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## Pegasus-like spyware used to target journalists and politicians

Israeli company QuaDream uses a 'zero-click' exploit that captures data, records calls and activates the camera surreptitiously like Pegasus, reveals a Microsoft-CitizenLab report.



(Page 22)

## Heatwaves ahead: A worry not just for economists but politicians as well

Over the past few years, heatwave conditions in India have gotten worse and the weather department has predicted a longer spell of hot days in 2023. The possibility of worsening heatwave conditions this year has not only worried economists, but politicians as well.



(Page 24)

## Indian-origin start-up executives convicted on \$1 billion corporate fraud charges

Jurors found health technology company Outcome Health co-founders Rishi Shah and Shradha Agarwal, and former chief operating officer Brad Purdy guilty.



(Page 22)

## Commercial real estate is in trouble. Why you should be paying attention

(Page 23)



## AAP (Aam Admi Party) gets national party status

With AAP getting the coveted national party status and other major parties such as TMC and NCP losing the tag, here's a rundown of what the benefits are of being a national party and how one can achieve the tag.



(Page 23)

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# Baisakhi - The formation of Khalsa Panth by Guru Gobind Singh Ji

One can find the Khalsa located around the world, living in harmony and always aware of the underlying requirements of their spiritual masters. The worldwide community of Sikhs in general or Khalsa, the group of people who follow the way of life laid down by Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the tenth Sikh Guru are today celebrating the founding of Khalsa. With the foundation of Khalsa Panth, Guru Gobind Singh Ji eradicated all social divisions as it states that the lowest of the low have the right to stand with the highest; all are one and have the right to drink "amrit" from the same vessel. Guru Gobind Singh Ji accorded Sikhs with a unique identity carrying the five K's - Kachha (shorts), Kripan (sword), Kesh (uncut hair), Kangha (comb) and a Kara (bracelet).

A key event in the history of Sikhism, the formation of Khalsa Panth of warriors in 1699 under Guru Gobind Singh Ji is commemorated with the harvest festival Baisakhi. Baisakhi is usually celebrated on 13th or 14th April every year with great enthusiasm and fervour, marking the birth of Khalsa. It holds a very important place in every culture in India and is celebrated with immense joy and festivity not only in India but across the world. Traditionally, it is the day when farmers thank the almighty and harvest the 'rabi' crop. Being celebrated as the New Year by Hindus in South India, Baisakhi is also known as Naba Barsha in Bengal,

Vishakha in Bihar and Rongila Bihu in Assam. But for Sikhs around the world it holds tremendous religious significance as they celebrate it as the birth of 'Khalsa Panth' which states that they believe in one God who is the Master and the Protector of all, the only Creator and Destroyer. The tenth Guru of Sikhs, as a warrior not only created and initiated the Khalsa in 1699 but also pledged to protect the innocent from any form of religious persecution. Khalsa, meaning sovereign or free, was formed in order to teach the followers that no ritual or superstition is above almighty. It is a name given to the religious structure and the community that manages the affairs of the global Khalsa community, being aware of its social and spiritual responsibility as stipulated by the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji.

## Popular story behind the firm beliefs of Sikhs and the 'Panj Pyare' of the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji

When Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb out of threat beheaded the ninth Guru of Sikhs, Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji who stood up for the rights of Hindus, his son Guru Govind Singh Ji took his place becoming the tenth Guru of Sikhs. With constant efforts to instil courage in his followers, Guru Gobind Singh Ji too was no less than a threat to the Mughal Empire. Subsequently, on the day of Baisakhi in 1699, thousands of Sikh devotees came to Anandpur Sahib to seek their Guru's blessings.

To everyone's shock, Guru Gobind Singh Ji flashed his sword and demanded a head addressing the crowd that his sword was hungry for a head. As his words sent a chilled wave in

the crowd, Daya Ram, a Khatri of Lahore, arose and offered himself in the service of his Guru. Guru Gobind Singh Ji took him to the tent nearby and returned with his sword drenched with blood demanding another head. He repeated himself until five devotees went after him following what he asked. Those present were shaken with the thought that their Guru had killed five of his loyal men so far. Much to their surprise, Guru Gobind Singh Ji finally appeared with all five of them adorned with turbans and saffron-coloured garments. Thereafter, Guru Gobind Singh Ji prepared the holy water called 'Amrit' and baptized the five volunteers. The five aforesaid loyal devotees of Guru Gobind Singh Ji were then named 'Panj Pyare' or the five beloveds. The five men were- Daya Singh, Dharam Singh, Mohkam Singh, Himmat

Singh, and Sahib Singh. Announcing the establishment, Guru Gobind Singh Ji then said that whenever and wherever five baptised (Amritdhari) Sikhs would come together, there would be the Guru himself. All those who receive Amrit from five baptized Sikhs will be infused with the spirit of courage and strength to sacrifice. With the establishment of 'Panj Pyare', the caste system was shunned bringing close the lower and upper castes as a group. The 'Panj Pyare' were regarded as the first members of Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh Ji. Alongside, he gave the surname of 'Singh' to every Sikh man and 'Kaur', a princess to all Sikh women, marking that they would represent royalty. The Guru then himself got baptized by the 'Panj Pyare' along with his family and from Gobind Rai, he became Guru Gobind Singh as is known since then. With its formation, Guru Gobind Singh Ji emphasized on the message that the Khalsa Panth is for the help of the needy and not to rule the poor or exploit the helpless. With its formation, Guru Gobind Singh Ji gave an opportunity to Sikhs to live life with courage and equality. Also, it is strongly believed, the holy water called Amrit potion has such tremendous power that even a sparrow can fight with an eagle with great valour. And it is when one 'Singh' or 'Sikh' is equal to 1.25 lac people.







**"On this Baisakhi,  
let us pray that it will be a year with a just  
and secure Peace for all, new happiness,  
and an abundance of joy.  
May God Bless us all..."**

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# Indian-origin man sentenced in UK for offensive TikTok video

**An Indian-origin man, Amrik Bajwa, has been sentenced to 18 months imprisonment by a UK court over a video he posted on social media found to be offensive to certain communities.**

(South Asian Insider Bureau)- A 68-year-old Indian-origin man has been sentenced to 18 months imprisonment by a UK court over a video he posted on social media found to be offensive to certain communities. Amrik Bajwa from Slough in Berkshire, south-east England, was sentenced and fined GBP 240 last week after pleading guilty to one count of sending by public communication network an offensive/indecent/obscene/menacing message or matter. "Following a Thames Valley Police investigation, a man has been sentenced for sending an offensive message using social media," the police said in a statement on Tuesday.



The post related to a video he posted on TikTok on July 19 last year reportedly targeted the Dalit community. "I am pleased with the sentence given, which provides a clear message that Thames Valley Police will not tolerate behaviour like that of

Amrik Bajwa," said Sergeant Andrew Grant, the investigating officer on the case from the Slough police station. "As a force, we are committed to protecting our communities and ensuring that criminal actions which have the potential to undermine

community cohesion are dealt with robustly," he said.

Bajwa was arrested a few days after his post, on July 22 last year, and charged via postal requisition on March 2 this year. The Anti Caste Discrimination Alliance (ACDA), a voluntary human rights organisation campaigning against caste-based discrimination in the UK, was among the organisations to complain about the offensive "casteist" post which it characterised as hate speech targeted at Dalit communities. "The 18 weeks sentence in jail reflects the severity of the harm Amrik Bajwa's video caused the Dalit community," said a spokesperson for the ACDA.

"We understand the conviction did not specifically refer to 'caste' because caste is not yet a protected characteristic in law. But the Crime Prosecution Service (CPS) shared at the hearing the derogatory words 'choora' and 'chaamar' that Mr Bajwa used. The video that Amrik Singh Bajwa posted on TikTok in 2022 was highly toxic and casteist in content," the spokesperson said.

The ACDA said the conviction was the result of several community organisations working together. The Thames Valley Police thanked all the key witnesses who helped with the force's investigation into the case.

## India 'vishwaguru', should use G20 presidency to highlight Ukraine crisis: Ukrainian minister

**Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Minister Emine Dzhaparova, who is on a visit to India, said President Volodymyr Zelenskyy would be "happy" to address the G20 summit, slated to be held in September. She requested India to use its G20 presidency and highlight the crisis in war-hit Ukraine.**

(South Asian Insider Bureau) - Ukraine has termed India as 'vishwaguru' and called on New Delhi to use its G20 presidency to highlight the crisis in the war-ravaged European country by inviting Ukrainian officials to the multilateral forum.

Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Minister Emine Dzhaparova said President Volodymyr Zelenskyy would be "happy" to address the G20 summit, slated to be held in September.

India, through its G20 presidency, can bring attention to the Ukraine crisis by inviting Ukrainian officials to the G20 events and the main summit, Dzhaparova said on Tuesday.

"Our expectations are quite clear. We believe that discussion about the economy and future economy and the economic situation in the world is not possible without discussion about the repercussions of the war with Russia against Ukraine," she said. "Because it has an impact on the economic growth and the economies of the G20. So, our message to India is to consider the participation of Ukrainian



officials at the events of the G20, be it side events or the summit, the one on the parliament level, or the September summit that will take place in New Delhi. I believe that my President will also be happy to speak up on behalf of the Ukrainian people," she continued. India is currently holding the G20 presidency for a year till November 30, 2023.

Dzhaparova further said, "Today, India plays a very important role in the world. The presidency of G20 brings additional responsibility. India may take this leadership by involving Ukraine in its agenda and helping Ukraine to bring its story. People-to-people contact is the best way to communicate."

Dzhaparova is the first high-ranking official from Ukraine to visit India since Russia invaded the European country on February 24 last year.

UKRAINE DEPUTY FM CALLS INDIA 'VISHWAGURU'

Dzhaparova termed India 'vishwaguru' (spiritual mentor of the world) and called on New Delhi to play a "greater role" in the Ukraine crisis.

"We see the role of India as 'vishwaguru'... Sometimes we have countries that choose war instead of love and friendship. India as a 'vishwaguru' can play a bigger and greater role. We also welcome efforts to resolve the war," she said.

"We are the most interested country to stop this war because our people have been killed and our infrastructure have been damaged," she added.

PRAGMATIC APPROACH FOR UKRAINE CRISIS

Dzhaparova stated that while Kyiv respects New Delhi's decision to strengthen relations with other countries, she said that there should be a "pragmatic approach" while dealing with the crisis in Ukraine.

"We respect the decision of the sovereign country, India, to build up relations with other countries... But the message from Ukraine is there should be consideration of a pragmatic and balanced approach. Being with Russia is being on the wrong side of history..." she asserted. "Ukraine really wants India to come closer to it. We had different pages in history but now Ukraine is gaining independence. We are now capable of being the subject, not the object," Dzhaparova said.

'RUSSIAN SOLDIERS STEAL TOILET BOWLS'

Touching upon the war crimes being committed in the war-torn

country, Dzhaparova said that intercepted conversations of Russian soldiers and their wives and mothers revealed that they were about stealing households in Ukraine, which includes "toilet bowls".

"When we received intercepted conversations of Russian soldiers with their wives and mothers, they are about what to steal from Ukrainian households, they steal sometimes even toilet bowls," she said.

UKRAINE DEPUTY FM'S ENGAGEMENTS IN INDIA

During her visit to India from April 10-12, Dzhaparova held bilateral talks with Sanjay Verma, Secretary (West), MEA. The bilateral agenda included spheres such as economic, defence, humanitarian assistance, and global issues of mutual interest. "She briefed Secretary (West) about the prevailing situation in Ukraine. The two sides agreed to hold the next round of Foreign Office Consultations in Kyiv on a mutually convenient date," a statement from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.



# Ukrainian President Zelenskyy wrote to PM Modi, sought humanitarian aid from India

A letter written by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking humanitarian aid from India was handed over by Ukraine's Deputy Foreign Minister Emine Dzhaparova to Union Minister of State for External Affairs and Culture, Meenakshi Lekhi.

(South Asian Insider Bureau) -Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking India's intervention in the Russia-Ukraine war and requesting additional humanitarian aid including medical equipment. The letter was handed over by Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Minister Emine Dzhaparova to Union Minister of State for External Affairs and Culture, Meenakshi Lekhi, during her four-day visit to India. The two leaders exchanged views on bilateral and global issues of mutual interest. Meenakshi Lekhi said Ukraine has been assured of "enhanced humanitarian assistance." Dzhaparova described the meeting as "fruitful". Emine Dzhaparova met Meenakshi Lekhi on Tuesday ahead of her



address at the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA). She is the first high-ranking Ukrainian official to visit India ever since the Russia-Ukraine war broke out in February last year. While responding to a question after her address at

the ICWA, Dzhaparova said Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy would like to address the G20 summit in India. The Ukrainian President had addressed the G20 Bali summit via video conference. Speaking on

the ongoing war with Ukraine, the deputy foreign minister said as a global leader and current chair of the G20, India can play a greater role in bringing peace and hoped that Indian officials would visit Kyiv soon.

Since the war with Russia began in February last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has spoken to Russian President Vladimir Putin as well as Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy a number of times.

In a phone conversation with President Zelenskyy on October 4 last year, PM Modi said that there can be "no military solution" and that India is ready to contribute to any peace efforts.

Earlier in September, PM Modi met Russian President Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. In the first meeting between the two leaders since the war broke out, PM Modi told Putin that "today's era is not of war" and "dialogue" was the only way forward.

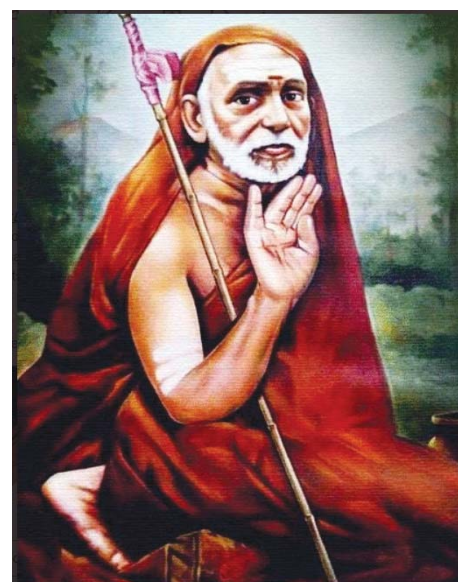
## Saketharaman to perform at Maha Periyava temple

(South Asian Insider Bureau) -Sanatana Dharma Foundation Inc, (A 501 (C) (3) tax exempt organization) in New Jersey and America Tamil Sangam has organized a Carnatic music concert by popular Indian Carnatic musician Saketharaman who is the prime disciple of maestro Padmabushan Lalgudi Jayaraman on April 16. The concert is being organized to raise funds for the completion of Maha Periyava Mani Mantapam. The function will be held at Maha Periyava Mani Mantapam, 14 Barley Sheaf Road, Flemington, NJ 08822. Suri Subramanian president of the Foundation and Calai Chandra president of America Tamil Sangam are jointly organizing the event. The Mani Mantapam (memorial prayer hall) is



being built in memory of Jagadguru His Holiness Shri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Maha Swami (20 May 1894 - 8 Jan 1994) also known as the Sage of Kanchi or Maha Periyava (meaning the great elder) was the 68th Jagadguru Shankaracharya of the famed Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam formed by Adi Shankaracharya in

Kanchipuram City in Tamil Nadu. Mahaperiyava started spreading his knowledge in spiritual journeys across the Indian hinterland. These included devotional practices and daily rituals such as performing various Poojas and recitations of the Vedas. People from various sub



castes and Abrahamic followers became his devotees. He carried the responsibility effortlessly and made simple practices for devotees to increase devotion, like chanting and writing the holy name of Rama. Devotees soon realized he was not a normal person and labeled him a Jagadguru (the guru of the

universe) Mahaperiyava dedicated his life to the deity Devi Kamakshi in the premises where he was the spiritual guru, Kamakshi Amman temple. The temple is where the goddess herself came personally for devotion to Shiva.

Throughout his life, Mahaperiyava breathed and practiced the Advaita philosophy of his guru, Adi Shankaracharya, the great Hindu philosopher and reformist. Mahaperiyava helped Vedic priests on their pronunciation of the holy Sanskrit texts and implemented rigorous Agama Sastra teachings describing cosmology, epistemology, philosophical doctrines, and precepts on meditation and other topics. On Aug 15, 1947 the day India attained independence; he gave a speech on the significance of the flag and the Dharma chakra in it.



# Kalakshetra rocked by sexual harassment allegations: The story so far

Since March, Kalakshetra Foundation has been rocked by sexual harassment allegations and incompetent investigations. Two separate committees are now probing the matter.

(News Agency)- Kalakshetra, the globally recognised Tamil Nadu-based arts and cultural centre, has been rocked by allegations of sexual harassment for weeks now. The allegations, first made online by students of a Kalakshetra Foundation-run college, have forced Kalakshetra to dismiss three staff members. Hari Padman, the professor against whom the allegations were made, has been arrested.



On Tuesday, a five-member team from the Tamil Nadu State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) visited Kalakshetra Foundation to investigate the allegations. The team, which is led by SP S Maheshwaran, recorded statements of students and faculty. Kalakshetra Foundation, on its part, has set up an independent committee comprising of retired Justice Kannan, Dr Shobha Varthaman and retired DGP Letika Saran to separately probe the matter. At

this point, Hari Padman, the main accused, continues to be behind bars after a court recently denied him bail.

## HOW IT ALL BEGAN

The Kalakshetra sexual harassment saga has been brewing online since December 2022 when students replied to a now-deleted social media post by Leela Samson, a former director of the foundation. In her Facebook post, Leela Samson alleged that a male teacher was "known to be threatening and

molesting (those) who are not yet adults". Samson said, "The said teacher must be brought to book". Rukmini Devi [the founder of Kalakshetra] did not build this institution and all her ideals to be abused so."

A couple of months later, one of the students filed a complaint against Hari Padman with Kalakshetra's internal committee (IC) about a harassment incident from around four years ago. When nothing reportedly came of the complaint, several

students started coming out in the open and posted similar allegations on CARESpaces, an online safe space online, against Hari Padman and three other staff members.

And that is when the row spilled out into the open. The allegations of sexual harassment made on CARESpaces came into public knowledge and the students subsequently complained to the staff, including foundation director Revathi Ramachandran, who formed an internal committee to investigate the matter. Revathi Ramachandran, who heads the IC, deemed the allegations irresponsible and gave a clean chit to the accused after an initial inquiry. Students were told not to speak to the media and that any attempts would have serious consequences. Kalakshetra put up an official notice on their website, stating, "During the last few months, a concerted and organised effort is being made to

spread rumours and allegations mostly through social media, aimed at maligning Kalakshetra Foundation. These allegations were presented as a false movement to help students speak up, they actually contained numerous ragtag word-of-mouth accounts; some of which were decades old. They seemed to be mostly manufactured by vested interests who, aimed to sully Kalakshetra Foundation by falsely projecting the institution as an unsafe environment and thus confuse and distress students and staff. The Internal Committee took up the enquiry Suo moto and a report has been filed after a thorough investigation. Enquiries were performed with full confidentiality and the committee did not find merit in the allegations." The National Commission for Women (NCW) stepped in on March 22 and asked the Tamil Nadu DGP to investigate.

