

**Why Something From The West Becomes Science and East A Superstition?**

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**A Medieval Malayan King Beat Cholas at Their Game. Almost Created a Superpower**

Not all invasions went from India/Sri Lanka to Southeast Asia. The Malayan rulers of Tambralinga tried to establish an empire across the seas.

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**'Open to...': Elon Musk to buy Silicon Valley Bank after collapse?**

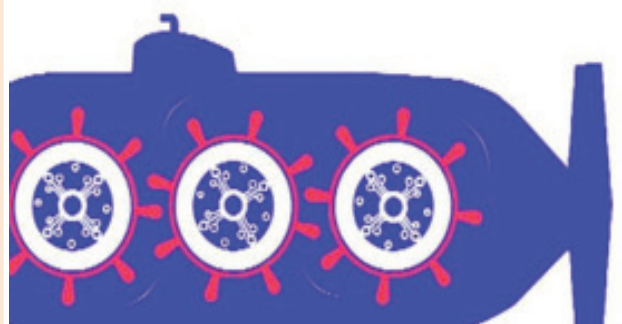
Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) collapse became America's biggest banking failure since 2008. Elon Musk on Saturday suggested that he was open to the idea of buying the collapsed bank.

(SAI Bureau) Twitter boss and billionaire Elon Musk, known for his witty remarks on the social media platform, said in a recent post that he was open to the idea of buying the collapsed Silicon Valley Bank (SVB). (Contd. on page 25)



**India and the Anglosphere**

Defence cooperation between US, UK and Australia highlights the opportunity for Delhi to develop a unique set of arrangements with Washington and its allies



(SAI Bureau) The road map to Canberra's acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines, announced this week in San Diego by the leaders of Australia, the UK, and the US, is being both hailed and denounced at the same time. For Canberra, London, and Washington, the AUKUS is about promoting deterrence and stability in the Indo-Pacific. (Contd. on page 25)

**Why do phone batteries explode and how to prevent such incidents**

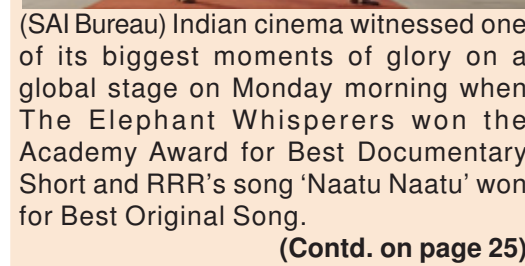
Most smartphones do give warnings before any explosion incidents. For instance, there could be some popping sounds or smell of burning plastic or chemicals or the device may heat up too often.



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**RRR's 'Naatu Naatu' and The Elephant Whisperers make history at the Oscars 2023**

(SAI Bureau) Indian cinema witnessed one of its biggest moments of glory on a global stage on Monday morning when The Elephant Whisperers won the Academy Award for Best Documentary Short and RRR's song 'Naatu Naatu' won for Best Original Song. (Contd. on page 25)



**Mexican cartels are as dangerous as al Qaeda and ISIS. Will Team Biden ever wake up?**

Latest estimate from federal government finds that major Mexican cartels are in at least 60 of our cities

(SAI Bureau) There is a new existential threat facing our nation and it's coming to a neighborhood near you. I was at West Point during 9/11 and watched live as the Twin Towers collapsed because terrorism gripped our homeland. After the attacks, I fought to defend our homeland from the rising threat of terrorism fueled by radical extremism. (Contd. on page 25)

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# Immigrating to Canada under the Express Entry system is set to change. Here's all you need to know



Entry.

## 1) Selection based on new groups and categories

The new bill will include Ministerial instructions to bring additional filters to the Express Entry pool based on groups and categories rather than only immigration class. It will serve as the foundation for the rounds of invites.

## 2) Invitations to Apply for PR to specify eligibility categories

Once the bill comes into action, new categories with eligibility requirements for the purpose of ranking will be created. If a foreign national qualifies for more than one category, the invitation should specify the categories in which the applicant must apply.

## 3) Economic goals to be specified with each category

The new bill will now require the Minister to specify in the instruction the economic goal that the newly established category will support.

## 4) Applicants who lost points due to age can now get PR

The new bill establishes exclusions that allow Express Entry permanent residence visas to be given to candidates who have received an invitation to apply but would otherwise have lost eligibility due to changes in their circumstances.

For example, if an applicant has aged and lost points or qualification but has maintained the minimum score required to rank in the invitation round will now be given the visa.

## 5) Minister's report to include categories for foreign nationals

The amendment adds that the Minister's annual report to Parliament must include instructions to establish any category for foreign nationals in Express Entry. These instructions should include the economic goal it supports and the number of invitations issued under this category.

