MLA Raju Pal murder case. Atiq has been named in 100 cases, while his brother Ashraf has 52 cases, wife Shaista Praveen has three, and sons Ali and Umar Ahmad have four and one cases, respectively, against them. UP Police has also announced a reward of Rs 2.5 lakhs for Atiq Ahmed's son Asad in connection with the Umesh

Pal murder case.

### PROPERTIES WORTH CRORES SEIZED

Properties worth Rs 11,684 crore belonging to Atiq and his family have been seized and 54 of his cases are currently under trial in various courts. The Prayagraj district administration also says it has released properties amounting to Rs 751 crore forcibly occupied by Atiq and his associates. Police have also seized properties worth Rs 8 crores of Praveen, who is a BSP leader, under the provisions of the Gangster Act. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Adityanath has often spoken about the actions taken by his

government to improve law and order in the state, including frequent demolition by bulldozers to raze illegal property of criminals and the mafia.

### LOSS WORTH RS 1200 CR EVERY YEAR

The state government has taken steps to tighten the noose around the mafia, due to which Atiq and his associates have suffered a loss worth Rs 1,200

crore every year.

With the Yogi-government coming to power in the state, Atiq and his henchmen were forced to shut down their business of illegal contracts and tenders, causing heavy losses to them. So far, land worth Rs 417 crores has been freed from the possession of Atiq Ahmed and his associates and gang. Atiq Ahmed's brother

Ashraf has a criminal record from as early as 1992. This includes a kidnapping case in Muthiganj police station, Prayagraj, and other cases registered in Rae Bareilly and Chandauli districts. On three occasions, cases registered against Ashraf under the Gangster Act were withdrawn. The police have seized properties worth Rs 27.33 crores of Ashraf.

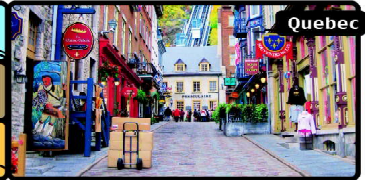


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# Traveller

WE TAKE YOU PLACES



A panoramic view of the Niagara Falls.



Insider Bureau) THIS is the world's second biggest country and to add to the drama it has three oceans — Pacific, Arctic and Atlantic — caressing its coastlines.

Canada has that and the mountains and great roadways. And it has been the land of opportunities for plenty of Indians.

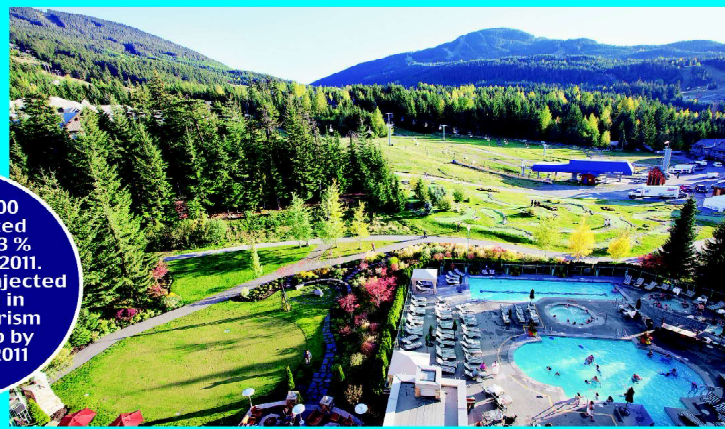
Realising the potential of those who head there to visit friends and relatives or to holiday, the Canadian Tourism Commission has come out with an array of activities to garner brand visibility in India. "We already have captured a major chunk of outbound tourism from Delhi and Mumbai.

We are launching our Canadian Signature Experiences (CSE) collection. It is a set of travel experiences found only in Canada. CSE makes it easier for the travel trade to package the products better and sell more Canada. We are moving towards newer growth cities with nationwide Ads and familiarisation trips," says Tina Singh, Assistant VP, Canadian Tourism Commission, India.

The reason for this lies in the numbers. In 2012, 1,47,000 Indians visited Canada,

a 5.3 per cent growth over 2011. These visitors injected \$ 173 million in Canada's tourism economy, up by 6.4 per cent. According to the Canadian Tourism Commission's figures, there has been 18,129 Indian arrivals to Canada in August 2013, an encouraging 7.1 per cent increase over the same period last year. This year Canada has seen 1,06,499 Indian visitors

## EXPLORE CANADA



Whistler, 125km north of Vancouver, is visited by more than 2 million people annually. Alpine skiing and mountain biking are the main attractions.

In 2012, 1,47,000 Indians visited Canada, a 5.3 % growth over 2011. These visitors injected \$173 million in Canada's tourism economy, up by 6.4 % over 2011

so far.