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# "If Choice Between Our People Going To Prison...": Elon Musk On India Rules

(News Agency)- Elon Musk said on Wednesday that he did not know "what exactly happened" when Twitter took down content related to a documentary critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi earlier this year, adding that some rules related to social media content were "quite strict" in India. In January, India ordered the blocking of a BBC documentary which questioned PM Modi's leadership during the 2002 Gujarat riots, saying that even sharing of any clips via social media was barred. The government had issued orders to Twitter to block over 50 tweets linking to the video of the documentary, Kanchan Gupta, an adviser to the government, had said. While the BBC had not aired the documentary in India, the video was uploaded on some YouTube channels, Ms Gupta had said. "I am not aware of this particular situation... don't know what exactly happened with some content situation in India," Elon Musk said

in an interview with the BBC broadcast live on Twitter Spaces, when asked if the site took down some content at the behest of the Indian government.



number. PM Modi has been cleared of any wrongdoing by investigations into the Gujarat riots. Earlier last year, the Supreme Court rejected an appeal against his exoneration in one of the cases linked to the killings. "If we have a choice of either our people go to prison or we comply with the laws, we will comply with the laws..." Mr Musk said. India's regulatory scrutiny of various U.S. tech firms such as Twitter, Facebook's WhatsApp and Amazon.com Inc, have hurt the business environment in a key growth market, prompting some companies to rethink expansion plans,

Reuters has reported. Indian authorities have in the past asked Twitter to act on content such as accounts supportive of an independent Sikh state, posts alleged to have spread misinformation about protests by farmers, and tweets critical of the government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The rules in India for what can appear on social media are quite strict and we can't go beyond the laws of the country," he said. The documentary focused on Narendra Modi's leadership as chief minister of Gujarat during riots in 2002 in which at least 1,000 people were killed. Activists put the toll at more than twice that

## Two booked for duping HDFC Bank of Rs 21.82 cr

Bill discounting is a type of lending in which the bank takes the bill drawn by the borrower on his customer and pays him immediately, deducting some amount as a discount/commission.



(News Agency)- The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of the Mumbai police has registered a case of cheating and forgery against the directors of two private companies for allegedly duping HDFC Bank to the tune of Rs 21.82 crore. The accused company availed bill discounting facilities from the bank on the basis of bogus bills/ invoices and defrauded it. Bill

discounting is a type of lending in which the bank takes the bill drawn by the borrower on his customer and pays him immediately, deducting some amount as a discount/commission. The police have booked Satnam Singh Maini and Harangad Singh Maini of Agile Security Force & Systems Pvt. Ltd. and Whiskers Infracare Pvt. Ltd.

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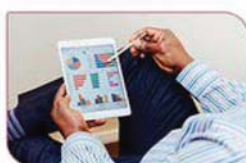
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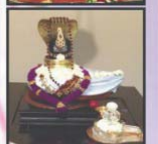
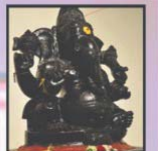
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## Atiq Ahmed's transfer from Gujarat jail to UP and back: Rs 10 lakh spent, 37 cops engaged



(News Agency)- Sabarmati Jail and then to take him back once the court adjourns. The gangster travels nearly 1,275 km one way. The Uttar Pradesh government is spending around Rs 10 lakh to produce Atiq Ahmed before a Prayagraj court from Sabarmati Jail. The government spends Rs 6 lakh on the salary and dearness allowance (DA) of the 37 policemen deployed for transporting Atiq. This figure is based on four days' salary after calculating their average pay and adding the DA amount. In addition, the fuel cost comes to Rs 3 lakh.

## Bathinda shooting: 18 incidents of fratricide in Army, 2 in IAF between 2014 and March 2021

Four Army jawans were killed in a firing incident inside Bathinda military station in Punjab on Wednesday. Police termed it a case of "fratricide". About 18 incidents of fratricides took place in the Army and two in the IAF between 2014 and March 21, 2021. However, the cases of fratricide and suicide are much higher in the Central Armed Police Forces.

(News Agency)- Four Army personnel were killed on Wednesday morning in a firing incident at the Bathinda Military Station in Punjab. The Punjab Police ruled out any terror angle in the shooting and said it was a case of fratricide.

The Bathinda killings have once again raised the question why fratricide incidents take place in the security forces.

As many as 18 incidents of fratricide reportedly took place in the Indian Army and two in the Indian Air Force between 2014 and March 21, 2021. In July 2022, two Armymen were killed and two others were injured in a fratricidal incident in an army camp at Surankote in the border district of Poonch in Jammu and Kashmir. However, fratricide and suicide cases are much higher in the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) as compared to the Army, the Air Force and the Navy.

Twenty-nine Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) personnel were killed by their colleagues in the last five years (from 2018 to 2022), revealed the data

presented by Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai in the Lok Sabha on March 28, 2023. Fratricide is an act of intentionally or unintentionally murdering sibling/siblings, and in the case of security forces, it means an act of killing colleagues or friendly troopers. The causative factors in most of such incidents are generally personal and domestic

problems, family issues, depression and work-related issues. In a response to a question raised on the issue in the Lok Sabha, MoS Defence Ajay Bhatt said, "The government has taken several steps towards stress amelioration

amongst troops, which, inter-alia, include deployment of trained psychological counsellors, improvement in the quality of food and clothing, training in stress management, provision of recreational facilities, buddy system, leave concessions, approachability of seniors, facilities for movement of troops from border areas and establishing a grievance redressal mechanism at various levels, etc."





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# Cracks in MVA over Rahul's Savarkar remarks? Congress' Venugopal to meet Uddhav

**Amid reports of fissures within the MVA over Rahul Gandhi's recent comments on VD Savarkar, Congress leader KC Venugopal is expected to meet Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray in Mumbai in the next two days.**

(News Agency)- Senior Congress leader KC Venugopal is expected to visit Mumbai and meet former Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray. The meeting is expected to be about ironing out "differences" within the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) alliance following Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's recent remarks on Hindutva icon VD Savarkar.

According to Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut, Venugopal has sought time to meet Uddhav Thackeray and they are expected to hold a meeting in the next two days.



here are reports of cracks within the MVA alliance over the Savarkar issue. Uddhav Thackeray also met Sharad Pawar last night to discuss these

differences.

Meanwhile, posters against Savarkar were put out in Wayanad constituency, the MP seat which was earlier

represented by Rahul Gandhi, before his disqualification, which flared up tensions between MVA leaders.

**WHAT IS THE ISSUE?**

Following his disqualification from the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi said last month, "My name is not Savarkar, my name is Gandhi and Gandhi does not offer an apology to anyone."

The remark drew sharp reaction from the Shiv Sena (UBT), with Uddhav Thackeray saying that he considered Savarkar as his "idol", and asked Rahul Gandhi to refrain from "insulting" him.

The Thackeray faction of the Shiv

Sena had also skipped the meeting convened by Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge to protest against Rahul Gandhi's remarks targeting Savarkar.

Amid growing fissures, NCP leader Sharad Pawar stepped in as peacemaker. According to sources, Sharad Pawar had advised Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi to stop making references to Savarkar as it could hurt regional sentiment during the Opposition meeting held last month. Sources added that Rahul Gandhi assured that he would avoid making comments on Savarkar.

## Driver of ATM cash van missing with Rs 1.5 crore in Patna, vehicle recovered

**A driver of an ATM cash van has gone missing in the Danka Imli area of Bihar's Patna along with more than Rs 1.5 crore that was inside the vehicle.**

(News Agency)-The driver of an ATM cash van in Bihar's Patna has gone missing along with more than Rs 1.5 crore cash that was inside the vehicle. Patna Police said the driver, Suraj Kumar, was left alone inside the vehicle while a guard and other staff member had gone inside the ICICI bank in Danka Imli.

According to the police, the vehicle was parked some distance away from the bank. The cash van has been recovered around a kilometre away from where it was initially parked. The lock of the safe has been broken and the driver is currently missing.

Police are now viewing nearby CCTV footage to catch the driver and a forensic team reached the spot to collect evidence.

**HOW DID THE DRIVER GET AWAY?**

The driver of the vehicle must have used a hammer to break open the safe and take the money, said police. He was accompanied by several people who were on their way to withdraw money from a bank and deposit it in the ATM. Ravi Rai, the auditor of



Securevalue company, told their way to deposit money in India Today that they were on the ICICI bank ATM at Danka

Imli when the incident took place. He added that they had also withdrawn cash from a bank and were to deposit the amount, which was more than Rs 1.5 crore, in two ATMs. Ravi Rai told the police that the Securevalue company's gunman Subhash Yadav, auditor Amresh Singh and other two employees, Sonu Kumar and Dilip Kumar, were together while the driver was

left alone in the vehicle.

After the driver went missing, the company's employees informed the Alamganj Police. The company's auditor, gunman and the two employees involved in the incident have been detained by the police and were questioned. Police later found the cash van abandoned near the Nalanda Medical College and Hospital.

## 'Gehlotji aapke dono haath mai laddu hai': PM Modi while flagging off Rajasthan's first Vande Bharat

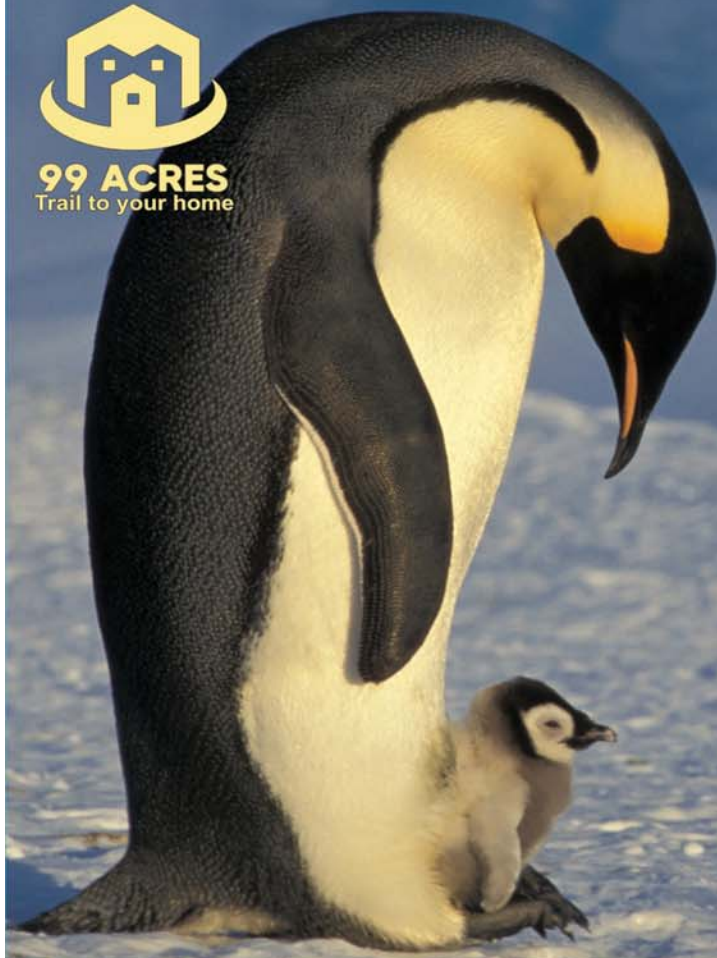
**Prime Minister Narendra Modi took a jibe at Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot while flagging off a Vande Bharat Express train and said, "Gehlot ji, aapke toh do-do haath mai laddu hain (You've got sweets in both your hands)."**

(News Agency)- Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday flagged off Rajasthan's first Vande Bharat Express train via video conferencing. Speaking at the flagging off ceremony, PM Modi addressed Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and said, "Gehlot ji, aapke toh do-do haath mai laddu hain (You've got sweets in both your hands)." The prime minister took a jibe at the Rajasthan CM and said, "Your Railway Minister is from Rajasthan and the Chairman of the Railway Board is also from Rajasthan. You have laddus in both your hands but the work which should have been done

immediately after Independence has not been done yet. But you have so much faith in me that you presented even that work in front of me. Your trust in me is the strength of our friendship. As a friend, I thank you for having this trust in me." PM Modi was referring to Railway minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and Chairperson of the Railway Board, Anil Kumar Lahoti -- both hailed from Rajasthan. Prime Minister Modi also brought up the ongoing issue within the Rajasthan government and said, "I especially express my gratitude to Gehlot ji. He has been through many problems due

to the political crisis in his state. Despite that, he took out time for development work and took part in the launch. I welcome him and appreciate his efforts." PM Modi's remark came a day after Congress leader and state minister Sachin Pilot sat on a one-day hunger strike against the Gehlot government to press for "inaction against corruption". The Vande Bharat launch function was organised at the Jaipur junction rail station. It was attended by Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, Rajasthan Governor Kalraj Mishra and others.





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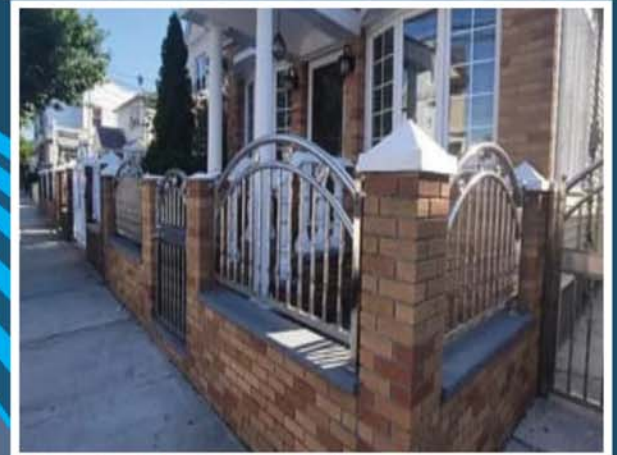
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# Pakistan Is Heading Towards Civil War

By Salman Ahmad

The Biden administration has been curiously silent as Pakistan, a long-time U.S. ally, descends into chaos and possible civil war. Democracy has never been very stable in this nuclear-armed country, but it is now under enormous threat.

The current political crisis in Pakistan centers around the struggle for power between the country's civilian majority, the military establishment and its corrupt, puppet government. The governing coalition, PDM (Pakistan Democratic Movement), led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, is a motley crew of 13 political parties. Fully 60 percent of the cabinet are out on bail for charges ranging from money laundering, murder, kidnapping, custodial torture and assassination attempts. The former Prime Minister, Sharif's brother, fled to London rather than face corruption charges.

Former Prime Minister Imran Khan and his Justice party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), are leading in all the polls and



have won 30 of 37 recent local elections. Khan was ousted in a vote of no-confidence where members of his party were bribed to switch sides and vote against him. Then he was targeted in an assassination attempt on November 3, 2022, in Punjab province, when, in broad daylight, multiple shooters fired at his vehicle. 14 people were wounded. One innocent bystander died, while the rest, including Khan, survived. Khan took three bullets to his right leg. While witnesses said there were at least three shooters, the government produced one suspect forced by police to record a confessional video claiming he tried to kill Khan for his alleged disrespect

for Islam. The police refused to register or even investigate Khan's charge that the government was behind the attempt. The country is now facing a crisis along with a massive social upheaval. The public is fed up with the corruption of the elites. It's unlike anything I've experienced, including being an eyewitness to two wars with India and three martial law regimes.

The military, supported by the United States, has a long history of intervening in politics. It has become the dominant player in the country's political landscape once again. There have been mass arrests, custodial torture of members of Khan's party,

assassination attempts and the murder of journalists and political workers by the State. Broadcast networks have been ordered off the air and forbidden to broadcast speeches by Imran Khan. The media in Pakistan has long been a vibrant and vocal part of the country's democracy, but that is now coming to an end. The judiciary is under pressure from the Army and government, as is the Election Commission. The government has brought 143 cases against the former prime minister, all obviously trumped up and ridiculous, mostly for "terrorism." In a great irony, he has been accused of corruption for failing to report the gift of a watch — this from a government whose prime minister and cabinet have been accused of stealing billions from the treasury, in well-documented cases.

On March 18, as Khan was travelling to Islamabad to appear in court, his home was attacked by police with tear gas. They arrested his household staff and relatives, terrorising his wife. They had no search warrant. Right now, a state

of civil war is approaching as the very popular Khan remains under threat. If he is killed, it may be too late to prevent large-scale violence by the population in response.

Khan, the former cricket legend, is fighting for democracy and the rule of law. Despite death threats, an assassination attempt, false charges and government roadblocks, he still managed to bring out the largest turnout of Pakistanis in history to his most recent political rally. The Pakistan military generals face the biggest challenge to their vice-like grip on politics. Chaos in Pakistan does not serve the interests of the United States or the world. Only democracy can stabilise the situation. White House' Biden and Secretary of State Blinken should speak out for Pakistani civil liberties, media freedom and the cessation of gross human rights violations against Pakistanis demanding free and fair elections. The United States, its allies, and the global human rights community must come forward and halt the slide towards anarchy, chaos and a renewed dictatorship in Pakistan.

# India Is Encouraging The Heatwaves That Will Cripple It

By David Fickling

India might have hoped that its punishing 2022 heatwave season, which pushed the mercury as high as 49.2 degrees Celsius (121 degrees Fahrenheit) in Delhi, would be followed by a breather. It's not looking that way. Most of the country outside the southernmost states is forecast to suffer more heatwave days during the most intense April-June season, the India Meteorological Department said at the weekend. A swathe of land from the Ganga valley to the coast of the Bay of Bengal - home to more than 350 million people - will endure 10 more days of heatwave than in a typical year, according to the department's latest outlook.

There's a great injustice in the disproportionate damage being inflicted on India and its neighbors as the climate warms. The average American, Canadian or Australian is responsible for about eight times more emissions than the average Indian. The climate damage that richer nations wrought on their path to wealth is being visited on the country with the largest

population of poor people, before it gets its own chance to struggle up the development ladder. Despite that, as it grows, India is increasingly becoming the author of its own misfortunes. Already by some estimates the world's biggest country by population, it's also the biggest source of demand growth for fossil fuels over the coming decade. Rich countries have cut their emissions by about 16% since 2007 and China's are set to peak before 2030. India's emissions are already on the brink of overtaking those from the European Union. By 2030, they'll account for more pollution than Europe and Japan put together. Whatever happened in the past, the country's leaders can't absolve themselves of responsibility for the consequences of their own actions over the coming decade.