The trade figures corroborate these numbers. "While VFR still remains a major influencer for Indians travelling to Canada, discerning and well-travelled passengers are con-

stantly evolving and looking out for newer destinations. We have seen a 60 per cent year-on-year increase in the number of Indians visiting Canada," says Mohit Gupta, Chief Business Officer, MakeMyTrip.

### MUST SEE IN CANADA

- 1 Get drenched at Niagara Falls.
- 2 Literature aficionados, visit the Green Gables house in Cavendish.
- 3 Gape at glacier-dotted Auyuittuq, literally the land that never melts.
- 4 Go culture-hopping around Place-D'armes in Montreal.

Another segment that has been steadily increasing is the MICE EXPLORE CANADA group. "The MICE segment is stronger and is growing. Popular commercial hubs such as Vancouver city and Ontario are the choices for such groups," says Sharat Dhall, President, Yatra.

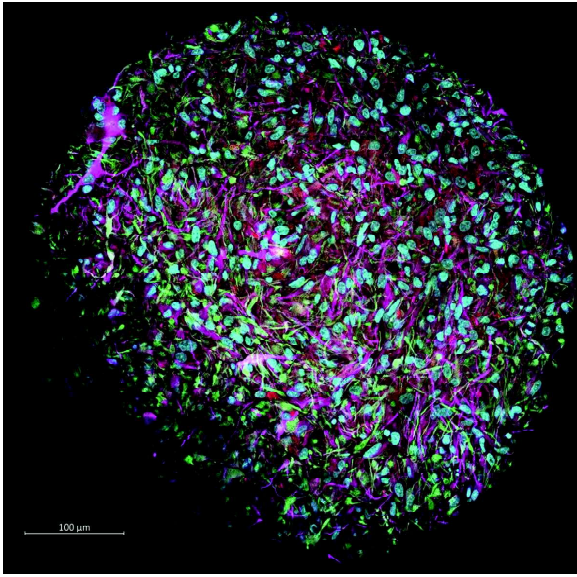
Agreeing with Dhall is Tara Singh. "Corporates are looking out for new destinations as incentives for their employees.

Canada being on top of this list is attracting a number of groups. In the recent past, Canada has gained popularity for MICE and the number of queries is fast growing.



# What is organoid intelligence? A tool that could make AI look slow

Scientists at Johns Hopkins University have introduced organoid intelligence that could make faster, more efficient and powerful computers of the future.



(SAI Bureau) Artificial Intelligence is the next big revolution happening in the tech world, but the advancement is not going to stop there and scientists have given a glimpse of the future

Artificial intelligence. Scientists are hopeful that biocomputers powered by human brain cells could become a reality sooner than we expected and it could exponentially expand the capabilities of modern computing, while also introducing a brand-new field of intelligence.

In a study published in the journal *Frontiers of Science*, researchers said that the recent advances in human stem cell-derived brain organoids promise to replicate critical molecular and cellular aspects of learning and memory and possibly aspects of cognition. Coining the term "organoid intelligence" (OI) to encompass these developments, we present a collaborative program to implement the vision of a multidisciplinary field of OI," the

paper read.

## WHAT IS ORGANOID INTELLIGENCE?

OI, according to the researchers, is an emerging multidisciplinary field working to develop biological computing using 3D cultures of human brain cells (brain organoids) and brain-machine interface technologies. It will be possible by scaling up current brain organoids into complex, durable 3D structures enriched with cells and genes associated with learning, and connecting these to next-generation input and output devices and AI/machine learning systems.

## WHERE ARE WE CURRENTLY?

Scientists have been working with tiny organoids, lab-grown tissue resembling fully grown organs, for decades as they experiment on kidneys, lungs, and other organs without resorting to human or animal testing. Researchers at Johns

Hopkins have been working with brain organoids, orbs the size of a pen dot with neurons and other features that promise to sustain basic functions.

"Biocomputing is an enormous effort of compacting computational power and increasing its efficiency to push past our current technological limits. "This opens up research on how the human brain works. Because you can start manipulating the system, doing things you cannot ethically do with human brains," Thomas Hartung who is spearheading the work, said in a statement. The team grew and assembled brain cells into functional organoids in 2012 using cells from human skin samples reprogrammed into an embryonic stem cell-like state. Each of these organoids contains about 50,000 cells, about the size of a fruit fly's

nervous system.

# Facebook tests bringing back in-app messaging features as it competes with TikTok

(SAI Bureau) (New York) Nearly a decade after Facebook angered some users by splitting off messaging features from its flagship social networking application and forcing people to download a separate app to chat with friends, the company is now testing out reversing the move. In an interview with CNN, Facebook head Tom Alison said the platform is testing bringing messaging capabilities back to the Facebook app so users can more easily share content without having to use the

Messenger app. The test comes as Facebook looks to beat back competition from TikTok by bolstering its position both as a platform to discover new content and discuss it.

"We believe that content feeds into not just you consuming it but being conversation starters and starting that message thread with your friends or being something that you can share into a group of people who share your same interests," Alison said. "I think the thing that will differentiate Facebook and Instagram from

TikTok and others is just the depth of being able to start a conversation with your friends from this content and have that kind of social dimension."

The move, which Alison also announced in a blog post Tuesday, comes after Facebook revised its strategy last year amid concerns about a stagnant and aging user base. No longer would the platform simply be about connecting friends and family. Instead, founder Mark Zuckerberg wanted Facebook to become a "discovery engine." Facebook redesigned



its home feed to surface more entertaining posts from across the platform, with AI-powered content recommendations, rather than just showing posts from those specifically in a user's network. (A new, separate tab fulfilled the desire for the latter.) The goal was clear: to keep users engaged longer and help the platform better compete with TikTok and its steady stream of recommended content. Nine months later, that shift has begun to pay off, Alison told CNN. The platform last month reported that it hit 2 billion daily active users in the December quarter.

A lot of the narrative leading up to this has been that Facebook

is in decline or Facebook's best days are behind it," Alison said, "and part of what we're trying to do with this milestone is say, 'hey, look, that's actually not true.' There have been no shortage of rumors of Facebook's demise over the years, from its admission of having a "teen problem" a decade ago to the more recent series of PR debacles for the social network and its parent company, Meta. TikTok's rapid rise and even the success of Facebook's sister service, Instagram, have also taken some of the shine off the aging social network Zuckerberg launched in a dorm room nearly 20 years ago. But its audience has resumed growing, for now.

## DOJ will hire more data experts to scrutinize digital monopolies, antitrust chief says

The Justice Department will expand its stable of data experts charged with analyzing how businesses use and abuse consumer data to violate US antitrust law, the agency's antitrust chief told CNN in an onstage interview Monday. DOJ's antitrust division plans to post additional job listings for data scientists and analysts, Assistant Attorney General Jonathan Kanter said at a Washington conference. Under Kanter, the division has already hired technologists and a chief economist with a background in computer science and machine learning. The push to recruit even more technology experts highlights concerns

about how companies may use data and algorithms to target consumers with highly personalized offers, recommendations and information that may entrench a company's dominance. "One of the things we're confronting in any market we address today," Kanter told CNN, "whether it's health care, energy, consumer tech, enterprise tech and everything in between, the importance of data is so significant, so substantial that we need to understand at an expert level how that data is used, how it affects the economics, how it affects the potential for tipping, moat-building and other competitive dynamics."

# Prolonged cough and cold: Why is the flu season more severe this time?

**Lots of people are complaining of bouts of cough which prolong for days even after the flu settles. Experts share why this is happening.**



(SAI Bureau) In the northern parts of India, the influenza virus has hit badly as several people are developing more severe symptoms than ever. Experts have cautioned people from standing in crowds, sanitising themselves and getting vaccinated.

As symptoms of fever, sore throat, prolonged cough and breathlessness are being reported, doctors have said

that the flu cases, at this time of the year, are slightly different. "Lots of patients are complaining of persistent cough or bouts of cough which keep going on for many days sometimes, even for weeks after the flu settles. Even in the post-viral phase, lots of people have prolonged fatigue, weakness, tiredness, mental fogging, and inability to work and concentrate," said Dr

Sandeep Budhiraja, Group Medical Director, Max Healthcare & Senior Director, Institute of Internal Medicine. Highlighting the fact that normally flu cases like this aren't seen in the months of February and March, Dr Budhiraja said that "seasonality has got extended even in many countries".

Commonly called spring influenza, since it is caused by a certain type of influenza virus, also known as the H3N2 virus, the expert said that fever, cough and cold, body aches normally settle down in 3-5 days. However, in the present scenario, even though other symptoms are settling down, the dry hacking bounds of the cough continue. "The feature of this virus is that it triggers a certain type of reaction or inflammation in the upper airways or sometimes

even in the lungs, partly because it may be allergic or inflammatory in nature," he said. Dr Budhiraja explained that many people who are not "asthmatic" start behaving like one after contracting the virus. "Their airways become hyper-responsive to the viruses that trigger asthma-like situations and give them bouts of cough. These patients have to be treated with a combination of anti-allergic and asthma-like medications which basically help relax the airways and are sometimes given steroids which are more potent anti-inflammatories to reduce the swelling in the airways. Because they do respond to these medications, hence, we can say that this is the virus that is triggering these effects in the upper

airways," he underscored. One of the major things that people should avoid doing when they have a influenza viral infection is consuming over-the-counter antibiotics.