That's particularly the case because in sector after sector, low-emissions technologies are already undercutting dirtier conventional ones. Electric rickshaws and three-wheelers won a two-thirds market share of sales last year, according to

BloombergNEF, thanks to running costs that are drastically lower than those for conventional diesel models. Power from new onshore wind and solar generators costs about three-quarters that from new coal plants. Switching to the less polluting option should give more people access to modern energy. It's troubling, then, that this isn't happening. Back in 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised the country would install 175 gigawatts of wind, solar, and small-scale hydro power by the end of last year. In practice, the country fell roughly 31% short.

Some 15.77 gigawatts of wind and solar was installed in 2022, less than half what's needed annually to hit a fresh government goal of 500 GW by 2030. Renewables tenders issued by utilities fell to just 28 GW from 40 GW in 2022 according to consultancy JMK Research. Those levels put 500 GW far beyond reach.

One factor in the shortfall has been the way that the energy transition is being asked to bear the costs of government trade barriers and industrial policy. Tariffs as high as

40% on imported solar components introduced last April have left local developers unable to finish projects because of costs that are now drastically higher than when contracts were signed. In the vehicle sector, the government has suspended subsidy programs for electric vehicles and investigated automakers over claims that they didn't have a sufficient share of local content. The entire automotive electrification subsidy program may be abandoned next year after hitting its modest targets, the Economic Times reported last month, citing officials it didn't name. Such counterproductive protectionism is increasingly rife across the world, from the US and EU to South Africa and Morocco. It might seem harsh to single out India for doing the same thing that many other countries are doing. And yet it's not people who are singling India out, but the climate itself: its loss of long-run gross domestic product from three degrees Celsius of warming would be 10.4%, the highest of any Group of 20 economy after Indonesia, according to one 2018

study. The complaint of Indian governments for five decades has always been that poverty itself is a form of pollution. A nation cannot clean up its economy until it has first grown affluent. If that means powering its early development with fossil fuels, then so be it, the argument goes. As renewables have undercut the costs of conventional alternatives, however, growth and efficiency is no longer the rhetoric that's used. Instead the talk is of the power of incumbency: How hard it will be to dethrone coal, for instance, when its inefficient supply chain is bound up with regional economies, rail freight, and the underwater investments of well-connected billionaires and state-owned utilities. That's not an egalitarian argument about the necessity of growth. It's an insistence that the mass of India's population must pay with their health, their wealth and their futures to support core interest groups, even when a cleaner path is at hand. That will be a hard sell to people laboring under crippling heatwaves over the coming months.





# MediaOne Case:

## Report in sealed cover and freedom of press in New India

**Kozhikode-based news and entertainment company -- Madhyamam Broadcasting Limited -- has been running the MediaOne TV news channel in Malayalam for more than a decade.**

**By Kaushal Kishore**

The Chief Justice of India (CJI) wrote more than 100 pages on freedom of press, the national security and sealed cover report in the MediaOne case. Five months ago, the division bench completed its hearing, and the judgment was reserved since then. The bench, comprising CJI DY Chandrachud and Justice Hima Kohli, heard the case dealing with license renewal of the Malayalam news channel. Earlier, the national security clause was invoked in order to cancel its broadcasting license. The Supreme Court reminded that free press is necessary for the functioning of the democratic institution. It shines a light on the functioning of the state. It lifted the telecast ban on the channel.

Kozhikode-based news and entertainment company -- Madhyamam Broadcasting Limited - has been running the MediaOne TV news channel in Malayalam for more than a decade. The crisis began with its critical reporting of the East Delhi riots in March 2020. Initially, its transmission was banned for 48 hours for an alleged anti-national attitude.

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) revoked the permission granted to run the channel on January 31, 2022, and removed it further from the list of permitted channels. Before that, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) denied security clearance. This issue has been a part of public discourse since then.

Soon, the case reached Kerala High Court. The Union of India had submitted its report in a sealed cover before the single judge bench. It

stipulated that the security clearance was denied on the basis of the intelligence inputs, which were sensitive and secret in nature. The Assistant Solicitor General, appearing on behalf of the government, had further submitted that the state cannot disclose reasons for the denial as a matter of policy and in the interest of national security. The bench dismissed it on February 8, 2022. Consequently, the media outlet approached the division bench of the High Court. On perusal of the records, the bench observed that the scope of judicial review in matters involving national security is limited. Moreover, the nature and gravity of the issue is not discernible from the files. But, it still mentioned that there were clear indications that security and public order would be impacted if permission is granted to operate the channel. The division bench comprising Chief Justice S Mani Kumar and Justice Shaji P Chaly upheld the previous verdict defending the Central government on March 2, 2022. The issue finally reached the appellate jurisdiction of the apex court.

After perusing the relevant files and the sealed cover report, the top court granted interim relief on March 15 last year to operate the TV news channel and accepted the appeal for further hearings. Dushyant Dave, the senior advocate appearing for the petitioner, described the backing of the news channel by Jamaat-e-Islam (Kerala chapter) and the 6 odd weeks of ban because it's run by people belonging to a minority community. In the next nine months, the court heard the arguments of parties dealing with the substantive and

procedural grounds. At last, the judgment reserved since November 3 was delivered last week, on April 5. In this case, the court observed that there was nothing to show terrorist links. None of the materials were against national security, which can threaten public order. As such, claims about the national security were made out of thin air. It's one of the most serious questions about the functioning of the MHA to raise it in a cavalier manner, and the Kerala High Court failed to ensure the fundamental rights, natural justice and open justice.

The constitutionality of free speech and freedom of press is one of the major issues here. The top court said, "The critical views of the channel, MediaOne, on policies of the government cannot be termed 'anti-establishment'. The use of such a terminology in itself represents an expectation that the press must support the establishment. The action of the MIB by denying a security clearance to a media channel on the basis of the views which the channel is constitutionally entitled to hold produces a chilling effect on free speech and particularly on press freedom." As such, the government cannot be allowed compelling the press to support its stand, and its criticism cannot be a ground to revoke the license of a TV news channel.

This is a case that will be quoted on certain occasions. Besides the alleged second class status of the minority communities, the freedom of press is yet another issue that needs attention. Last year, India was ranked in the 150th position among the list of 180 countries of the world in press freedom. Now, the stand of the Supreme Court of India on national

security claims and sealed cover report is in public. One can hope it will be like a virtual death knell on the sealed cover report commonly used in recent times.

All investigation reports cannot be termed secret or confidential as they affect the rights and liberty of citizens and there cannot be blanket immunity for the government from disclosing the information.

Kerala High Court on two occasions failed to produce the speaking order and relied on the seal cover procedure. Thereby, it denied the appellant's right to remedies, even though it's described as the heart and soul of the Indian Constitution — one of its basic features.

The bench said, "The nondisclosure of reasons for the denial of security clearance, which was the sole ground for denying permission to renew the license, and the disclosure of the relevant material only to the court in a seal cover, has rendered appellant's procedural guarantees under the Constitution." It has further cleared that national security claim cannot be raised to deny people their fundamental rights. The courts could adopt less restrictive public interest immunity proceedings where only redacted portions are given to the parties.

Democracy is impossible in the absence of different and varied opinions. It has enriched democracies in the past and will continue to do so in the future as well. The apex court has clearly explained in its verdict how immature the Union of India has been in order to clamp a ban on the TV news channel. The author of the verdict, Justice DY Chandrachud, will be referred to uphold what a robust judiciary is meant for.



# AAP Zooms To National Party Status, Catapulted By Gujarat Polls

By Shubhabrata Bhattacharya

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)'s elevation as a national party just a decade after its inception was aided ironically by its performance in the Gujarat election. Finishing third behind the Congress with a tally of just five seats, AAP polled 12.97 per cent votes in last year's polls. This was more than double the required six per cent after it polled 6.67 in Goa and swept to power in Delhi and Punjab to meet the Election Commission's benchmark.

A fledgling, 10-year-old AAP's upgrade coincided with the eclipse of the 1925-born vintage Communist Party of India (CPI), which lost its national party status and was derecognised as a state party in West Bengal and Odisha while remaining a state party in three other states.

Though downgraded, the CPI is the only party in India that has consistently fought all elections since 1952 on one symbol - ears of corn and a sickle. All other parties, except the BJP (lotus), have forfeited their symbols and acquired new ones because of splits or mergers. (When the CPI split in 1964, the CPI-Marxist chose a new symbol - the hammer, sickle and star - leaving the CPI symbol intact) From 1952 to 1962, the CPI was consistently India's main opposition party in Lok Sabha. Its galaxy

of leaders - Hiren Mukherjee, Indrajit Gupta, SA Dange, Homi Daji, SM Banerjee (Lok Sabha) and Bhupesh Gupta (Rajya Sabha) - left a huge imprint on parliamentary discourse.

In 1969, though it had lost its prima donna status to the Swatantra Party (44 seats) and BJP's precursor Bharatiya Jan Sangh (35), the CPI with its 24 seats, along with the DMK's 25, provided the cushion to Indira Gandhi who lost 53 members to Congress (O) when the Grand Old Party first split. The Congress government survived on the crutches of these two parties. Such was CPI's clout that in the 1971 polls the Congress left some 44 seats to it "in adjustment" so that the ruling party's bid for power was bolstered.

In 2019, the CPI won just two Lok Sabha seats, one more than AAP whose sole MP Bhagwant Mann quit after becoming Chief Minister of Punjab. The Sangrur seat was snapped up by Simranjit Singh Mann of the splinter party Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar), who defeated Punjab's ruling party, AAP.

So, on the day it acquired national party status, AAP does not have representation in Lok Sabha. It has 10 MPs in Rajya Sabha, thanks to its overwhelming numbers in the Delhi and Punjab assemblies.

The party may make it back to Lok Sabha

if it wins the Jalandhar election on May 13. Despite being Punjab's ruling party since March 2022, AAP could not find a suitable candidate from its ranks. It fielded Sushil Rinku a day after he quit the Congress. The Jalandhar bypoll was held to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Congress veteran Santokh Singh Chaudhary, who died a day after he participated in Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra in January. The Congress has fielded his widow Karanjit Kaur.

The de-recognition of the Trinamool Congress and the NCP as national parties sees two offshoots of the Congress, founded in 1998 and 1999, whose leaders Mamata Banerjee and Sharad Pawar have often been seen as prime ministerial contenders, shrink to regional entities.

Like AAP, Trinamool too had ventured outside its home turf. But it did not manage the requisite six per cent votes, and is now recognised as a state party only in West Bengal and Tripura. The NCP, despite winning seats in Nagaland, where, apart from Maharashtra, it is a state party now, failed to retain its niche position due to its poor performance in Goa, Manipur and Meghalaya.

The National People's Party (NPP) led by Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma (the son of Purno Agitok Sangma, who along with Sharad Pawar

and Tariq Anwar had revolted against Sonia Gandhi to launch NCP) is recognised as a national party along with the BJP, Congress, CPI (M) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP).

The process of derecognising national parties was initiated by the Election Commission soon after Narendra Modi's huge victory in 2014, based on the parties' electoral performance. Besides NCP, Trinamool and CPI, the BSP too was served show-cause notice. Following representations from these parties, the poll body opted for a less stringent view and amended rules, enlarging the period from just one election to two elections. The BSP's performance in terms of votes polled across several states in the 2019 Lok Sabha election excluded it from this exercise. The NCP, Trinamool and CPI were found ineligible in 2019 in terms of the proportion of votes polled and state-wide presence. The NCP's poor showing in the Northeast and Trinamool's inability to expand its footprint beyond West Bengal, where it has a massive majority, contributed to its downgrade.

Among other parties which lost state party status is the Bharat Rashtriya Samithi (BRS) led by Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao (KCR). His party was found to be ineligible in Andhra Pradesh and is recognised as a state party only in Telangana.

## BJP's Unprecedented Christian Outreach a Remarkable Gesture, But More Needs to be Done

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has recently initiated an intensive unprecedented outreach to the Christian community in India. This is quite a remarkable gesture for a party whose leaders have either remained silent or tacitly acquiesced in the propaganda war and even stray physical attacks by Hindu extremists against the country's third-largest religious community mostly on the plea of forcible conversion. The decision to go out of its way to woo Indian Christians may well be prompted by both domestic electoral concerns as well as opinion in Western countries that dominate the G20, of which India assumed the leadership just a few months ago.

Last month, boosted by good performance in the state Assembly elections of regional parties, allied to the BJP in Christian-dominated Nagaland and Meghalaya, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared



that this busted the myth of the BJP being unacceptable to religious minorities. He went on to predict that, like in Northeastern states and BJP-ruled Goa, the party will also soon do well in Kerala which has the largest number of Christians among all states in the country and form an important vote bank. Earlier, at the BJP national executive meeting last year, the prime minister had urged leaders and workers of the

party to send a 'sneha sambad' (message of love) to the minorities in Kerala, where it has done poorly in successive Assembly and parliamentary polls. The wooing of Christians by the BJP has been gathering momentum since last Christmas when thousands of party workers in Kerala visited Christian homes bearing Christmas cakes and other gifts. In the national capital Delhi, President Draupadi Murmu

attended a special service at the Sacred Heart Cathedral, the city's most prominent church on Christmas Eve.

Last week, at Easter, it was Prime Minister Modi who made the extraordinary gesture of attending a special service at the Sacred Heart Cathedral and lighting a candle at the Statue of Resurrection. This is the first time that an Indian PM has attended a special Easter or Christmas service. Thousands of BJP workers in several states including Kerala and Delhi visited Christian homes with Easter greetings cards. Interestingly, the cards carried pictures of Jesus Christ and PM Modi.

The appeasement campaign by the prime minister and the BJP has reached a crescendo in the wake of a massive protest at Jantar Mantar in Delhi, less than two months ago, by members of the minority community and the clergy, against attacks in different

parts of the country, mainly in BJP-ruled states against Christians and their places of worship. Significantly, the priest who presided over the Jantar Mantar protests was none other than Delhi Archbishop Anil Joseph Thomas Couto, who led the senior clergy greeting the prime minister on Easter at the Sacred Heart Cathedral and the night of the protests saw a candlelight vigil at the same church to mourn Christians martyred by Hindu extremists.

PM Modi's dogged persistence in sending conciliatory messages to the Christian minority is motivated by both domestic and international concerns. With a crucial parliamentary poll just a year ahead, the prime minister wants to leave no stone unturned to ensure that even religious minorities, particularly Christians estranged by the BJP's Hindutva politics, do not vote en bloc against the party.



# Why 3,167 Tigers in a Land of 141 Crore Indians is a Huge Achievement

By Reshmi Dasgupta

It's a great feeling to know that the number of tigers in the wild in India has gone up from 1,827 (based on the rather imprecise methods) in 1973 when Project Tiger was launched to the more scientifically ascertained 1,411 in 2006 to 3,167 today. But few appreciate the enormity of this achievement, given that India's humans — in the wild and otherwise — have more than doubled since 1973, in crores, not thousands: 59.61 crore in 1973 to 141 crore in 2023!

But India also has 431 people per square kilometre. No other country with tigers — or other endangered species — has such a population pressure. The Amoy tiger, native to southern China, is now extinct in the wild. And there are only an estimated 500 Amur or Siberian tigers left; they once roamed the vast borderlands between the Russian Far East, northern China and Korea. And the population densities of China and Russia are 153 and 9 people per sq km. It must be noted that three tiger subspecies are already extinct — the last Balinese tiger was killed in 1937 and the Caspian tiger was eliminated in the 1950s. The last sighting of the once-abundant Javan tiger was in the mid-1970s. As was the case in so many tiger habitats, the arrival of white colonials spelt doom for Javan tigers: the Dutch occupiers put huge bounties on them to overcome traditional local reluctance to kill them if they had not harmed anyone.

Most countries in Asia that still have tigers also have human population densities far less than India. Indonesia is 151 per sq km and Thailand is 137 per sq km for example. Only Bangladesh at 1,265 people per sq km far exceeds India's. Their latest tiger census began in February 2023 and is expected to be completed next year but their tiger number five years ago was 114 (mainly in the Sunderbans), up from 106 in 2015 but alarmingly down from 404 in 2004.

That India came back from the brink is an ode to not only the authorities that have ensured there are now 53 wildernesses designated as tiger sanctuaries (up from the initial 9 in 1973) but also the majority of ordinary Indians who have had the foresight to live and let live even as land has become scarce.



Poachers are aberrations, not the norm here. More and more people in India have realised that the real value of tigers lies beyond their skin, claws and teeth.

The enormous distance India has travelled in terms of attitudes has never been adequately appreciated. We were left with a colonial legacy that saw wild animals as "game" — to be killed at will for clearing land for farming or simply for blood sport. Our maharajas also imbibed that attitude, and the walls of their palaces bear evidence of their enthusiasm. Even post-Independence the penny did not drop: India advertised hunting — shikar — as a tourist attraction. A lot hinged on the word 'game'. Ranthambore National Park was set up in 1955 as the Sawai Madhopur Game Sanctuary, most probably to attract shikar tourists. Game denotes wild mammals, reptiles and birds hunted for products (mostly meat and fur) and for sport ('trophies' such as heads, skins, horns, ivory, etc). It is not a coincidence that game is also a word synonymous with sport — for recreation — and hunting was just that for elites, particularly in the West.

The era of colonisation afforded Western elites a new set of "game" — lions, tigers, elephants, rhinos — to hunt for fun, with better and better weapons, not to mention retinues of 'beaters' to drive them out of the foliage to be shot. Unfortunately, the magnificence and elusiveness of tigers made them the most highly sought after. With maharajas also eagerly joining colonial rulers in their obsessive pursuit of this 'sport', tiger numbers obviously dropped dramatically. Coincidentally if not intentionally, India's Wildlife Protection Act — which banned all forms of hunting (but not angling) — happened in 1972, the

same year that privy purses for India's royal families were abolished. WPA meant our wild animals were no longer "game". It meant farmers could not kill those that endangered their crops and livestock, but it put a lid on hunting "game" for sport. The latest tiger census is proof that India decided correctly. Contrast that with the convulsions that many other nations have gone through (and in some cases, are still squabbling) about hunting wild animals. For many countries, wild animals are resources to be managed (and culled/killed if need be) not

creatures with a right to live in the land of their forebears as much as ours. Some African nations also fell for that mantra and use their animals as bait, quite literally, to attract white hunters as "big game" is big money.

In South Africa it is legal to hunt lions — for a fat fee, of course. Those who run wildlife resorts often also have a side business of keeping animals—including antelopes, impalas, warthogs, Cape buffalo and lions—on private lands elsewhere for hunting tourists, mostly from Western nations. And this is accepted as a "pragmatic" way to "preserve" these species. China's gruesome tiger farms are rightly criticised but not these; the reason for duplicity is clear.