"The best way to avoid getting the flu is by avoiding crowded places, practising good hand and respiratory hygiene, annual flu shots, keeping indoor air quality under control, wearing a pollution mask when outdoors and avoiding home remedies without consultation," said Dr GC Khilnani, Chairman, PSRI Institute of Pulmonary, Critical Care and Sleep Medicine.

According to the World Health Organisation, the West experienced influenza A (H1N1) pdm09, A (H3N2), and influenza B viruses spreading in several countries between September and January.

## As flu season takes over, read this before popping an antibiotic

**During the flu season, the unnecessary use of antibiotics has also increased. Health experts are trying to make people aware that the incorrect usage of antibiotics could cause way more harm to the body than good.**

(SAI Bureau) As the flu season has hit the country with people experiencing bouts of cough and fever with chills, many are heading to pharmacy stores to buy over-the-counter antibiotics. Witnessing the trend, doctors have cautioned against the use of antibiotics without medical diagnosis and are urging people not to self-medicate.

Though the practice of self-treatment has been quite a

common phenomenon, especially when people contract the influenza virus, health experts are trying to make people aware that the incorrect usage of antibiotics could cause way more harm to the body than good.

### WHAT ANTIBIOTICS?

"Antibiotics, as the name suggests, means killing bios (life) or bacteria that cause harm in the body. Any infection that is caused by

bacteria will respond to the antibiotic," Dr Sharad Malhotra, Senior Consultant & HOD, Gastroenterology Hepatology & Therapeutic Endoscopy, Aakash Healthcare told indiatoday.in. Dr Malhotra added that antibiotics are medications that are designed specifically for a region like a throat infection caused by bacteria. "Antibiotics are different for different regions of the body wherever the



bacterial infection is present," he said.

### HOW DO ANTIBIOTICS WORK IN THE BODY?

Though antibiotics do not work on flu or any viral infection, they are only required when there is a secondary bacterial infection, which should only be "diagnosed by a doctor". If you're consuming antibiotics for a throat infection, the medicine goes to the stomach where it is broken down by the enzymes. The partially absorbed medication will traverse the stomach and go into the bloodstream. From the bloodstream, it will be circulated to the entire body and reach the infection in the throat through it and kill the bacteria.

"The absorption and blood circulation of the antibiotics will cure the bacterial infection," said Dr Malhotra. In

the hospital, patients are given intravenous antibiotics (injections). Each antibiotic has a dosage period that should be followed without fail.

**WHY YOU SHOULDN'T SELF-MEDICATE?** "Most of the cough and cold cases are viral in nature and they require adequate rest, steaming, maybe, cough syrup. If you take antibiotics, the virus is not going to get cured. Antibiotics are not the right therapy for it," said Dr Malhotra. Since viruses have a lifetime of 2-3 days, people also consume antibiotics for that duration and do not complete the entire course. "You're not doing anything good to the body by doing that. The bacteria which are present inside the body will start becoming resistant to the medication. If you require antibiotics in the future, your body will have resistance to it," the expert added.

## H3N2 virus hits India: All you need to know about this viral outbreak

**With a significant uptick in cases of the H3N2 virus in the country, doctors are witnessing more severe symptoms than ever.**

Every second person is experiencing prolonged post-viral cough, breathlessness and sneezing. This trend is a rarity, especially in North India, where more flu cases have been reported in the months of January, February and March.

According to Dr Sandeep Budhiraja, Group Medical Director, Max Healthcare & Senior Director, Institute of Internal Medicine, the symptoms of the influenza virus strain are slightly different and a bit more severe than how it was in previous years during the flu season.

"Lots of patients are complaining of persistent cough or bouts of cough which keeps going on for many days, sometimes even for weeks after the flu settles. Normally, we don't see flu cases in North India in the months of February and March. Till now, we are seeing a lot of cases coming in. Seasonality has extended in most countries," said Dr Sandeep Budhiraja. Most of these cases are caused by the H3N2 virus, a type of influenza A virus, which is severe, but not as epidemical in nature as the deadly H1N1 virus (swine flu).



# Centre not in 'crazy rush' to sell everything: Nirmala Sitharaman

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the government is not in a "crazy rush" to sell everything and it will continue to have a presence in four strategic sectors.