Abundance is often given as an excuse to hunt. That is why within decades the number of tigers in India plummeted from around 40,000 to just 1,411. Yes, Indians did hunt before colonial rule, but never to extinction. Take the cheetah, which was never hunted but traditionally captured by royals to be kept as pets as they did not attack humans. But under

the British, a bounty was put on cheetahs to clear jungles for farming. Their numbers never recovered.

Today, wild black bears, which are still found aplenty across the US — around 400,000 — can be legally hunted in 33 states. There are only 50,000 grizzly bears left in the US, but it is legal to hunt them too, even in places that previously banned it as their numbers had been dangerously depleted. Now words like "harvested" and "culled" are used to gloss over the fact that around 50,000 wild bears are legally shot and killed by permit every year in the US. The usual ostensible reason is that wild bear numbers have risen too high and they need to be kept away from human habitats. But the population density of the US is a mere 36 people per sq km, so why should bears be a problem? Canada has a population of 60,000 wild wolves which are legally considered to be "game". So they are shot for sport, not for human-wolf conflict presumably as Canada's population density is 4 — yes, four — people per sq km.

## Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Points to Worrying Trends in West Asia

By Prabhu Dayal

The current government of Israel led by Benjamin Netanyahu, who took office as the prime minister for the sixth time on December 29, 2022, has been described as the most Right-wing as well as the most religious government in Israeli history. The new government's stated priorities include expanding settlements in the West Bank and an annexation of the West Bank.

The rapid deterioration in Israeli-Palestinian relations is already being witnessed. On February 26, 2023, hundreds of Israeli settlers attacked the Palestinian town of Huwara and three nearby villages, setting alight hundreds of Palestinian homes (some with people in them), businesses, a school, and numerous vehicles, killing one Palestinian man and injuring 100 others.

Zvika Fogel, a Member of the Knesset from the ultra-nationalist Otzma Yehudit Party which forms part of the governing coalition, said he "looks very favourably upon" the results of the rampage. Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich (who

is from the Religious Zionist Party) subsequently wrote on Twitter that Huwara should be "wiped out" by the Israeli government. He also said that "there's no such thing as Palestinians because there's no such thing as a Palestinian people". He added that the Palestinian people are a fictitious nation

invented only to fight the Zionist movement, asking "Is there a Palestinian history or culture? There isn't any". The lectern at which Smotrich spoke was covered with a flag of the 'Greater Land of Israel' (which also includes Jordan).



Israeli-Palestinian relations under the new Netanyahu government appear poised to deteriorate sharply. The clashes which took place last week between Palestinians and Israeli police forces in the Temple Mount area are an indication of this. Over 350 Palestinians who are supporters of Hamas were arrested and Hamas retaliated by firing 34 rockets into northern Israel. In turn, the Israeli military carried out air strikes on targets belonging to Hamas in southern



# Why India's border standoff with China reveals Modi weakness. It's the economy, stupid

By JYOTI MALHOTRA

Home minister Amit Shah's visit to Arunachal Pradesh has excited quite a few people, who say that India is for the first time paying China back in the same coin. But a close look at the situation on the India-China border cannot be complete without studying its diplomatic and political aspects. First, India is hosting a summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, likely in July, following which the G20 summit will be held in September. For both events, Chinese president and general secretary of the Communist Party, Xi Jinping, has been invited.

Question is, will he come if border tensions remain? Second, how far does India want to escalate these tensions, in the full knowledge that Xi won't show up if Delhi pushes the tipping point?

This, then, is the dilemma. On the one side, India has entered a particularly sharp and divisive countdown to the general elections next year and everything is fair game – from the marital status of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his education



degree to the fact that this month marks the third anniversary of the border standoff between India and China.

Geopolitical cocktail

The American poet TS Eliot famously described "April as the cruellest month." In Delhi this year, it is also a time when the government is debating the balance between domestic political considerations, the economic relationship with China defined by rising trade, India's growing relationship with the US and the Quad as well as the necessity to prevent a belligerent tone with Russia despite Moscow's enhanced partnership with Beijing.

It's enough to make one's head spin. Add to the cocktail the fact

that at the G20 summit, Xi Jinping will sit at the same round table as Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin. It will take all of Delhi's diplomatic finesse to first persuade all the big powers to show up and then manage the tensions between the Big Three so that no one is offended and the G20 takes the agenda forward for the developing world. This week, though, tensions with China are front and centre. The Chinese "renamed" 11 cities in Arunachal Pradesh, which it calls "Zangnan", and said the whole area was part of China. In Delhi, diplomats rolled their eyes, knowing full well that this was pure Chinese rhetoric, but also understanding that it required a political response. So besides a

statement by the Ministry of External Affairs, Amit Shah was sent to the Northeastern state to send the message that India is ready to take on the Chinese.

Nehru-did-nothing lens

It's not so easy, of course. The standoff in eastern Ladakh continues, with about 60,000 troops from each side across the Line of Actual Control, despite 17 rounds of border talks. Chinese troops may not be occupying territory, but they are preventing Indian troops from patrolling areas in Depsang and Demchok—tensions in the latter area began before Modi came to power and are now also his headache.

So what can be done to return to status quo ante? It's a tough task, especially now that security issues are also seen via the "Nehru-did-nothing" lens. During his visit to Arunachal Pradesh Monday, Shah reiterated that "before 2014" there was no development in the Northeast and that the Modi government had upped peace in the region, including reducing areas under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act.

Perhaps, Indian politics is far too broken for us to expect that at

least in India's borderlands, "who did more, Nehru or Modi", constitutes diplomatic irrelevance. Certainly, China will be smiling at the domestic contestation on full display in India—considering it outsmarted Nehru in 1962 and its attempts to do the same to the Modi government, circa 2020-2023, are ongoing.

Certainly, the Modi government is building border infrastructure of the kind that no government has built before. "The eastern Ladakh model is now being replicated across the 4,000 km-long LAC, with a road running parallel to it, up and down the mountainside," retired Lieutenant General Satish Dua, former chief of the Integrated Defence Staff told The Print.

Chinese appeal Then there is the all-important economic driver of the bilateral relationship. Trade in 2022 has broken all previous records, touching \$135.98 billion. China's exports to India climbed to \$118.5 billion, a year-on-year increase of 21.7 per cent, while India's exports to China were only \$17.48 billion, a year-on-year decline of 37.9 per cent.

## SVB failure has lessons for India. Banks can shut down, deposit insurance needs reforms

By RENUKA SANE

It would have been hard for many to miss the words "deposit insurance" on the newsfeed last month. The US-based Silicon Valley Bank had caused it to shut down. The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation or FDIC initially announced that deposits insured with the bank will be paid out. This has led to a discussion on the system of deposit insurance in India. Our experience suggests that much reform is required on pricing, as well as the process of payout. Depositors need to internalise that bank safety cannot be taken for granted.

Deposit insurance in India  
Deposit insurance in India is managed by the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation

(DICGC). The DICGC insures all bank deposits up to a maximum amount of Rs 5 lakh. This implies that you will have access to deposits up to Rs 5 lakh if your bank fails. Any amount above it will be lost. Each bank has to pay an annual premium of 12 paise per Rs 100 of assessable deposits to the DICGC. That is, if a bank has accessible deposits of Rs 100 crore, then it will pay Rs 12 lakh as a premium. The DICGC will be solvent when insurance premiums are higher than the payouts.

There are two interesting features of such insurance in India. First, it is rarely used in the case of commercial banks. This is not because banks don't fail, they are not immune. India's response

has been to merge the failing bank with a larger bank, often a Public Sector Bank (PSB), and kick the can down the road. There is no set process, the



Reserve Bank of India takes a decision based on the circumstances. For example, Yes Bank was taken over by a group of banks led by the State Bank of India in 2020. Lakshmi Vilas Bank was merged with DBS Bank in 2020, Global Trust Bank was merged with Oriental

Bank of Commerce in 2004, which along with United Bank of India was subsequently merged with Punjab National Bank in 2020. Vijaya Bank was merged

with the Bank of Baroda in 2019. As a result, the question of shutting the bank and paying out deposit insurance has not arisen. This is not to say that depositors have not had their accounts frozen. In the case of Yes Bank, withdrawals were limited to Rs 50,000 for a period of time. But if the strategy is to never let a commercial bank fail, then why collect insurance premiums from them? Second, in the case of cooperative banks, it takes a long

time for depositors to get their money. As of 2019, depositors have had to wait for an average of about six years to get their funds. When a bank fails, the liquidator of the bank is supposed to make a list of all the depositors, and hand it over to the DICGS. It is this process that causes the delay. It imposes a huge cost, especially as depositors in cooperative banks are likely to be from low to middle-income groups. As an example, for the bank failures in 2017-18, if one assumes that the funds would have earned an interest of even 8 per cent, then depositors effectively suffered a 26 per cent loss. The process of deposit insurance payouts is not smooth, it imposes considerable uncertainty on the depositors.



# PM Modi's Anti-Corruption Crusade and the ED, CBI Factors

By Sanju Verma

The Supreme Court on April 5, 2023, refused to entertain a petition filed by 14 political parties alleging that the central investigating agencies such as the Directorate of Enforcement (ED) and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) are being weaponised by the Modi government to clamp down on dissent, by arresting Opposition leaders. This verdict is a stinging slap on a combined Opposition that had the gall to doubt the bonafide of our premier probe agencies and then had the audacity to file such a petition in the apex court. Surely, the Congress and these Opposition parties were caught on the wrong foot when the Supreme Court said that political leaders cannot claim a higher immunity than ordinary citizens and hence, a special set of guidelines cannot be issued for them. Imagine the entitlement of the Opposition that it even dared to demand that politicians are a privileged class and need to be treated with kid gloves. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), on the other hand, has always stood for inclusivity and has never played the politics of entitlement, bordering on



unfounded narcissism. Abhishek Manu Singhvi, the lawyer for the Opposition, eventually had to eat humble pie. He took the court through certain statistics to argue that Centrally controlled investigating agencies are being increasingly deployed in a 'selective and targeted' manner against political opponents. He argued that between 2004-2014, of the 72 political leaders investigated by the CBI, 43 were from the Opposition, now the same figure has risen to over 95 percent. The same pattern, he alleged, is reflected in ED's investigations as well, with the proportion of Opposition leaders from the total number of politicians investigated rising

from 54 percent (before 2014) to 95 percent (after 2014). After outlining the said figures, Singhvi argued that there is a skewed application of CBI and ED jurisdictions and the skewed application of law has a chilling effect on our democracy. Well, Singhvi clearly suffers from selective amnesia because if democracy has indeed ever been threatened in India, it was only when the Congress regime was in power, including the dark era of Emergency under the draconian Indira Gandhi, from 1975 to 1977. "Are you saying that because of these statistics, there should be immunity from investigation?" Chief Justice Chandrachud asked Singhvi. Political leaders

can't claim higher immunity, the CJI added, saying, "The problem with this petition is that you are trying to extrapolate statistics into guidelines, where the statistics only apply to politicians. But, we cannot have guidelines exclusively for politicians." Singhvi, in a futile bid to score some brownie points for his petitioners, added, "Mass arrests are a threat to democracy. It is a sign of authoritarianism. The process becomes the punishment." To this absurd and devious charge by Singhvi, the CJI went on to say, "Political leaders stand absolutely on the same standing as the citizens of the country. They do not claim a higher identity. How can there be a different set of procedures for them?"

Chief Justice Chandrachud, while asking the Opposition/petitioners to come back with specific instances, said that the top court could not lay down abstract guidelines, adding, "It would be dangerous to formulate general guidelines in the absence of such specific facts." However, the biggest rebuttal and a clear snub to the 14 Opposition parties came when the CJI told Singhvi, "When you say that

space for Opposition has shrunk, the remedy is in that space, the political space. Not the court." With those words, the CJI called out the bluff of India's electorally vanquished Opposition which was desperately trying to find a judicial remedy to a political matter, after repeatedly losing elections at the hustings. This petition by Singhvi, on behalf of the Opposition, was basically put in a trash can by the apex court, sending out a loud and clear message that any attempts to delegitimise the ED and CBI or the Modi government's war against corruption, will not find any takers in the highest echelons of the judiciary unless backed by hard facts. Speaking of PM Modi's unrelenting anti-corruption crusade, besides the April 5, 2023, verdict which came as a shot in the arm for the Modi government, even back in 2022, on July 27 last year, the apex court upheld the constitutional validity of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, (PMLA), 2002, thereby dismantling the puerile hopes of a debilitated Opposition which wanted PMLA provisions to be diluted.

## China's new strategy for Taiwan-US meet—show Xi as peacemaker, not rile up domestic protesters

By AADIL BRAR

Beijing's calculated military response to Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen meeting with US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in California didn't create a splash on Chinese social media. The 'Joint Sword' exercise launched from 8-10 April failed to achieve a complete blockade of Taiwan. President Xi Jinping was likely trying to balance presenting himself as peacemaker-in-chief and defending China's 'national sovereignty' over Taiwan. Aircraft sorties were again hovering over the Taiwan Strait, as we saw during last year's Taiwan visit by Nancy Pelosi. Beijing was waiting for President Tsai to return to Taipei to announce the 'Joint Sword' exercise. But there are several differences between Beijing's response to the two Taiwan-US contacts. Precision

attack simulation

On 8 April, the PLA sent 71 aircraft and 9 PLA Navy vessels across the Taiwan Strait, of which 45 aircraft crossed the median line. If that wasn't enough, on 10 April, the PLA set a record by sending 91 aircraft across Taiwan Strait, 54 of those crossed the median line. During the exercise, PLA deployed J-16s and J-10C fighter jets and Y-8 anti-submarine aircraft crossing the median line multiple times over the three-day exercise. The military exercise launched to simulate a blockade around Taiwan during Pelosi's visit lasted four days instead of the three days announced as part of the 'Joint Sword' exercise after Tsai's visit

to the US.

Another stark difference was the PLA deploying the Shandong aircraft carrier near Taiwan Island. Taiwan's Ministry of Defence said



the PLA carrier take-off and landing drills on Sunday from Chinese aircraft carrier Shandong were extremely close to Japan's territorial waters. The situation was unprecedented as Japan had to scramble jets in response. "We confirmed approximately 120

landings and departures on the Chinese navy's Kuznetsov-class aircraft carrier Shandong, 80 times by fighter aircraft and 40 times by helicopters," said Japan's Self-Defense Forces on Monday. On Sunday, the PLA tested the capability of the J-15 aircraft to take off and land from the Shandong aircraft carrier, which departed from Sanya Naval Port in the Chinese province of Hainan earlier in April. A 17-ship fleet of the PLA Navy participated in the exercise.

On Haokan Baidu, a short video-sharing platform, the most viewed video on Monday went with the title "For the first time, the Shandong ship participated in the combat readiness patrol around Taiwan and the 'Joint Sword' exercise". The video was viewed more than 2 million times.

Taiwanese experts noted the significance of deploying the Shandong carrier east of Taiwan. "The drills show that the Shandong aircraft carrier is now a serious threat to eastern Taiwan, which Taiwan's military has traditionally used to preserve and maintain its combat readiness in the event of a full-scale invasion by the PLA since the region is protected by the central mountain range on the west," said retired Air Force Lieutenant General Chang Yen-ting. Besides the deployment of Shandong, the Rocket Army displayed its ability to carry out precision strikes at multiple locations around Taiwan Island. During the exercise, the Rocket Army appears to have tested PHL-191 multiple rocket launchers and DF-11 conventional ballistic missiles, which landed around Taiwan Island at multiple locations.



# 4 Sri Lankan Tamil stowaways caught travelling on cargo ship at Suez Canal checkpoint

**Four men secretly boarded a Liberian flagged vessel when it was at the Colombo Harbour on March 24. The Sri Lankan men were discovered by the captain of the ship at the Suez Canal security checkpoint in Egypt.**

(News Agency)- Four Sri Lankan Tamil stowaways have been handed over to authorities here after they were caught illegally travelling on a cargo vessel dressed as part of the ship's crew.

The four who sneaked into the MV CMA CGM PANAMA containership while it was at the Colombo Harbour last month were discovered by the captain of the ship at the Suez Canal security checkpoint in Egypt, the Colombo Page news portal reported.

The ship was carrying garment exports to Europe from Sri Lanka.

The men were handed over to Sri Lanka Police on Monday, and were remanded by the Acting Magistrate of Galle Premaratne Thiranagama, Newsfirst Lanka



reported on Tuesday.

The four men secretly boarded a Liberian Flagged vessel when it was at the Colombo Harbour on March 24. The ship left the port of Colombo on March 25 and started its journey to Europe, the reports said.

When the ship was entering the

Suez Canal in Egypt, it was discovered that there were four stowaways in the ship who were not known to the captain or the other staff of this ship, it said. The Sri Lankan men were dressed as part of the ship's crew when they were discovered.

The captain informed his parent

company about the incident and on March 28 the four stowaways were handed over to the MV Jackson Bay ship belonging to the same company which was sailing towards Sri Lanka.

They kept the four Sri Lankan youths in a special cell and brought them to the international

waters near the Galle port under strict security.

Following their discovery, the men were handed over to another vessel that passed by and was heading to China, so that they can be handed over to Sri Lankan authorities. The four men were handed over to Sri Lankan authorities in the seas of Galle Harbour. The men were identified as residents from Mullaithivu, Chunnakkam, Kytes, and Welivithurai, the report added.

The Department of Immigration and Emigration said that a special investigation was launched to determine how these men entered the Colombo Port, and the vessel. Action will be taken not only against the four Sri Lankans but also against the people who aided and abetted them, the authorities said.



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# RoboDog adds muscle to New York City's high-tech policing

A robotic dog, weighing 70 pounds (32 kg), was among the three new high-tech policing devices unveiled by New York City officials. These devices would be inducted into the New York Police Department.

(News Agency)-New York City officials on Tuesday made public three new high-tech policing devices, including a robotic dog, a GPS tracker for stolen cars and a cone-shaped security robot. The new devices have a GPS tracker for stolen cars and a cone-shaped security robot. They will be rolled out in a way that's "transparent, consistent and always done in close collaboration with the people we serve," Police Commissioner Keechant Sewell was quoted as saying by a report by The Associated Press (AP). The Commissioner was accompanied by Mayor Eric Adams and other officials at Times Square, where the security robot and a 70-pound (32 kg) mechanical canine called 'Digidog' were unveiled. "Digidog is out of the pound.

Digidog is now part of the toolkit that we are using," said Adams, a Democrat and former police officer. Adams' predecessor, Bill de Blasio, had leased New York City's first robot police dog in 2020 but the contract was cut short following pressure from critics who described it as "creepy and dystopian", the AP report said. Asserting that he will not bow to pressure from opponents, Adams said, "A few loud people were opposed to it and we took a step back. That is not how I operate. I operate on looking at what's best for the city." The remote-controlled Digidog would be deployed in emergency situations such as hostage standoffs beginning this summer, Adams said. "If you have a barricaded suspect, if you have someone

that's inside a building that is armed, instead of sending police in there, you send Digidog in there. So these are smart ways of using good technologies," he stated. The New York Police Department will pilot the tracking system named StarChase that will allow police officers to track the location of a stolen car with a GPS tag attached to it. The pilot programme for this system will end in 90 days, according to officials. Police officials said it will deploy the Autonomous Security Robot inside Times Square subway station in a seven-month pilot programme beginning this summer. The device would be first be joined by a human partner, police said, the AP report said. Critics slammed the decision



to roll out the mechanical canine and other high-tech tracking devices. "This latest announcement is just the most recent example of how Mayor Adams allows unmitigated overspending of the NYPD's massively bloated budget," said Ileana Mendez-Penate, programme director of Communities United for Police Reform. "The NYPD is buying robot dogs and other fancy tech, while New Yorkers can't

access food stamps because city agencies are short-staffed, and New Yorkers are getting evicted because they can't access their right to counsel," Mendez-Penate added. Albert Fox Cahn, executive director of the Surveillance Technology Oversight Project, said, "The NYPD is turning bad science fiction into terrible policing. New York deserves real safety, not a knockoff RoboCop."

## US will turn over every rock to find source of classified documents' leak: Defence Secretary

The United States will investigate the leak of highly classified documents that supposedly contain information about its key allies, including Ukraine's military capabilities and adversaries, and the presence of Western special troops in the war-torn nation.

(News Agency)-The United States will probe the recent purported leak of classified documents until the source is identified, Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Tuesday (local time). Over 50 documents labelled as "Secret" and "Top Secret", which first surfaced in February-March on social media, were reviewed by Reuters. These documents purportedly contain information about the military capabilities of some US allies and adversaries. Some of the most sensitive data supposedly includes details related to Ukraine's military capabilities and shortcomings, while one document indicates a small number of Western special troops in the European nation. "We will continue to investigate and turn over every rock until we find the source of this and



the extent of it," Austin said during a press conference at the State Department. The Pentagon was made aware of the documents posted on February 28 and March 1 but was unsure if there were other documents that were available

online, said Austin. "These are things that we will find out as we continue to investigate," he said. Some US officials and national security experts suspect that the leaker could be American given the breadth and sensitive

nature of the information mentioned in the reports. More theories could crop up as the probe progresses. US Central Intelligence Agency Director William Burns termed the leaks "deeply unfortunate". He, however, did not elaborate

on what he described as "quite intense" investigations by the Pentagon and the Justice Department. "We need to learn lessons from that, as well, about how we can tighten procedures," Burns said at Rice University in Texas. Investigations are underway to find out which person or group might have had the ability to publish the intelligence documents. The leaks could cause more damage to the credibility of the US government since the 2013 publication of thousands of reports on WikiLeaks, Reuters reported. Deputy undersecretary of defense for intelligence and security Milancy Harris is leading the Pentagon's investigation to gauge the potential impact of the leaked reports, a US official told Reuters.



## California assembly passes resolution urging US Congress to recognise 1984 anti-Sikh riots as 'genocide'



Bains is the first-ever elected Sikh member of the California state assembly.

The resolution was co-sponsored by assembly member Carlos Villapudua. Only other Hindu member, Ash Kalra, also voted in favour of the resolution.

The resolution spoke about a 'Widow Colony' in the national capital and said it still housed "Sikh women who were assaulted, raped, tortured, and forced to witness the dismemberment, burning and murder of their families, and who are still calling for justice against the perpetrators".

"In 2015, the California assembly also passed a resolution terming the anti-Sikh violence as pogrom," Pritpal Singh, president of the American Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, was quoted by Times of India as saying.

(News Agency)-The California state assembly passed a resolution, requesting the US Congress to formally recognise the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in India as 'genocide'. The resolution also urged the US Congress to condemn the violence.

The resolution, passed on Monday by the California assembly, said the Sikh community in the US had not yet recovered from the physical and psychological trauma of the

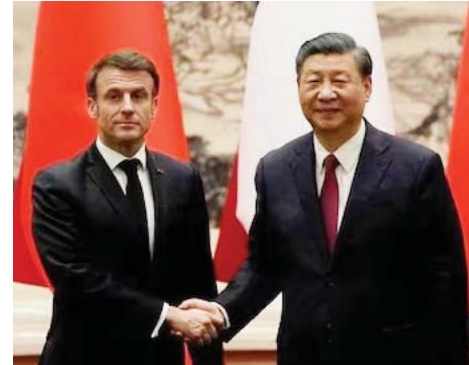
riots, and urged the US Congress to formally recognise and condemn the November 1984 anti-Sikh violence as a genocide, news agency PTI reported.

The same resolution was passed by the Senate of New Jersey on January 6 last year, according to a Times of India report.

It was introduced by assembly member Jasmeet Kaur Bains on March 22. It was passed unanimously by the California state assembly.

## Taiwanese official invokes France's founding ideals after Macron's 'puzzling' speech

(News Agency)- Comments by French President Emmanuel Macron on Taiwan are puzzling, a senior Taiwanese politician said, wondering whether France's founding ideals of liberty,



equality and fraternity are now out of fashion.

Macron, in comments in an interview on a trip to China that was meant to showcase European unity on China policy, cautioned against being drawn into a crisis over Taiwan driven by an "American rhythm and a Chinese overreaction". He also called for the European Union to reduce its dependence on

the United States and to become a "third pole" in world affairs alongside Washington and Beijing.

Taiwan parliament speaker You Si-kun, writing on Facebook late Tuesday above a screengrab of a report about Macron's comments on Taiwan, questioned the French commitment to freedom.

"Are 'liberté, égalité, fraternité' out of fashion?," he wrote, referring to the official French motto of "liberty, equality, fraternity".

"Is it OK just to ignore this once it's part of the constitution? Or can advanced democratic countries ignore the lives and deaths of people in other countries?" added You, one of the founders of Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party. "The actions of President Macron, a leading international democracy, leave me puzzled."

## Earthquake, villages carpeted in grey ash: The aftermath of Russia's most active volcanic eruption

The Kamchatka Peninsula, which extends into the Pacific Ocean, is one of the world's most concentrated areas of geothermal activity, with about 30 active volcanoes. Tuesday's volcanic eruption spewed clouds of dust 20 kilometers (12 miles) into the sky.

(News Agency)-A vast cloud of ash was shot into the sky as soon as Russia's most active volcanoes erupted on the far eastern Kamchatka peninsula on Tuesday. In no time, the ash smothered villages in drifts of grey volcanic dust and triggered an aviation warning.

According to the Kamchatka Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences' Geophysical Survey, the Shiveluch volcano erupted just after midnight and reached a crescendo about six hours later, spewing out an ash cloud over an area of 108,000 square kilometres (41,700 square miles).

Mudflow warnings were issued along a nearby highway as the lava flow tumbled from the volcano, thus melting snow.

Villages were carpeted in drifts of grey ash as deep as 8.5 centimetres (3.5 inches), the deepest in 60 years.

"The ash reached 20 kilometres high, the ash cloud moved



westwards and there was a very strong fall of ash on nearby villages," Danila Chebrov, director of the Kamchatka branch of the Geophysical Survey told Reuters. "The volcano was preparing for this for at least a year and the process is continuing though it has calmed a little now," Chebrov said.

### EARTHQUAKE AFTER VOLCANIC ERUPTION

Nearly 24 hours after the volcano began erupting, a 5.8 magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of Kamchatka, the geological

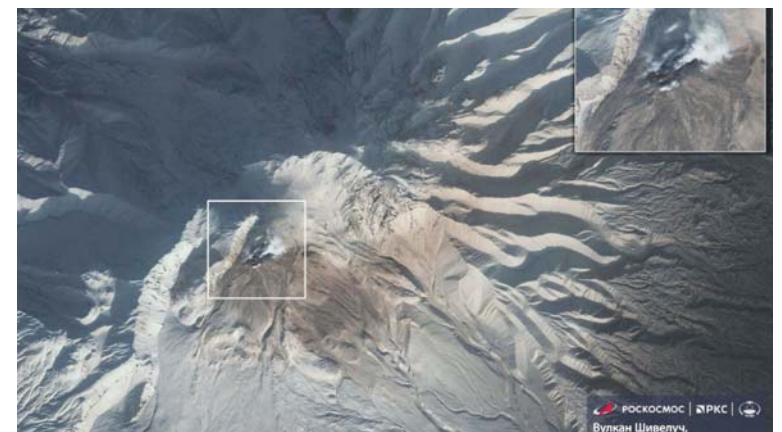
survey confirmed.

Russian scientists said the quake was an aftershock from an April 3 earthquake.

About 300,000 people live on Russia's vast Kamchatka peninsula, which juts into the Pacific Ocean northeast of Japan.

The volcano, one of Kamchatka's largest and most active, would probably calm now, Chebrov told Reuters, though he cautioned that further major ash clouds could not be excluded.

Chebrov said the lava flows



should not reach local villages. There were no immediate reports of casualties, though scientists said the volcano was still erupting 15 hours after the start of the eruption.

### FLIGHTS DISRUPTED

Meanwhile, the Kamchatka Volcanic Eruption Response Team (KVERT) issued a red notice for aviation, saying "ongoing activity could affect international and low-flying aircraft".

Some schools on the peninsula, about 6,800 km east of Moscow,

were closed and residents were ordered to stay indoors, head of the Ust-Kamchatsky municipal region Oleg Bondarenko said in a Telegram post.

Shiveluch has had an estimated 60 substantial eruptions in the past 10,000 years, the last major one being in 2007.

It has two main parts, the smaller of which - Young Shiveluch - scientists have reported as being extremely active in recent months, with a peak of 2,800 metres (9,186 feet) that protrudes out of the 3,283 metre-high Old Shiveluch.



# Pegasus-like spyware used to target journalists and politicians

A covert Israel-based spyware company with hacking capabilities comparable to NSO Group's Pegasus has customers in at least 10 countries, including North America and Europe. A recent report reveals that its hacking tools have been used against opposition party politicians and journalists using a zero-click exploit, according to research by Microsoft and the nonprofit Canadian research organisation, Citizen Lab released on Tuesday. In a separate analysis made public on the same day, Microsoft links malware DEV-0196 to the Israel-based private company called QuaDream. Thereafter, Citizen Lab used the data to track down the victims, and together in their latest report, they analyse how the spyware works and which countries operated servers for receiving the information which the spyware captured. While the company has no website, and there is little public reporting about it in the media, with a few exceptions.

The reference to QuaDream can be traced back to Meta's December 2022 Threat report that observed the company's testing ability to exploit iOS and Android mobile devices with the intent "to exfiltrate various types of data including messages, images, video and audio files, and geolocation." Citizen Lab reported that it had been able to identify a handful of civil society, NGO workers

and journalists whose iPhones had been hacked using surveillance software developed by the Israeli company. QuaDream Ltd also known by the name 'Reign' created by ex-Israeli military and intelligence professionals, is a lower-profile competitor to the Israeli spyware company NSO Group, which was earlier banned by the U.S. government over allegations of abuse.

The report also mentions that it has located QuaDream servers in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Ghana, Israel, Mexico, Romania, Singapore, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Uzbekistan. It noted that some of those countries, including Mexico and UAE, have widespread human rights issues and have been accused of deploying spyware on peaceful assemblies and dissent in the past. No specific cases related to Indian operations have been found. Like NSO Group and other commercial spyware firms, QuaDream employed "complicated and opaque" corporate practices that are designed to evade public scrutiny and accountability. It primarily targeted Apple devices, specifically iOS 14, but there were indications that some of the code could also be used on Android devices. However, it's highly likely that malware DEV-0196 has updated their code, targeting newer versions to account for this.

The system worked in part by

sending malicious "invisible iCloud calendar invitations" to Apple devices that would not be seen by the targets. When calendar invitations with backdated timestamps are received on iOS devices, they are automatically added to the user's calendar without any notification or prompt, allowing the zero-click exploit called 'ENDOFDAYS' to run without user interaction and the attacks to be undetectable by the targets. Such attacks are known as "zero-click" because users of the devices do not have to click on any malicious link or take any action in order to be infected. The spyware hosts a monitor agent, a native Mach-O file written in Objective-C, which is responsible for reducing the forensic footprint of the malware to prevent detection and hinder investigations.

The highly sophisticated spyware has the capability to extract device information (such as iOS version and battery status), Wi-Fi information (such as SSID and airplane mode status), cellular information, send and retrieve files, get the device geolocation, monitor phone calls, generate iCloud time-based one-time password to login to your iCloud account and even use the device front and back camera in the background.

The surveillance malware also has the capability to self-delete itself and clean out any traces left behind by the spyware itself, from victims' iPhones to evade detection.

Pegasus Maker and QuaDream As per the CitizenLab report, QuaDream sells its eavesdropping services to government agencies just like its better-known rival, NSO Group, maker of the Pegasus spyware. But unlike NSO, the company doesn't need export licenses as it deals through a reseller based outside Israel, most notably the Cypriot firm InReach. In 2021, QuaDream and NSO were accused of using the same iPhone software flaws to install spyware that could capture data, record calls and activate the camera secretly, without the need for any user interaction. Apple sent out warnings to affected users, including some of the ones now identified as QuaDream targets, and patched the flaws. Since NSO introduced the Pegasus spyware to the global market in 2011, it solved the biggest pressing issue of the 21st century that "criminals and terrorists had better technology for encrypting their communications than investigators had to decrypt them." The spyware aided Mexican authorities to capture the drug lord known as El Chapo, Joaquín Guzmán Loera. Investigators in the UK have employed Pegasus to thwart terrorist plots, fight organized crime and, in one case, take down a global child abuse ring. Tech giants like Microsoft, Meta and Apple, have been doing their fair bit to disrupt spyware operations and publicise their

findings. Meta reported in its 'Threat Report on the Surveillance-for-Hire Industry' released in December last year that it disabled 250 accounts that QuaDream developers were apparently using to test their ability to extract messages and videos from mobile devices. However, the new revelations mark another blow to Apple, which has marketed its security features as among the best in the world. Reign a.k.a QuaDream appears to be a potent threat to the integrity of the company's mobile phones. The Pentagon on March 27, 2023, kicked off its long-awaited commercial spyware executive order, which prohibits American agencies from "operationally" using commercial spyware when they find that it poses a national security or counterintelligence risk to the United States. It also bars the US government from using spyware when there's a major risk that foreign governments use such tools to violate human rights or target Americans. ("Operational use" under the order means accessing a computer remotely without permission for purposes such as tracking locations or stealing information.)

"Ultimately, this report is a reminder that the industry for mercenary spyware is larger than any one company, and that continued vigilance is required by researchers and potential targets alike," Citizeb Labs concluded in its report.

## Indian-origin start-up executives convicted on \$1 billion corporate fraud charges

Two Indian-origin executives of a Chicago-based start-up have been convicted by a federal jury in the US of running a \$1 billion corporate fraud scheme that targeted the company's clients, lenders and investors. Following a 10-week-long trial, jurors on Tuesday found health technology company Outcome Health co-founder and former CEO Rishi Shah guilty on 19 of 22 counts, co-founder and former president Shradha Agarwal guilty on 15 of 17 counts and former chief operating officer Brad Purdy guilty on 13 of 15 counts. Shah, 37, was convicted of five counts of mail fraud, 10 counts of wire fraud, two counts of bank fraud and two counts of money laundering. Agarwal, 37, was convicted of five counts of mail

fraud, eight counts of wire fraud, and two counts of bank fraud, while Purdy, 33, was convicted of five counts of mail fraud, five counts of wire fraud, two counts of bank fraud, and one count of false statements to a financial institution. The defendants face a maximum penalty of 30 years in prison for each count of bank fraud and 20-year imprisonment for each count of wire fraud and mail fraud. Shah faces a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison for each count of money laundering. A sentencing hearing will be scheduled at a later date.

A statement issued by the Justice Department said on Tuesday that the company installed television screens and tablets in doctors' offices around the US and then sold advertising space on those

devices to clients, most of whom were pharmaceutical companies. According to evidence presented at the trial, Shah, Agarwal, and Purdy sold advertising inventory the company did not have to Outcome's clients, then under-delivered on its advertising campaigns. Despite these under-deliveries, the company still invoiced its clients as if it had delivered in full.

Shah, Agarwal, and Purdy lied or caused others to lie to conceal the under-deliveries from clients and make it appear as if the company was delivering advertising content to the number of screens in the clients' contracts. Purdy and others at the company also inflated metrics that purported to show how frequently patients engaged with the company's tablets

installed in doctors' offices. According to the trial evidence, the scheme targeting the company's clients began in 2011, lasted until 2017, and resulted in at least \$45 million of overbilled advertising services. Shah, Agarwal, and Purdy were also convicted of defrauding the company's lenders and investors. The under-delivery to the company's advertising clients resulted in a material overstatement of the company's revenue for the years 2015 and 2016. Shah, Agarwal, and Purdy used inflated revenue figures in the company's 2015 and 2016 audited financial statements to raise \$110 million in debt financing in April 2016, \$375 million in debt financing in December

2016, and \$487.5 million in equity financing in early 2017.

The trio lied to investors and lenders to conceal their ongoing under-delivery of advertising campaigns for clients.

The \$110 million debt financing resulted in a \$30.2 million dividend to Shah and a \$7.5 million dividend to Agarwal; the \$487.5 million in equity financing resulted in a \$225 million dividend to Shah and Agarwal. The verdict represented a stunning fall for the three who were once young stars of Chicago's tech scene. And it may have implications for others in the tech community, with parts of the case focusing on the line between startups' typical growing pains and fraud, the Chicago Tribune reported on Tuesday.



# AAP (Aam Admi Party) gets national party status

The Election Commission (EC), after thorough deliberations, downgraded the recognition status of nine national/state political parties and upgraded the status of 16 political parties on Monday evening.

Earlier, there were seven parties -- Trinamool Congress (TMC), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Congress, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), Communist Party of India (CPI), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and CPI (Marxist) -- recognised as national parties by the Election Commission. On Monday, the NCP, TMC and CPI lost their national party status while Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) was elevated to the coveted league, leaving the country with five national parties. The EC also revoked the state party status granted to Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) in Uttar Pradesh, Bharat Rashtra Samiti (BRS) in Andhra Pradesh, People's Democratic Alliance (PDA) in Manipur, Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) in Puducherry, Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) in West Bengal and Mizoram People's Conference (MPC) in Mizoram.