(SAI Bureau) The government is not in a "crazy rush" to sell everything and it will continue to have a presence in four strategic sectors, including telecom, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Saturday. In strategic sectors, a bare minimum presence of the existing public sector commercial enterprises at the holding company level will be retained under government control. The remaining enterprises in a strategic sector

minerals; and Banking, Insurance and Financial Services. The policy, she added, "is not a crazy rushing out to sell everything..nor it is saying that the government will run the business of producing pins to crops to everything. So where the government doesn't have to be, it won't. But where because of strategic interests you have to be, it will be there like telecom for instance."

"There will be a telecom company which will be government owned and it will be run professionally." Explaining the minimum presence of government in those core sectors, she said, "We mean that institutions which are big enough to run on their own steam will be there but if there are others who are very small or unsustainable or not scalable, if there is a possibility, we will try to blend them so that bigger unit, sustainable unit, a unit which can on its own take care of its

needs." The government will blend them and create a larger entity which can continue to be there, she said.

Sitharaman in the latest Budget announced that the government will raise Rs 51,000 crore by selling stakes in various state-run companies in FY24. This is marginally higher than the current year ending on March 31, 2023.

In the last budget, the government intended to raise Rs 65,000 crore through divestments, which was later revised to Rs 50,000 crore. At present, the government is trying to work on the privatisation of a number of central public sector enterprises, such as IDBI Bank, Shipping Corporation of India, NMDC Steel, BEML, HLL Lifecare, Container Corporation of India and Vizag Steel. Process for disinvestment for these companies have already started and are at different levels, and are

expected to be completed in the next fiscal if the target of Rs 51,000 crore is to be met.

The government has missed its disinvestment target for the past four years.

On asset monetisation, Sitharaman said it is being encouraged so that assets which are not optimally generating revenues are used to generate earnings for the government or its entities. Monetisation does not mean selling or giving assets for free but a certain value is assessed and accordingly put to productive use, she said, adding, asset monetization would continue. Asked what gives her confidence that India's growth would be intact, the Finance Minister said, "we have the right combination of things that matter for a growing economy— a middle class, captive market with purchasing power, tech-driven public investment and product and digital infrastructure."

## Foxconn in Telangana: All you need to know about Apple's biggest supplier

**Foxconn, also known as Hon Hai Precision Industry Co Ltd, is a multinational electronics contract manufacturing company based in Taiwan. It is one of the largest electronics manufacturers in the world, with operations spanning across multiple continents.**

(News Agency) Multinational electronics contract manufacturing company Foxconn Technology Group has been in the limelight recently after it confirmed that it will open a manufacturing plant in Telangana. The manufacturing plant is expected to create 1 lakh jobs, in addition to boosting the state's image as a strong electronics manufacturing hub.

While the Foxconn manufacturing unit will come up in Telangana's Kongara Kalan village, the Karnataka

government was equally interested in the deal. Besides the economic benefits of an electronics manufacturing plant, the reputation that Foxconn brings as a brand is what got the attention of both the states.

Foxconn, also known as Hon Hai Precision Industry Co Ltd, is a multinational electronics contract manufacturing company based in Taiwan. It is one of the largest electronics manufacturers in the world, with operations spanning across Asia, Europe, and the Americas.

The company, founded in 1974 by Terry Gou, started off as a manufacturer of plastic parts for television sets. Over the years, the company has cemented its position as a technology manufacturer and service provider. After Terry Gou retired from his position in 2019, Foxconn named Young Liu as its chairman. It manufactures a diverse range of products for major US, Canadian, Chinese, Finnish and Japanese companies. Notable products that Foxconn has manufactured



include the iconic BlackBerry phones, iPad, iPhones, Kindle, Nokia devices, Cisco products, Sony devices including a few playstations, Google Pixel phones, and even Microsoft Xbox.

Some of the electronic products that it manufactures include smartphones, computers and gaming consoles. Foxconn's clients include some of the world's biggest technology companies, such as Apple, Microsoft, and Sony. It may be noted that Foxconn is Apple's biggest supplier. An important milestone in Foxconn's journey came in 2001 when it was chosen by Intel to manufacture its Intel-branded motherboards instead of Asus. Foxconn expanded rapidly over the next decade,

aggressively investing in manufacturing plants in many parts of the globe. Foxconn's reputation is a result of efficiency, scale and cost-effectiveness, which has made it a popular choice for outsourcing manufacturing services. The company's revenue hit a record high in 2022, but has witnessed a slump thereafter due to the ongoing global slowdown. On the other hand, the company has also faced several controversies over the years. In 2010, there was a huge uproar about working conditions at the company's facilities, following which Foxconn implemented a number of reforms, including raising worker wages, and improving working conditions, to address concerns.