The Election Commission's review of the status of recognised national and state political parties was done under paras 6A, 6B and 6C of the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968.

Elaborating on the reasons behind the upgradation/downgradation of the status of political parties, sources in the Election Commission told India Today TV, "At the heart of the decision is the will of the voter. If voters want to make a party national, it will be reflected in the way voting happens. If voters don't want parties to become national, that will also be decided by the voting pattern."

"The decision is not a spur of the moment decision. Parties were given more than enough time through various elections to prove their numbers. This change in status comes after many changes," the sources said. **AAP NOW A NATIONAL PARTY**

The EC recognised AAP as a national party as it fulfilled the condition of Para 6B(iii), i.e. recognition as a state party in four states, based on its electoral performance in Delhi, Punjab, Goa and Gujarat.

The party is in power with big majorities and very large vote shares in Delhi and Punjab. In the Goa Assembly elections held in March last year, it received 6.77% of the vote.

AAP needed 6% of the vote in the Assembly elections in either Himachal Pradesh or Gujarat to be recognised as a state party in a fourth state, which would qualify it for recognition as a national party. In Gujarat, the party got

13% vote, which helped it to achieve the coveted tag of national party. Soon after the EC's announcement, Kejriwal tweeted, "National party in such a short time? This is nothing less than a miracle. Many congratulations to all. Crores of people of the country have brought us here. People expect a lot from us. Today, people have given us a huge responsibility."

This is a significant moment for AAP, considering the fact that the party was established 10 years ago, in November 2012.

**WHY TMC, NCP, CPI ARE NO LONGER NATIONAL PARTIES**

The top electoral body stripped the national party status of TMC, NCP and CPI. The Commission said that NCP and TMC will be recognised as state parties in Nagaland and Meghalaya respectively, based on their performance in the recently concluded Assembly elections in those states.

The TMC was granted the national party tag in 2016. However, its poor showing in Goa and some Northeastern states in the respective Assembly polls led to its withdrawal of the status.

According to EC, "TMC did not fulfill the criteria of recognition as a state party (as laid out in Para 6A of the

Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968) in Arunachal Pradesh, both at the General Election to the Legislative Assembly of Arunachal Pradesh, 2014 and also at the General Election to the House of the People, 2014". The NCP was formed by Sharad Pawar in 1999 and became a national party in 2000 following a series of wins in several elections. NCP lost its national party status because of its performance in Goa, Manipur and Meghalaya.

The CPI, founded in 1925, was recognised as a national party in 1989, but the tag was withdrawn after its poor performance in West Bengal and Odisha elections.

**HOW CAN A PARTY BECOME A NATIONAL PARTY?**

As per the Election Commission's Political Parties and Election Symbols 2019 handbook, a political party would be considered a national party if it is recognised in four or more states; or if its candidates polled at least 6% of total valid votes in any four or more states in the last Lok Sabha or Assembly elections, and has at least four MPs in the last Lok Sabha polls; or if it has won at least 2% of the total seats in the Lok Sabha from not less than three states.

## Commercial real estate is in trouble. Why you should be paying attention

Economists are growing concerned about the \$20 trillion commercial real estate (CRE) industry.

After decades of thriving growth bolstered by low interest rates and easy credit, commercial real estate has hit a wall.

Office and retail property valuations have been falling since the pandemic brought about lower occupancy rates and changes in where people work and how they shop. The Fed's efforts to fight inflation by raising interest rates have also hurt the credit-dependent industry.

Recent banking stress will likely add to those woes. Lending to commercial real estate developers and managers largely comes from small and mid-sized banks, where the pressure on liquidity has been most severe. About 80% of all bank loans for commercial properties come from regional banks, according to Goldman Sachs economists. "I do think you will see banks pull back on commercial real estate commitments more rapidly in a world [where] they're more focused on liquidity," wrote Goldman Sachs Research's

Richard Ramsden in a note on Friday. "And I do think that is going to be something that will be important to watch over the coming months and quarters." Recently, short-sellers have stepped up their bets against commercial landlords, indicating that they think the market will continue to fall as regional banks limit access to credit. Real estate is the most shorted industry globally and the third most in the United States, according to S&P Global. So just how big of a deal is this threat to the economy? Before the Bell spoke with Xander Snyder, senior commercial real estate economist at First American, to find out.

This interview has been edited for clarity and length. Before the Bell: Why should retail investors pay attention to what's going on in commercial real estate right now?

Xander Snyder: Banks have a lot of exposure to commercial real estate. That impacts banking stability. So the health of the market has an impact on the larger economy, even if you're not interested in commercial real

estate for commercial real estate's sake.

How bad are things right now?

Price growth is slowing and for some asset classes it's starting to decline. Office properties have been more challenged than others for obvious reasons.

Now private lending to the industry is starting to slow as well — bank lending was beginning to dry up over a month before the Silicon Valley Bank failure even happened. Credit was getting scarce for all commercial real estate and a fresh bank failure on top of that only exacerbates that trend.

How do you expect banking turmoil to make things worse? I think more regulatory scrutiny is coming for smaller banks, which tend to have a larger concentration of commercial real estate loans. That means small and medium-sized banks are going to tighten lending standards even more, making it more difficult to get loans. Does the possibility of a looming recession play into this?

As credit becomes scarcer and more expensive, it's hard to know exactly what buildings are

worth. You get this gap opening up between sellers and buyers: Sellers want to get late 2021 prices and buyers are saying 'we don't know what things are worth so we'll give you this lowball offer.' That was already happening and the result of that price differential was bringing deal activity down.

There's no broad agreement on asset valuations. Economic uncertainty will exacerbate that trend. And if you're a bank, it's a lot more difficult to lend against the value of a building if you don't know what the value of the building really is.

So how worried should we be? A lot of people hear commercial real estate and they think it's all the same thing and the trends are they're all the same but they're not. The underlying fundamentals of multifamily and industrial assets remain relatively stable on a national level.

It's different for office and retail properties. There's been a fundamental shift in how we use office space and that has changed demand. That's something you should have your

eye on, especially as low-interest office loans come due. We're running into a situation where office-owners have to refinance at a higher rate and only 50% of the building is being used. That doesn't translate to good cash flow metrics for the lender.

I think retail also faces challenges. A lot of people are still sitting on excess pandemic savings that are beginning to be spent down and the Fed is certainly trying to nudge unemployment up a little bit. So I imagine that both of those things will impact retail spending and therefore impact retail as an asset class.

Economists forecast recession and elevated inflation. Stagflation, the combination of high inflation and a weakening economy, could make a comeback. The majority of economists expect a recession sometime this year and forecast that inflation will remain above 4%, according to The National Association for Business Economics' latest survey, released Monday.





# Heatwaves ahead:

## A worry not just for economists but politicians as well

**Over the past few years, heatwave conditions in India have gotten worse and the weather department has predicted a longer spell of hot days in 2023. The possibility of worsening heatwave conditions this year has not only worried economists, but politicians as well.**

The scorching heatwaves that haunted India for a long period in 2022 are back. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast very hot days in the coming days and weeks while issuing heatwave warnings for several parts of the country. These are developments that will be closely watched not just by economists, but by politicians as well. India is building up to a high-stakes general election year. And, like in every election, the state of the economy will be a top focus area for all politicians - whether from the ruling party or the opposition - as they gear up to campaign for the 2024 polls. Longer periods of heatwaves during the summer months of this year could have a negative impact on key sectors that contribute to economic growth - a development that could hurt sentiments ahead of the crucial Lok Sabha elections next year.

But in what ways do heatwaves exactly impact the economy and, by extension, the politics of the country? Let us understand that.

### IMPACT OF HEATWAVES OVER THE YEARS

Over the past few years, heatwave conditions in India have gotten worse. The situation was particularly scary last year when the country experienced twice as many heatwave days as compared to the same period in 2012.

The average number of heatwave days rose to a decadal high in 2022, as per data released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

The rising mercury level has not only made summer months unbearable for Indian citizens, but it has also taken a big toll on economic growth over the years.

### LABOUR LOSS

A 2022 report, compiled by an international

partnership of organizations, stated that the country suffered an income loss of USD 159 billion in the service, manufacturing, agriculture, and construction sectors due to extreme heat in 2021.

Meanwhile, a World Bank report indicates that the country will suffer a GDP loss of 2.5 per cent to 4.5 per cent by 2030 from only lost labour hours due to extreme heat and humidity conditions. By 2050, climate change-related impact is projected to reduce agricultural yields in India by up to 25 per cent.

It also indicated that 40 per cent of India's GDP is dependent on heat-exposed work, and in just seven years, it could lead to 3.4 crore job losses.

And this is just the impact of heatwaves on labour force productivity. Soaring temperatures have an equally devastating impact on crucial agriculture, which could lead to prolonged periods of high inflation.

### CROP DAMAGE AND RISING INFLATION

The farm and agriculture sectors, which contribute to 14 per cent of India's GDP, play a vital role in balancing growth. More than half of the country's population is dependent on it for their livelihoods.

A 2022 report prepared by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research indicated that the scorching heatwave impacted crops, fruits, vegetables and animals in the nine states, including agriculture-heavy states like Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra.

In fact, the heatwave conditions also impacted milk production as body temperatures of livestock and milch animals increased by 0.5 to 3.5 degrees Celsius. Milk yields were reduced by as much as 15 per cent.

This led to a sharp rise in inflation across the country, and it took months of efforts by the government to bring the situation under control.

Farm production and income are crucial for India, and more so in election years.

### MOUNTING PRESSURES

The situation could get far worse this year if the weather department's prediction of a longer spell of heatwave is accurate.

At a time when the global economy is facing a slowdown and inflation is rising across the globe, a longer duration of heatwaves could mount additional pressure on India's economy.

Radhika Rao, senior economist at DBS Bank, said in a recent interview that farm sector outputs could be affected if weather forecasts are accurate. Crop production has already been impacted in parts of the country and the situation could worsen if there is no respite from the heatwave conditions.

Many essential food items, including grains, pulses and cereals, are in tight supply and the prolonged heatwave could put further pressure on the government to support farmers, according to economists.

The government has already acknowledged that there are risks to growth and prices if El Nino conditions prevail. India's Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran stressed the need to be ready with both supply side and monetary policy measures if El Nino disturbs the monsoon season. The RBI in its past two policy reviews said it is aware of the risks from adverse weather events.

### OTHER RISK FACTORS

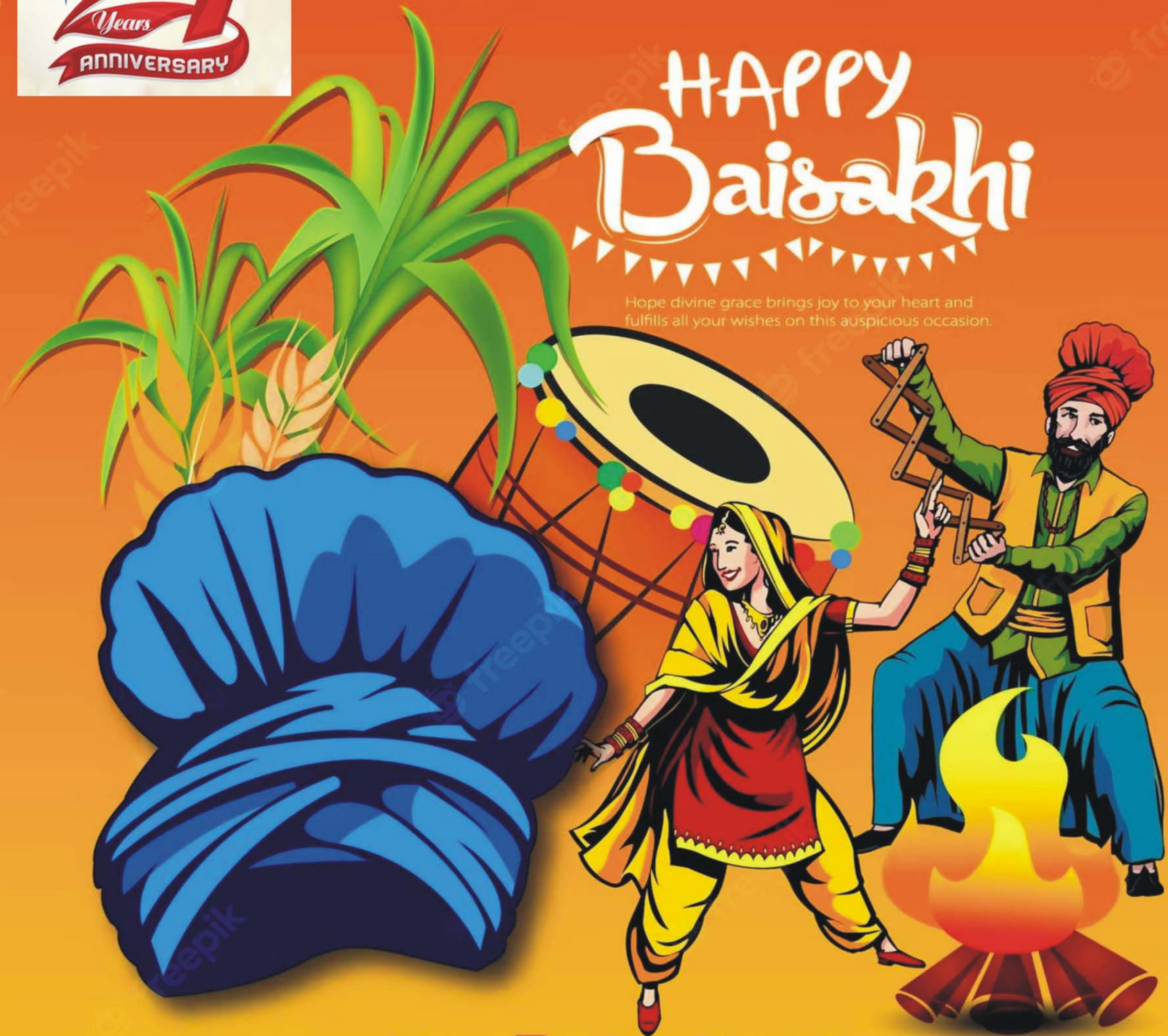
Prolonged heatwave conditions will also lead to increased power demand, which can put pressure on the government to import more energy. This could have a direct impact on fiscal expenditure. It may be noted that rising temperatures could increase energy demand in India by up to 50 per cent by 2030.





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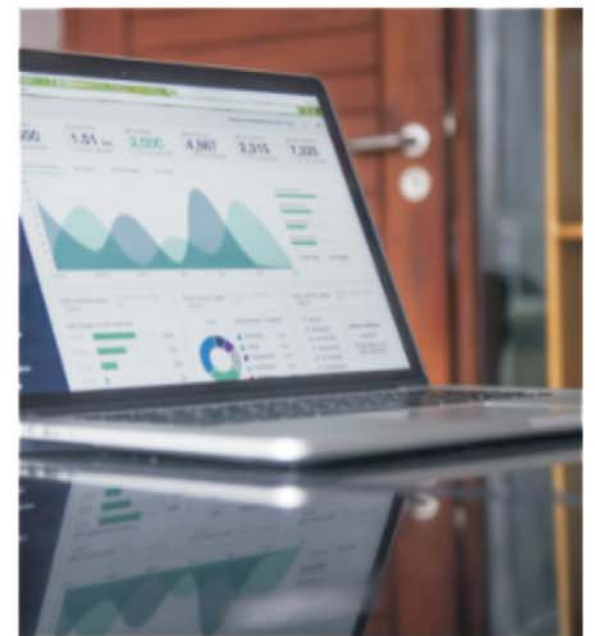
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# Nandini controversy: How Amul's chocolates have a taste of Karnataka

**The relationship between Amul and Karnataka isn't new. In focus due to the raging row over the Nandini issue, did you know that Amul has been helping cocoa farmers in Karnataka for decades?**

The war between Nandini, the homegrown milk brand of Karnataka, and Amul from Gujarat has escalated into a full-blown election issue between the BJP and the Congress with the JD(S) adding to the mix. Given that the Nandini vs Amul issue could impact the upcoming polls, the BJP has reportedly asked Amul to put its dairy foray into Karnataka on hold.

The BJP state government clearly didn't anticipate such a big backlash towards the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation's (GCMMF) business move and is now in damage-control mode. But did you know that Karnataka farmers already have a relationship with GCMMF's Amul that began several decades back? **THE COCOA WAR** Cadbury was launched in India in

1948, and by the 1960s, had a monopoly over the chocolate market in India. When C Subramaniam, the agriculture minister of India (1964-67), who is considered one of the three key leaders of India's Green Revolution (the others being MS Swaminathan and Nobel Laureate Norman E Borlaug), realized that cocoa farmers weren't being paid a fair price because of this monopoly, he recommended to Verghese Kurian that Amul should foray into chocolates.

Thus, in the 1960s, Kurian began to work with cocoa and arecanut farmers in Kerala and Karnataka to set up co-operative societies, and in 1973, the Central Arecanut & Cocoa Marketing and Processing Co-operative Limited or CAMPCO was born in Mangalore, Karnataka.

Meanwhile, Amul set up its first chocolate factory in Anand, Gujarat, in 1973 (with the help of Nestle) at a cost of Rs 190 crore. Cocoa was transported from Kerala and Karnataka to Gujarat for chocolate production. And the first 40 gm and 80 gm packets of Amul Milk Chocolate were made in 1973, all thanks to Karnataka and Kerala cocoa and arecanut farmers.

**AMUL HELPS KARNATAKA AND KERALA FARMERS**

What Amul and Kurian did was help Karnataka and Kerala farmers in three important ways – first, the whole idea of making chocolates was to help cocoa farmers in the south; second, the farmers were organised into co-operative societies (similar to the ones in Gujarat), so they could control the prices and third, Cadbury no longer



had the monopoly over the market, and Amul was offering them a better price.

If the South states are supplying cocoa and cocoa products successfully to companies across India, it is thanks to C Subramaniam, Verghese Kurian and Amul. Today, Karnataka's CAMPCO also services other states like Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, New Delhi, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Assam and Goa. It produces around 23,000 tonnes of cocoa and cocoa products every year and has

expanded its footprint.

While the Amul versus Nandini controversy is in full swing, people seem to have forgotten that Amul has been playing a key role in helping the cocoa and arecanut Karnataka farmers since the 1960s. Even today, Amul buys the bulk of its requirements from CAMPCO in Mangalore.

Politicians may be milking the Amul vs Nandini issue right now with the upcoming polls in mind, but it's just a matter of time before Amul sweetens the taste, thanks to its chocolates.

## NAPCA (National Asian Pacific Center on Aging) -Special Feature

National Asian Pacific Center On Aging (NAPCA) is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of life of AANHPI older adults and their families. We operate a NAPCA Senior Assistance Center for Older Adults and Caregivers which is available in five (5) different languages. In this column, we want to share some of the important questions we received from readers. Hope you will find them useful.

**Q1. My husband is turning 65 soon and he is still working. He and I are covered by his employer's medical insurance. He does not have 40 working quarter credits yet. Do we still need to join Medicare?**

Most people sign up for both Medicare Part A and Part B when they turn 65. However, if they do not have more than 40 working credits that allow them to get premium-free Part A, they must pay \$278 (30-39 credits) or \$506 (less than 30 credits) per month.

If your husband's employer has more than 20 employees and employer-sponsored insurance is "creditable", he may delay signing up for Medicare until he stops working or loses the current employer coverage whichever comes first. He will not pay a penalty for delaying enrollment.

Whether delaying Medicare or enrolling in Medicare, he should check his coverage policy with his employer before making his decision.

**Q2. What happens if I work and get**

**Social Security retirement benefits?**

You can get Social Security retirement benefits and work at the same time. However, if you are younger than FRA (Full Retirement Age which is between 65 and 67 depending on the year you were born) and make more than the yearly earnings limit, your benefit will be reduced. If you are younger than FRA during all of 2023, Social Security Administration deducts \$1 from your benefits for each \$2 you earn above \$21,240. If you turn FRA during 2023, your benefit is deducted \$1 for each \$3 you earn above \$56,520 before your birth month. Starting with the month you reach FRA, your benefits will not be reduced no matter how much you earn.

**Q3. Should I pay taxes on Social Security benefits when I work while receiving retirement benefits?**

**Some people must pay federal income taxes on their Social Security benefits. This usually happens only if you have other substantial income in addition to your benefits. The portion of benefits that are taxable depends on your COMBINED INCOME\* and filing status.**

**If you file as an individual;**

- 1) you pay no tax on your benefits when your combined income is below \$25,000,
- 2) you pay taxes on 50% of your benefits when your combined income is between \$25,000 and \$34,000,
- 3) you pay taxes on 85% of your benefits

when your combined income is more than \$34,000.

If you file as a joint return;

- 1) you pay no tax on your benefits when you and your spouse have combined income below \$32,000,
- 2) you pay taxes on 50% of your benefits when you and your spouse have combined income between \$32,000 and \$44,000,
- 3) you pay taxes on 85% of your benefits when you and your spouse have combined income more than \$44,000.

\*COMBINED INCOME = Your adjusted gross income + Nontaxable interest + ½ of your Social Security benefits

**Q4. I have been a legal permanent resident for over 15 years. My husband worked at a job during all those years. I did not work because he wanted me to stay at home and raise our three children. Last year my husband divorced me. My children are grown so he does not have to pay me anything. Am I eligible for Social Security or Medicare?**

Yes, as a divorced spouse you are entitled to premium-free Medicare Part A and collect Social Security Benefits based on your husband's work credits. If you have been married for over 10 years and remain unmarried after being divorced, you can apply for Social Security Benefits when you turn 62 and premium-free Medicare Part A when you turn 65.

**Q5. I am over 70 and it has been just over 5 years since I received permanent resident status. Now I am qualified to sign up for Medicare and I found that I must pay high monthly premiums because of the lack of Social Security working credits, but I cannot afford it. Should I still sign up for Medicare or can I keep my current individual plan that I got through the Health Insurance Marketplace?**

If you are not eligible for premium-free Part A and are not enrolled in Medicare yet, you can keep your current individual Marketplace plan and premium tax credit benefits. However, if you choose to enroll in Medicare Part A and/or Part B later, you will have to wait to sign up and you may have to pay late enrollment penalties.

Depending on your state's income and asset limit, you may be eligible for Medicare Savings Program (MSP), which can help you pay Medicare part A/part B premiums. To be eligible for MSP, you must enroll in Medicare. Please check your eligibility with the Medicaid office in your state.

###

If you have additional questions regarding the above, or around the topics of Medicare, Medicaid, Affordable Care Act, or others, there are three ways you can reach us. We will answer all of your questions in a timely manner.



# Filling the loopholes: How drug networks evade port security around world and what can be done to fix

**India Today dives into the dark world of drug trafficking in India through the sea routes of the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal after a recent report by the UN calls for enhanced port security measures while also raising alarm about the role of drug dealers in smuggling through ports jointly with local operators and networks.**

A recent report by the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), the United Nations watchdog for narcotics, released on March 2023, detailed data related to drug control efforts around the world. It states that there has been a significant increase in drug seizures in India over the last five years i.e. from 2017 to 2022, with darknet and sea routes having emerged as the preferred mode of smuggling.

One of the key findings of the report is that only 74% of governments provided their statistical forms on time, while 22% of countries and territories failed to submit their reports for 2021 by the June 30, 2022 deadline. Accurate and complete data is critical for monitoring drug control efforts and identifying weaknesses in control systems.

Therefore, the INCB is concerned about the lack of timely reporting. Law enforcement agencies have investigated and found that large criminal networks in India are actively involved in facilitating the transportation of drugs through various means, including ports and other transport channels. These criminal organizations allegedly use their extensive networks to smuggle drugs into the country from other countries and then distribute them through a complex network of dealers and distributors.

The INCB report highlights the significant role played by these criminal entities in the global drug trade, particularly in the trafficking of heroin and other opioids. The amount of illegal drugs seized in 2021 has significantly increased compared to 2017. Specifically, 2,146 kg of narcotics were seized in 2017, whereas 7,282 kg were seized in 2021 as per the report.

In addition, there has been a surge of more than 70 per cent in the seizure of opium. The amount of opium seized was 2,551 kg in 2017, which has increased to 4,386 kg in 2021. There has also been an increase of over 90 per cent in the seizure



of cannabis. In 2017, 3,52,539 kg of cannabis was seized, whereas, in 2021, the amount increased to 6,75,631 kg.

As for cocaine, the amount seized in 2021 was 364 kg. This is a significant increase compared to the average of around 40 kg seized in the past three years. Moreover, in 2021, a staggering 300 kg of cocaine was found in one container. Between July and October 2021, Indian authorities seized heroin weighing 294 kg and 25 kg respectively from Mumbai/Nhava Sheva Port. The heroin was concealed in goods declared as talcum powder and vegetable oils. On 06 July 2021, the Coast Guard also seized 19 packets of drugs, suspected to be Cannabis, that had been dumped at sea off Kutch, Gujarat.

The largest reported drug haul in India in September 2021, authorities detained two containers arriving from Kandahar, Afghanistan, via Bandar Abbas, Iran, at Mundra Port, Gujarat. After examination, 3,004 kg of heroin was seized from the lower layers of jumbo-sized bags containing unprocessed talc powder. On October 2, 2021, the NCB seized drugs from a cruise ship in an undercover operation off the west coast between Mumbai and Goa.

The above drug cases highlighted the scale of drug trafficking operations in Indian ports and the challenges faced

by law enforcement agencies to detect and intercept illicit drugs highlighted by the press information bureau (PIB). India Today's OSINT team spoke with IPS officer Harinarayan Chari Mishra, who has extensive experience in disrupting drug networks within the state and across the country. Mishra expressed his deep concern regarding the infiltration of illegal drugs in the country, he emphasized that "illegal drugs hamper the lives of young people, and drug trafficking is regarded as one of the most profitable illegal businesses in the world".

Mishra highlighted that "there's a need to target both the 'supply chain' and 'demand chains' to effectively combat illegal drug trade. Although police action often disrupts the supply chain, new criminals join the illegal business due to unchanging demand".

"Criminals and local handlers are facilitating drugs network that pushes new youth into the mire of drugs, and places like bars, and pubs are chosen by criminals. In these places, such gangs continuously 'target' the rich youths by assessing their purchasing power and taking them into this trap due to various temptations and pressures. Therefore, it is crucial to raise awareness among young people, conduct awareness campaigns in schools and colleges, and educate parents," Mishra adds. A few months ago,

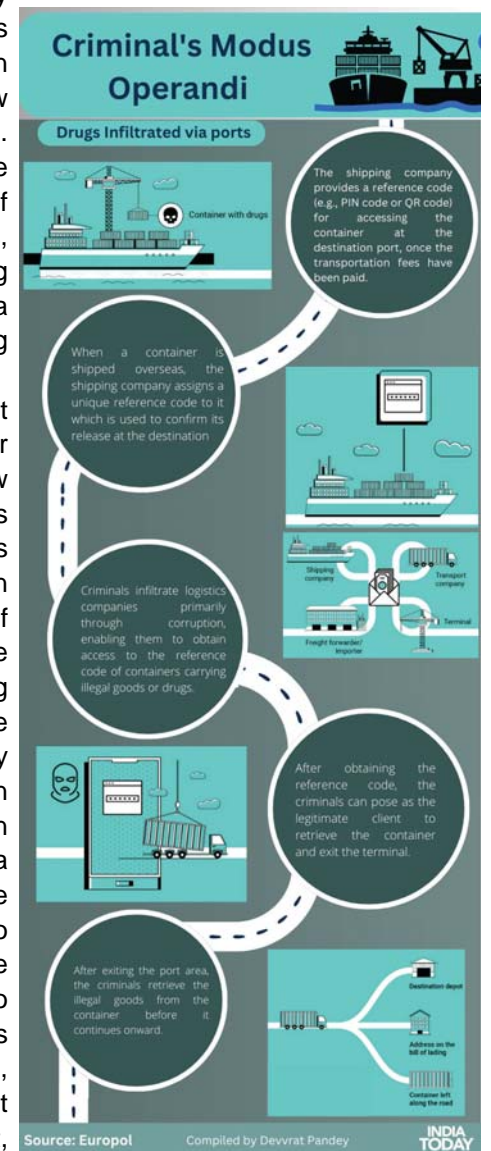
Mishra's team caught a large inter-state gang in Indore that was involved in the illegal MDMA trade worth 70 crores. The operation exposed the names of 35 criminals from eight different states, he mentioned.

The Indian government has taken several steps to combat this growing threat, including increasing security measures at ports and other entry points, as well as increasing cooperation with international law enforcement agencies. However, given the complexity and scale of these criminal networks, the fight against drug trafficking in India remains a challenging and ongoing battle.

Mishra emphasizes that there should be better coordination among law enforcement agencies across different regions or countries. This can facilitate the sharing of intelligence and enable more effective targeting of criminal networks. He highlighted that recently an initiative has been taken in coordination with his team to "start a Narco Helpline in Indore city, dedicated to cracking down on the illegal drug trade. To ensure the effectiveness of such helplines, informer identity is kept confidential. As a result,

the police receive a large amount of information and consequently, the effectiveness of the action increases."

"There's a need for increased investment in technology to enhance the detection and interception of illegal activities in ports or local handlers networks. This can be achieved through the use of advanced scanning technologies and data analytics to identify and track suspicious activities", Mishra said. Modus Operandi in Drug smuggling Drug smugglers and criminal organizations traditionally rely on infiltrating a large number of accomplices to invade ports. However, newer methods that require fewer individuals to be grafted are becoming more popular. Smugglers have adopted a new modus operandi to infiltrate ports and extract illicit goods. One of the methods often practised is the use of misappropriated container reference codes, also known as PIN code fraud.





# Twitter no longer exists: Here's what Elon Musk has done

A recent court document has indicated that Twitter Inc does not exist anymore on paper. It has been merged with an entity called X Corp. Here is all you need to know.



Twitter Inc is no longer an independent company after it was merged with a shell company called X Corp. A court filing revealed that Twitter no longer exists legally and billionaire Elon Musk's X Corp

has absorbed it.

A court document submitted in a California court on April 4 suggested that Twitter no longer exists.

"Twitter Inc. has been merged into X Corp. and no longer

exists. X Corp. is a privately held corporation, incorporated in Nevada, and with its principal place of business in San Francisco, California," read the court document.

This comes at a time when

Twitter is going through sweeping changes after multiple waves of layoffs at the company after Musk's takeover. While the chain of events since Twitter's takeover has led to a lot of speculation and uncertainty, the new revelation provides some clues about Musk's plan for the company.

What is X Corp?

Elon Musk had suggested in the past that buying Twitter is part of a bigger plan to create X, which the billionaires dubbed as an "everything app". Musk has been silent about the Twitter-X merger, but tweeted about it on Tuesday with a single character, "X".

The world's second-richest man has long desired to make X, similar to China's WeChat – a superapp owned

by Tencent Holdings Limited that can be used for everything from payments and booking event tickets to messaging.

It may be noted that Musk also owns the domain X.com, which is the name of the online payments company he started and eventually merged with PayPal.

While Elon Musk first set up a trio of holding companies in Delaware with a variation of the name "X Holdings" in April last year, X Corp was established on March 9 in Nevada, as per records filed in the state.

X Corp's merger with Twitter was submitted on March 15. Filings show that Elon Musk is the president of the firm and its parent, X Holdings Corp, which was also created last month and has an authorized capital of \$2 million.

## Stock market holiday: No trading at BSE & NSE on Ambedkar Jayanti



Here's an important news for those confused whether the stock market is open today or not. The trading at Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) and National Stock Exchange (NSE) will remain shut on April 14, 2023 due to Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar Jayanti.

As per the list of share market holidays available on the Bombay Stock Exchange website, no trading activity in the equity segment, equity derivative segment and the SLB segment will take place today due to Ambedkar Jayanti.

Besides this, trading will be closed at the commodity derivatives segment and electronic gold receipts segment during the morning session from 9 am to 5 pm. But trading at the MCX and NCDEX will take place

in the evening session.

Besides Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar Jayanti, trading at BSE and NSE was shut on April 4 (Mahavir Jayanti) and April 7 (Good Friday). As a result, Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar Jayanti is the last stock market holiday in this month.

Earlier this year, stock markets were also shut on January 26 (Republic Day), March 7 (Holi) and March 30 (Ram Navami). The stock markets will be shut on May 1 (Maharashtra Day), June 28 (Bakri Eid), August 15 (Independence Day), September 19 (Ganesh Chaturthi), Gandhi Jayanti (October 2), October 24 (Dussehra), November 14 (Diwali Balipratipada), November 27 (Guru Nanak Jayanti) and December 25 (Christmas).

## Petrol, diesel prices on April 14: Check rates in your city

Petrol and diesel prices remained unchanged on Friday, Goodreturns website showed. Prices across major cities including New Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai did not mark any shift from yesterday's figures, giving slight relief to the consumers. While this the second consecutive day when some of the major metropolitan cities have not witnessed any change in petrol, diesel prices, the latest figures showed prices remained stable in the National Capital Region (NCR) including Gurugram and Noida as well, which had seen marginal changes yesterday. This would mean, in Gurugram



and Noida a litre of petrol will be sold at ₹97.38 and ₹96.92 respectively. The diesel prices in the two NCR regions will also remain unchanged at ₹90.24 and ₹90.08. The oil marketing companies set these retail prices in tune with global crude

prices after the government freed petrol and diesel rates in 2010 and 2014 respectively. In 2017, it was also decided that new prices would be released daily as compared to previous norm of fortnightly revision.

## Need global coordination to regulate crypto assets: FM Nirmala Sitharaman

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said that there was a greater acceptance among Group of 20 (G20) member countries that any new regulations on the crypto assets need to be globally coordinated. "I am glad to say

that there is a greater acceptance among all G20 members, that any action on crypto assets will have to be global. The G20, I think, has responded fairly with alacrity (on the crypto challenge)," Sitharaman told reporters at a news conference after a

meeting of G20 finance ministers and central bank governors. "The G20 and its members agree that it's not going to be possible to have an independent, standalone country dealing with the crypto assets," the minister added.



## Pooja Hegde's Kisi Ka Bhai Kisi Ki Jaan promotions look in bralette and denims makes an uber-chic statement. See inside



Actor Pooja Hegde is promoting her upcoming film Kisi Ka Bhai Kisi Ki Jaan with Salman Khan, their co-stars and the makers. Pooja has been scoring full marks in the sartorial department with her gorgeous ensembles during promotional events. From chic dresses to colour-coordinated bodycon separates, Pooja has worn it all. Pooja slipped into a bralette and denim jeans for her latest appearance at another event. The star made an uber-chic statement with the ensemble. Check out Pooja's pictures below.

On Thursday, Pooja Hegde stepped out in Mumbai to promote Salman Khan's Kisi Ka Bhai Kisi Ki Jaan. The paparazzi

clicked Pooja during the outing and posted the snippets on social media. The pictures and videos



show Pooja greeting the media and posing for the cameras before leaving for the promotional shoot. Her stylish avatar in the bralette

and the denim jeans garnered her compliments from her fans. A few netizens dropped heart and fire emojis, and a fan commented, "Wow." Keep scrolling to read our download on Pooja's outfit. Pooja Hegde's sleeveless bralette comes in a lemon yellow shade, a cropped length to flaunt her toned midriff, an asymmetric infinity-style hem design, a round neckline, a gathered design all over, and a fitted bust.

Pooja wore the blouse with dark blue-coloured denim jeans featuring a high-rise waistline, patched pockets on the sides, calf-length slits on the front, floor-grazing hem, a baggy silhouette, and side pockets.

## Triphala to hing; best Ayurvedic remedies for optimal bowel health

Ayurveda, an ancient Indian system of medicine, has been around for thousands of years, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a healthy digestive system for overall well-being. In Ayurveda, the digestive system is referred to as Agni, which translates to "fire". When the Agni is strong and balanced, it leads to optimal digestion and absorption of nutrients, which in turn, helps to build strong immunity and faster tissue repair. On the other hand, when the Agni is weak or imbalanced, it can result in a range of digestive issues, such as constipation, diarrhoea, bloating, and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). In Ayurveda, several natural remedies can help promote optimal bowel health. These remedies are safe, effective, and often readily available in your kitchen or local market. (Also read: Natural Ayurvedic remedies for heat rashes) "Our nervous system controlling our digestive functions is closely interconnected with our mind and emotions, making it very important for us to maintain a healthy gut-brain; that led to the creation of a new branch of



physiology called the enteric nervous system. Besides various herbs and churns that need to be taken orally, Ayurvedic remedies for optimal bowel health include stress-relieving practices such as breathing exercises and meditation, as well as external applications like castor oil and hot fomentation over the abdomen to calm the sensitive enteric nervous system," says Anjenay Aggrawal, health expert and founder of Royal Bee Natural Products.

Ayurvedic remedies for optimal bowel health: He further shared with HT

Lifestyle, some of the best Ayurvedic treatments for optimal bowel health.

1. Triphala: Triphala combines three fruits - amla, haritaki, and bibhitaki. It is one of the most popular Ayurvedic remedies for digestive health. Triphala is known to improve bowel movements and relieve constipation. It also helps to detoxify the body and improve overall digestive health.