## Adani Group prepays over Rs 7,000 crore worth share-backed loans

**The decision to prepay loans is part of the Adani Group's strategy to tackle the crisis triggered by the Hindenburg report and also to regain the confidence of investors**

(News Agency) The Adani Group on Tuesday prepaid share-backed financing of Rs 7,374 crore as part of its promoters' commitment to cut overall leverage backed by shares of the conglomerate's listed entities.

The development comes as the port-to-power conglomerate remains focused on reducing debt to regain the confidence of investors – both at home and globally – after a scathing report by US short seller Hindenburg Research led to sharp market losses in 10 listed companies. Adani Group had denied the allegations leveled by Hindenburg, but to no avail. The group then decided to prioritise a strategy

to reduce debt, especially those involving pledged shares.

The group had recently held a fixed-income roadshow in Hong Kong and Singapore, where it reportedly assured investors that it is well-positioned to service its borrowings. The Adani Group is also scheduled to hold more roadshows from March 7 to 15 in Dubai, London and the United States. Meanwhile, Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone will release 155 million shares or an 11.8 per cent stake. Promoters of Adani Green Energy and Adani Transmission will release 1.2 per cent and 4.5 per cent stakes in respective companies.

# FIRST-EVER SOUTH ASIAN HOUSE LAUNCHES AT SXSW THIS MARCH 11 AND 12

**PROGRAMMING TO FEATURE SPEAKERS AND ACTIVATIONS FROM BUSINESS, TECH, FILM, TV, MUSIC, AND FASHION SECTORS FROM THE REGION**

**Located at Fourth & Co in downtown Austin, inaugural South Asian House aims to connect and celebrate community thought leaders from seven different South Asian countries**



(AUSTIN, TEXAS) – Austin welcomes South Asian House, premiering for the first time ever at South By Southwest (SXSW) 2023. Created in partnership with The Auntie Network, Tasveer, One Minute Saree, The Partnership Inc., URL Media, IndieMeme, and Sway with Pray, South Asian House will take place at Fourth

& Co located at 208 West Fourth St. Unit D in Austin, Texas during the first weekend of SXSW on Saturday, March 11 from 11 a.m. - 2 a.m. and Sunday, March 12 from 11 a.m. - 2 a.m. Featured speakers for the initiative include industry professionals from various sectors such as business, tech, film, TV, theater,

music, and fashion. South Asian House will also provide a networking brunch and happy hour each day, as well as live music entertainment and a DJ set each night. To conclude the weekend, South Asian House will host a Red Carpet Awards Ceremony, presented by Tasveer, at 5:45 p.m. and a live Oscar Viewing Party at 7 p.m. on Sunday, March 12. Media and photographers are invited to cover the red carpet event beginning at 5 p.m. and may RSVP or request general coverage of the weekend here. For more information on South Asian House, please visit here. South Asian House attendees can also look forward to several partnership events with innovative companies from the region. On March 10, The Slashie Summit team with BrownGirl Magazine will co-host an event at the iconic Claypit (located at 1601 Guadalupe St, Austin, TX 78701)

from 6 to 9 p.m., where Sway with Pray will be launching a Bollywood dance pop-up. Women in Film and Television, Austin will also present a Pilot reading hour. Catalyst Media/Fund, supported by Lalit Vadhlamani and Shubha Iyengar, is invested in developing and elevating future South Asian leaders; join producing partners Monika Samtani and Rohi Mirza Pandya as they dive into what it takes to develop a successful leadership mindset with industry gurus Pooja Kumar (Actress/Producer Miss India USA), Milan Chakraborty (Head of Film/Marginal MediaWorks), Sid Shah (Founder/Trackmind), Anjali Worah (Chief Transformation Officer/The Partnership, Inc.), and James A. Mathew (CEO/The Outer Voice Company). South Asian House programming will also include two noteworthy panels on Saturday, March 11. The

first, starting at 2:30 p.m., is "Creating South Asian Content for a Global Audience," which will be an hour-long discussion with actor Rizwan Manji ("Schitt's Creek," "Peacemaker"), Emmy-award winning executive producer for ViceTV, Falguni Lakhani Adams, and Emmy-award winning producer of the hit TV series "Delhi Crime," Apoorva Bakshi, moderated by DFW South Asian Film Festival Founder/Director and producer of South Asian House Jitin Hingorani. The second panel, "Investing in the Future of Our South Asian Stories," will be from 4:30 - 5:30 p.m. Panelists for this important conversation will include CEO and Co-founder of URL Media S. Mitra Kalita, actress Kausar Mohammed ("4400," "The Flash"), and CEO of Create Entertainment Atit Shah, moderated by co-founder of Box Office Guru Media Gitesh Pandya.