2. Hing: Spices like asafoetida and ajwain (carom seed) are recommended to be used in cooking or as tea or consumed in various churns to prevent

bloating and enhance digestion. It ignites digestive fire burning away toxins and metabolic waste, increasing metabolic rate and correcting digestion.

3. Psyllium Husk: Psyllium husk is a natural fibre commonly used as a laxative. It helps to soften the stool and promote regular bowel movements. Psyllium husk also helps to reduce inflammation in the digestive tract and improve overall gut health.

4. Ginger: Ginger is a natural anti-inflammatory and digestive aid. It helps to stimulate digestion and relieve

constipation. Ginger also helps to reduce gas and bloating in the digestive system.

5. Fennel: Fennel is a natural carminative that helps to reduce gas and bloating in the digestive system. It also helps to improve digestion and relieve constipation.

6. Aloe Vera: Aloe vera is a natural laxative that helps to soften the stool and promote regular bowel movements. It also helps to reduce inflammation in the digestive tract and improve overall gut health.

7. Castor Oil: Castor oil is a powerful laxative that helps to stimulate bowel movements. It also helps to reduce inflammation in the digestive system and improve overall gut health.

8. Haritaki: Haritaki is an Ayurvedic herb that helps to improve digestion and relieve constipation. It also helps to detoxify the body and improve overall gut health.

9. Ghee: Ghee is a type of clarified butter that is rich in healthy fats. It helps to lubricate the digestive system and promote regular bowel movements. Ghee also helps to reduce inflammation in the digestive tract and improve overall gut health.







## Who is Eksha Kerung

the cop from Sikkim and new face of Maybelline

**Eksha Kerung is a cop from Sikkim who has been appointed as the new face of Maybelline. She describes herself as a boxer, hiker, rider and model in her Instagram bio.**

Cosmetic giant Maybelline unveiled new faces of their brand on Tuesday and posted a picture of the same from



their official Instagram handle. Maybelline! We are taking our game up a notch with our

Well, the new faces include Suhana Khan, PV Sindhu, Ananya Birla and Eksha Kerung. While Suhana is going to make her acting debut soon, PV Sindhu is India's badminton sensation. Ananya Birla is a singer and businesswoman and Eksha Kerung is a cop from Sikkim. Yes, you read that right. But, more on her later. Let's give you a glimpse of the new faces of Maybelline first. "We've just got the perfect fit for



sensational squad. Say hello to Suhana Khan, PV Sindhu, Ananya Birla and 208k followers.

Eksha Kerung," reads the caption of the post. Now, "I was always passionate and focused. And finally, I am living my dream. I always wanted to see myself in the show. It took lots of time and courage for me to show up and take a step for myself, for participating in MTV Supermodel of the Year AND NOW...I did it," she wrote while sharing a snippet from MTV Supermodel of the Year 2. Eksha Kerung also made her Bollywood debut with Lakadbagha opposite Anshuman Jha and Milind Soman.





# First death from H3N8 confirmed in China: All you need to know about this deadly virus

**The H3N8 virus is a type of influenza A group of viruses that is commonly detected globally in animals.**

A woman suffering from an avian influenza A (H3N8) virus died in China on March 27, as per World Health Organisation. This was the third case of human infection reported with an avian influenza A virus. All three cases were reported from China.

Based on the available information, this virus does not have the ability to spread easily from person to person. The risk involved in the spread of the H3N8 virus among humans at national, regional and international levels is considered to be low.

The 56-year-old woman was hospitalised for severe pneumonia and subsequently died last month. The case was detected through the severe acute respiratory infection (SARI) surveillance system. WHO, in a statement, said that the patient had multiple



underlying conditions and had a history of exposure to live poultry before the onset of the disease.

## WHAT IS THE H3N8 VIRUS?

H3N8 has been circulating since 2002 after it first emerged in North American waterfowl. It is known to infect horses, dogs and seals.

The H3N8 virus is a type of influenza A group of viruses that is commonly detected globally in animals. Influenza A viruses -

H3N8 - are commonly found subtypes in birds, causing little to no sign of disease in either poultry or wild birds.

The transmission of avian influenza viruses from birds to humans is usually sporadic and happens in a specific context: most cases that have been reported previously were due to exposure to infected poultry or contaminated environments.

As far as symptoms are concerned, zoonotic influenza

infections in humans may be asymptomatic or may cause disease. Depending on factors related to the specific virus and the infected host, the disease can range from conjunctivitis, mild flu-like symptoms to severe acute respiratory disease or even death. Gastrointestinal or neurological symptoms have also been reported but these are rare.

The infection is usually the result of direct or indirect exposure to infected live or dead poultry or contaminated environments.

To better understand the current risk to public health, more information is needed from both human and animal investigations, WHO stated.

Is there a vaccine for H3N8 virus?

While there is a vaccine against influenza viruses, there isn't one available or reported for the

H3N8 influenza A virus.

Precautions for H3N8 virus

The health body recommended practising good hygiene by frequently washing hands or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer and wearing respiratory protection when in a risky environment (such as live animal markets/farms, live poultry, or surfaces that may be contaminated by poultry or bird faeces). Travellers to countries with known outbreaks of animal influenza should avoid farms, contact with animals in live animal markets, entering areas where animals may be slaughtered, or contact with any surfaces that appear to be contaminated with animal faeces or other body fluids.

Travellers should also wash their hands often with soap and water and follow good food hygiene practices.

## Sore throat, blocked nose in summer? Here's what you should do

**Sudden temperature changes affect the nasal tissues that result in a runny or blocked nose and sore throat. Experts share tips on what you can do to feel better.**

The month of March saw fluctuating temperature levels in the country. Days ranged between sunny and hot to breezy and cold, due to which common cold symptoms like runny nose, sore throat, cough, and even diarrhoea were witnessed rampantly.

Every second person has been

experiencing runny nose and dry cough for longer periods of time without essentially developing a high fever. As summer started, many people still have these symptoms.

According to Dr Atul Bhasin, Director, Internal Medicine, BLK Max Super Speciality Hospital, sudden temperature changes can cause a stuffy or

congested nose. It is caused by the nasal tissue lining getting swollen, which may be due to inflamed blood vessels.

"The problem may also include nasal discharge or runny nose.

The excess mucus runs down the back of your throat (postnasal drip), leading to a cough or sore throat. Other symptoms that you may experience may be fever, runny nose, headache, hoarse voice or trouble swallowing, which could be painful," said Bhasin.

Dr Tushar Tayal, Consultant, Internal Medicine, C K Birla Hospital, Gurugram said that the current weather conditions are optimal for the survival of viruses and there are plenty of viruses circulating in the environment such as influenza B, H1N1, H3N2, Covid and other respiratory viruses - all these viruses produce symptoms such as fever, sore throat, cough, running nose and in some cases, vomiting and loose stools.



If you're experiencing a stuffy or runny nose, it may be caused by a common cold, flu, sinus infection, and nasal polyp (soft, painless, noncancerous growths on the lining of your nasal passages or sinuses). Seasonal allergies require specific treatment with decongestive and anti-allergic medicines.

What to do if you have flu-like symptoms?

Besides the regular Covid guidelines of wearing a mask, frequent hand sanitisation and social distancing, Dr Tayal said that a patient can have a paracetamol tablet if the fever is above 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

"You can take antihistaminics for runny or blocked nose and over-the-counter cough syrup and lozenges if there is excessive cough. Saltwater gargles or betadine gargles and steam inhalation can help relieve the pain. Vitamin C tablets can also be consumed for a few weeks to boost immunity," said Dr Tushar Tayal.

"If the symptoms persist beyond 5 days after onset, then consult a doctor, especially for young children and elderly individuals. A well-balanced diet rich in seasonal fruits and vegetables with adequate water intake is essential for recovery," he added.

## Your peanut allergy could soon be treated

Immunologists at UCLA are working to devise a treatment that could treat peanut allergies, which affect 1 in 50 children across the world. They have created a first-of-its-kind nanoparticle that can deliver mRNAs to specific cells in the liver that could teach the body to tolerate the peanut protein.

Hopes have been further raised as the team demonstrated that nanoparticles not only reversed peanut allergies but also prevented them from developing in mice. The team focussed on

introducing the mRNA into the liver cells of the mice, which are trained not to respond to every challenge because it is regularly bombarded with foreign substances. "As far as we can find, mRNA has never been used for allergic disease. We've shown that our platform can work to calm peanut allergies, and we believe it may be able to do the same for other allergens, in food and drugs, as well as autoimmune conditions," Dr. André Nel, the paper's co-corresponding author, said in a statement.



## Shah Rukh Khan asks if he can 'take some credit' after daughter Suhana Khan's first official media appearance: 'Well spoken, well brought up'

Suhana Khan has been announced as the face of a beauty brand and Shah Rukh Khan, like a proud parent, shared a video congratulating his daughter.

Shah Rukh Khan is getting a chance to show his desi Dad side and fans are loving this side of his personality. While Shah Rukh has often spoken about his kids, he recently took to Instagram to share a video from his daughter Suhana Khan's recent media appearance for makeup brand Maybelline. The video looks like a fan-edit with still photos from the event and a small portion of the video with Suhana's speech, with the song 'Pretty Woman' from Kal Ho Naa Ho playing in the background.

Shah Rukh shared this with a caption that read, "Congratulations on Maybelline beta. Well dressed...well spoken...well done & if I may take some credit, well brought up! Love u my Lil Lady in Red!"

Suhana took to the comments section and replied, "Awww love you!! One of the fans wrote in the comments section, "Dying. So cute." Another fan wrote about the resemblance between Suhana and her father and wrote, "She looks like mini you... =O P". One of the fans, who sounded like they are already a Suhana Khan fan wrote, "Congrats Sir!! Soon people will say SRK is her dad... not that she's SRK's daughter! Recently, Suhana was spotted with her mother Gauri Khan at the opening night of Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre and a video from the event was widely circulated on social media. The video had Anusha Dandekar, who was taking interviews on the red carpet, talking to Gauri and

Suhana where it seemed like Gauri wasn't keen on giving an interview and discouraged Suhana from doing the same. Anusha later took to her social media and called out the 'bullies' as she wrote, "Some people don't like to give interviews and never have and that's totally okay. And some have to wait for their release till they do any interviews. THE END. I think I did a great job and I'm really good at what I do...but no one's stopping you to try my job if you have so many opinions. I wish you happiness, so you will finally stop being bullies (sic)." Suhana is looking forward to making her debut in the movies with Zoya Akhtar's The Archies which also stars Khushi Kapoor, Agastya Nanda, among others.

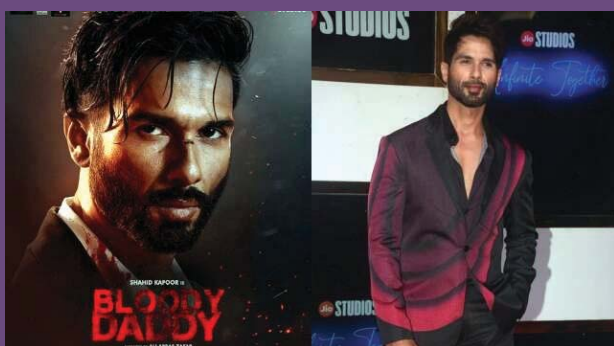


## Shahid Kapoor confirms Bloody Daddy to drop on OTT

'If we do action of this scale on streaming, what do we do now for big screen?'

Billed as a 'stylised relentless action-packed ride', Bloody Daddy marks the first collaboration between Shahid Kapoor and Ali Abbas Zafar.

Actor Shahid Kapoor on Wednesday confirmed that his upcoming actioner Bloody Daddy will release on Jio Cinema. An official adaptation of the 2011 French film Nuit Blanche, Bloody Daddy is directed by Ali Abbas Zafar, known for movies like Tiger Zinda Hai, Sultan and Bharat. The announcement was made at a grand 'Infinite Together' event of Jio Studios, where more than 100 films and shows were announced, including



Bloody Daddy. At the event, Shahid said he had "a lot of fun" in the genre. "I had a great time doing an action film. I really enjoyed working with Ali. He understands the genre very well. The dilemma now is that if you're doing something of this scale on OTT, what do you do on the big screen? So we have to figure that out. But it's been a blast," Shahid said at the

event, hosted by actor Riteish Deshmukh. When Riteish asked how was it shooting an action film, Shahid said, "I was just saying what Sanjay Kapoor

lot of choreography involved with dance. I started dancing at the age of 15, I can memorize things fast. When we did the film, unfortunately due to Covid, we had a lot of issues." "The action directors were not from here, some of them were from London, Hollywood, and they're used to a lot of rehearsals. There were visa issues, they came in and thought this

would be a disaster but because I've done a lot of dancing, I could pick it up (the action) really fast. That helped us. When you do action, you lose about a kg a day, so it's really tough but you've to look really buff," he added. Billed as a "stylised relentless action-packed ride", Bloody Daddy marks the first collaboration between Shahid Kapoor and Ali Abbas Zafar.

says in the teaser, 'What the f\*\*\*s going on?' I pretty much kept saying that. Ali told me, 'Just bloody do it.' We shot for 50 days." Shahid Kapoor said doing action, much like dancing, requires choreography. Despite the obvious Covid-19 hiccup, he was able to learn and perform the stunts thanks to his dancing background. "There's a

lot of choreography involved with dance. I started dancing at the age of 15, I can memorize things fast. When we did the film, unfortunately due to Covid, we had a lot of issues." "The action directors were not from here, some of them were from London, Hollywood, and they're used to a lot of rehearsals. There were visa issues, they came in and thought this

## Alia Bhatt expected to walk Met Gala 2023 red carpet

Alia Bhatt will be attending the Met Gala 2023 ahead of her international debut in Heart of Stone. However, her team has refused to comment on it.



Before making her international debut in Netflix's thriller Heart of Stone, Bollywood actor Alia Bhatt is all set to make her Met Gala debut this year. She will be representing India on the red carpet of the prestigious fashion event. A few reports suggest that the actor will be wearing an outfit by the Nepalese-American fashion designer, Prabal Gurung. However, her team has refused to divulge any details regarding the same. When indianexpress.com reached out to Alia's team, they refused to comment. "It is everywhere on the internet, but there's nothing from our side," they said. Alia has had quite an illustrious 2022, both personally and professionally. She starred in two superhit films, Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Gangubai Kathiawadi and SS Rajamouli's RRR. Alia also tied the knot with Bollywood star Ranbir Kapoor last year and the two became parents to daughter Raha. Before Alia, a few Indian celebrities have walked the red carpet at Met Gala.



# Jio Studios unveils slate: Dunki, Bhediya 2, Stree 2, Zara Hatke Zara Bachke, Laal Batti and others

**Jio Studios announced that they are collaborating with noted filmmakers including Rajkumar Hirani, Sooraj Barjatya, Dinesh Vijan, Ali Abbas Zafar, Aditya Dhar, Prakash Jha, Amar Kaushik, and Laxman Utekar among others for their upcoming titles.**

Jio Studios on Wednesday unveiled its upcoming slate in India that features over 100 movie and web series titles including Shah Rukh Khan-starrer Dunki, a film with Amitabh Bachchan and sequels to Bhediya and Stree. Jio Studios, the media and content arm of Reliance Industries Limited, announced that they are collaborating with noted filmmakers including Raj Kumar Hirani, Sooraj Barjatya, Dinesh Vijan, Ali Abbas Zafar, Aditya Dhar, Prakash Jha, Amar Kaushik, and Laxman Utekar among others for their upcoming titles. The studio has lined up ready to release over 100 stories across genres of



films and original web series in multiple languages including Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Gujarati, and Bhojpuri. The stellar film line-up includes Shah Rukh Khan-starrer Dunki, Bloody Bhediya 2 with Varun Dhawan, Bhul Chuk Maaf Kapoor, an untitled film with Shahid and Kriti Sanon, and Daddy featuring Shahid. The studio has lined up ready to release over 100 stories across genres of

starring Kartik Aaryan and Shraddha Kapoor, Stree 2 with Rajkumar Rao and Shraddha Kapoor, Amitabh Bachchan-starrer Section 84. While Stree 2 will release on August 31, 2024, Bhediya 2 will hit screens in 2025.

R Madhavan-led Hisaab Barabar, Zara Hatke Zara Bachke, starring Vicky Kaushal and Sara Ali Khan, Blackout with Vikrant Massey and Mouni Roy, south star Vijay Sethupathi's Hindi movie Mumbaikar, The Storyteller with Paresch Rawal and Adil Hussain, Dhoom Dhaam with Pratik Gandhi and Yami Gautam, Taapsee Pannu and Arvind Swamy's Empire are also part of the line-up.

## Radhika Apte says she's 'gotten used to rejection': 'I think it is extremely hard to sell yourself, stay relevant'

**When asked about comparisons between Mrs Undercover and Manoj Bajpayee's The Family Man, Radhika Apte said that she loves Raj and DK but she has not watched the critically acclaimed web series.**

Radhika Apte, the actor who has lit the screens and stimulated the audience's interest in web content by being part of Sacred Games, Ghoul, Parched, Lust Stories, Andhadhun, among many others, is now playing a special agent in Mrs Undercover. Radhika was among the early adopters of OTT space and emerged as its face in India. In this interview with indianexpress.com, Radhika talks about her work in films and OTT, and how competitive the space has become in the last few years. Radhika plays a homemaker who is a former spy in the show. Calling the Anushree Mehta directorial a unique idea that took her instantly, she says, "When the director told me about it, I was totally into it. It is such a unique idea and it is also very playful and relatable. We see our mothers or friends being treated in a certain way at times because they are housewives or trying to do both — manage home and work."



Radhika says she believes in picking up roles she can relate to. "You don't have to live that life to relate to a role. You can relate to it emotionally too. She is someone who has to do but at the same time, they are taken for granted." While Radhika has proven to be a scene stealer in almost all the projects she has acted in, she feels there is a "certain perception" about her due to which filmmakers don't offer her "breezy roles." Asked her penchant for intense roles, the actor says, "When I did Monica O My Darling, people asked why don't you do more comedy. And now this (Mrs Undercover) is also a comedy, but I am rarely offered such roles. As an actor, you choose from what you get. People's perception of you unfortunately guides what you are offered."

different priorities now and feels a bit let down by the agency that has forgotten her. Now, they want her to leave everything and come back. It is something very relatable. I have seen my mother, who is an anesthetist, do so much — she cooks, takes care of the home, and is the glue that holds our family together. It is true for my aunt and some of my friends as well, but they don't get the credit for it. They also think that it is something they have

an actor, you choose from what you get. People's perception of you unfortunately guides what you are offered."







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