## Bruce Willis' wife begs paparazzi not to yell at him in the street

Bruce Willis' wife, Emma Heming Willis, has called on paparazzi to keep their distance and stop yelling at the "Die Hard" star when they see him in public.

Heming Willis made an emotional plea in a video shared on her Instagram page over the weekend, saying "there's still a lot of education that needs to be put forth" about people living with dementia.

Recounting a recent incident in which photographers attempted to speak to the ailing actor as he made a rare public appearance to meet friends for coffee in Santa Monica, the 44-year-old model noted how "difficult and stressful it can be to get someone out into the world and to navigate them safely." "This one is going out to the photographers and the video people that are trying to get those exclusives of my husband out and about: Just keep your space," she said in the clip. "I know this is your job, but maybe just keep your space." She added, "For the video people, please don't

be yelling at my husband asking him how he's doing or whatever — the 'woohoo'-ing and the 'yippee ki-yays'... just don't do it. OK? Give him his space. Allow for our family or whoever's

with him that day to be able to get him from point A to point B safely."

Heming Willis added in the caption to the video: "To other caregivers or dementia care specialist navigating this world... Any

tips or advice on how to get your loved ones out in the world safely? Please share below." Her request comes weeks after Willis' family announced that his speaking disorder, aphasia, had progressed into a form of dementia called frontotemporal dementia, or FTD.

"Today there are no treatments for the disease, a reality that we hope can change in the years ahead. As Bruce's condition advances, we hope that any media attention can be focused on shining a light on this disease that needs far more awareness and research," they said last month in an update shared online.



## A Master of his Craft like Few Others: How Manoj Bajpayee Casts a Spell with Brilliant Acting

(News Agency) Rahul V Chittella's family drama Gulmohar, a quietly released film streaming on Disney+ Hotstar, tugs at the viewer's heartstrings. The director's association with Mira Nair is well-known. Nair's influence is evident in Gulmohar, which revolves around the affluent Batra family in New Delhi. The Batras and a few of their friends have assembled for a party in the family bungalow they will vacate soon.

A story about human relationships with their secrets, differences and memories gradually unfolds. The film has an ensemble cast, which includes Sharmila Tagore, who shines in the author-backed role of the matriarch. But the actor who makes the maximum impact is Manoj Bajpayee, who plays Arun Batra, a businessman and a father. Bajpayee appears in the character of Arun, the adopted son of the Batras (Tagore plays his adoptive mother). He shares an uneasy

relationship with his son, who wants to launch a start-up without the former's assistance. He drinks tea from a stainless steel glass in a roadside stall, has a quiet private conversation with his



adoptive mother, and reaches out for his pills when he is unwell. He is a middle-aged man with grey sideburns — someone we meet for the first time after the film starts. OTT platforms have become an inseparable part of our lives. The actor's entry into the online world has resulted in a popular web classic like The Family Man, an action drama helmed by Raj & DK. Amazon Prime subscribers are familiar with the character of Srikanth Tiwari, a middle-class intelligence officer.



# Keanu Reeves took the red pill ... no, seriously, he has it

Just when you thought Keanu Reeves couldn't be any cooler. During a recent Reddit Ask-Me-Anything (AMA), Reeves was asked if he had ever stolen anything from any of his many movie sets.

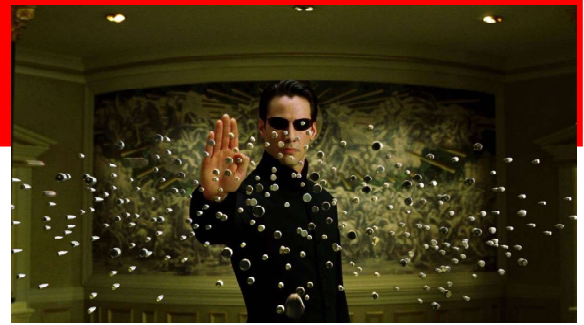
"Not stolen... the watch and wedding ring from John Wick, a sword from 47 Ronin, and the first red pill that the Wachowski's ever gave me," Reeves replied. Yes, that means

Reeves took the red pill from "The Matrix."

The actor is currently promoting his latest "John Wick" film, the fourth in the franchise.

Both "The Matrix" franchise and the "John Wick" one have some overlap when it comes to the physicality. Both involved martial arts and Reeves was asked about the action. "Nothing can ever compare to the kung fu training from the Matrix because

it was so unique and my first time...but the jiu jitsu in John Wick being integrated with judo and gunfights can never be touched in its own way," he said. Reeves also answered a question about his aspirations had he not gotten into acting. "Well, when I was a kid I always said I wanted to be a race car driver, a conductor or an astrophysicist," he said. "Today, let's conduct some music." Just

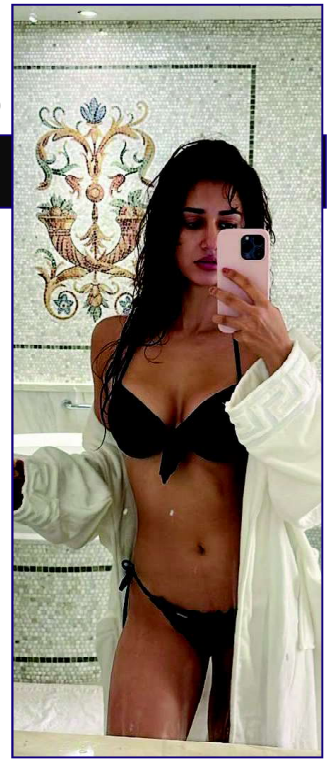
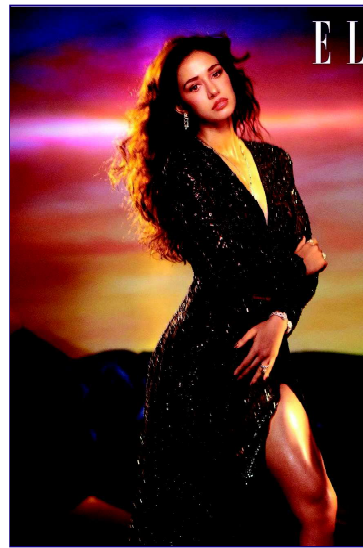
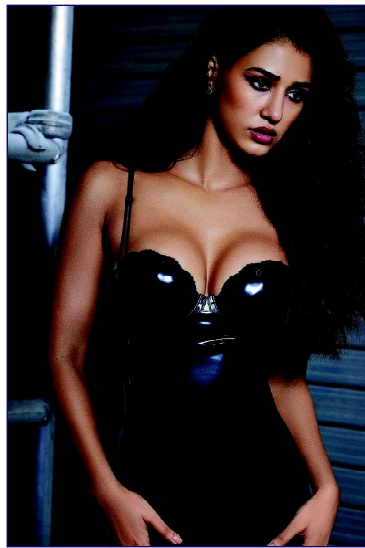


don't ask him his favorite film in which he has starred. "I've been very fortunate to work on a few films that have changed my life. I can't pick just one," Reeves said. "But here are a few-

'River's Edge,' 'Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure,' 'Matrix' trilogy, 'The Devil's Advocate,' 'A Scanner Darkly,' 'My Own Private Idaho,' 'Point Break,' 'John Wick'.

## Disha Patani Sets Internet On Fire In Bold Lingerie-inspired Bodysuit, Check Out The Diva's Sexy Pictures

**Disha Patani, who is touring in the US with actors Akshay Kumar, Nora Fatehi and Mouni Roy, is oozing oomph in a black lace lingerie-inspired outfit. See her hot and sexy pictures**



## Ranbir Kapoor calls Alia Bhatt's leaked pics controversy 'ugly', says 'we are dealing with it with correct legal ways'

(News Agency) Ranbir Kapoor has reacted to the recent photo leak of his wife-actor Alia Bhatt. The actor was clicked by a paparazzo from another building while she was at her home. Alia had reacted strongly to the breach of privacy and now Ranbir, too, has reacted.

Alia had posted a collage of pictures of herself, taken inside the house without her consent. She wrote in the long note, "Are you kidding me? I was at my house having a perfectly normal afternoon sitting in my living room when I felt something watching me.... I looked up and saw two men on the terrace of my neighbouring building with a camera right at me! In what world is this okay and allowed?" In a new interview, Ranbir called the entire episode 'ugly' and said they were pursuing the matter legally. "It was invasion of privacy. You cannot shoot inside my house and anything can be happening inside my house, that is my home. It was totally uncalled for. We are going through the correct legal ways of dealing with it. I don't want to talk much about it, but it was something which was very ugly," Ranbir told Miss Malini in an interview.



Directed by the master of telling real-life stories Anubhav Sinha, Bheed has a noteworthy ensemble starring Rajkumar Rao, Pankaj Kapur, Bhumi Pednekar, Ashutosh Rana, and Dia Mirza. The film is jointly produced by Bhushan Kumar's T-Series and Anubhav Sinha's Benaras Mediaworks. The film also features Virendra Saxena, Aditya Shrivastava, Kritika Kamra, and Karan Pandit. Bheed releases on 24 March and Reliance Entertainment is the film's Overseas Distribution Partner.



**Some Call us a Media House  
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