Express Entry includes categories like the Canadian Experience Class, the Federal Skilled Worker Program, the Federal Skilled Trades Program, and a component of the Provincial Nominee Program, which will experience changes under Bill C-19 in 2023. More details on the C-19 Bill will be revealed, along with the exact categories and its eligibility in the upcoming months.

(SAI Bureau) Canada's Express Entry system will undergo several amendments as Bill C19 received royal assent. These new amendments will bring changes to the Comprehensive Ranking System used to evaluate and rank individuals in the pool. Under this new system, groupings will be established based on economic goals, factors such as

employment and academic experience, or fluency in English or French. Candidates will also be invited based on "groupings" set by the Immigration minister. The main aim of this bill is to respond to Canada's labour market and demographic needs. Below is the in-depth explanation of what is going to change in Bill C-19 Amendments To Express

# U.K.'s controversial asylum plan explained

The British government is promising new "safe and legal routes" for refugees, but has yet to spell those out.



(SAI Bureau) Britain is facing a domestic and international backlash after unveiling contentious legislation to overhaul the way it handles migrants crossing the Channel on small boats.

## What has been announced?

The Illegal Migration Bill places a legal duty on the interior minister to deport anyone who enters the U.K. illegally, superseding their other rights under human rights conventions. They would be deported home or to a "safe third country", such as Rwanda, under an existing U.K. plan, where they could then claim asylum. Legal challenges or human rights claims would be heard in that country. Applicants would be disqualified from using British laws aimed at preventing modern slavery to stop their deportation. Illegal entrants who are removed also face a lifetime ban on citizenship and re-entry to the U.K. The government is promising new "safe and legal routes" for refugees, but has yet to spell those out. Lawmakers would set an annual quota for legal refugees eligible to settle

## in Britain. Why is the U.K. proposing this?

More than 45,000 arrivals from across the Channel were recorded last year, with 3,150 already having made the journey so far in 2023.

Interior minister Suella Braverman says that as many as 80,000 could cross by the end of the year, and that the "broken" asylum system is costing U.K. taxpayers £3 billion (\$3.55 billion) annually.

She and Prime Minister Rishi Sunak also argue that their approach is more "compassionate" than allowing cross-Channel tragedies to occur. In November 2021, at least 27 people drowned when their fragile dinghy deflated. But the government says that in any case, many of the migrants are coming for economic reasons rather than for genuine asylum needs. Last year, the largest contingent came from Albania, which has already agreed a return policy with Britain to take its illegal migrants back.

## Is it legal?

Britain is a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, which sets numerous responsibilities for countries towards people fleeing persecution or war. Criticising the U.K. bill, the UN refugee agency noted that the convention explicitly allows people to flee their homeland and claim asylum elsewhere without passports or other papers. Britain

also has obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) to avoid putting people at risk of torture or other forms of inhuman or degrading treatment. The country's own 1998 Human Rights Act also offers asylum-seekers various protections. Braverman insists the draft law complies with international law. But in a note to MPs at the beginning of the 66-page bill, she acknowledged she was "unable" to assess that its provisions are compatible with

the ECHR.

## What responses have there been?

The bill has drawn vocal support from many Conservative MPs and right-wing newspapers after serial vows by governments to crack down on cross-Channel migration. But critics including U.K. rights groups and United Nations agencies have expressed deep concern. The Refugee Council has said it is "unworkable, costly and won't stop the boats", while the

Doctors Without Borders charity called it "cruel and inhumane". The main opposition Labour party wants the money spent instead on a crackdown on criminal gangs behind the cross-Channel traffic, arguing that the government's plan will do nothing to deter them. BBC football presenter Gary Lineker, a longtime critic of the government's migration policies, even compared the new plan to the rhetoric of Nazi-era Germany.

## Demand for UAE Golden Visa picks up again as other countries imposes restrictions

Greece has announced that it will double the amount required for a Golden Visa starting in May 2023, while Portugal and Ireland have already ended their programmes for acquiring Golden Visa

(SAI Bureau) Demand from cash-rich Indians for UAE Golden Visa is said to be seeing a sudden spike in recent weeks as some of the European Union nations phase out their Golden Visa programmes or tighten real estate investment rules for citizenship seekers. Greece has announced that it will double the amount required for a Golden Visa starting in May 2023, while Portugal and Ireland have already ended their programmes for acquiring Golden Visa. A surge in real estate prices, especially house prices, is cited as the reason for the European countries to end or make their residency visa programmes more expensive. This has made the UAE an attractive option for high net-worth individuals (HNWIs) from India to acquire a Golden Visa in the UAE, offered to investors on certain conditions. For instance,

the UAE offers a 10-year residency visa for investing only AED2 million in a real estate asset. The Golden Visa is a long-term residence visa which enables foreign talents to live, work or study in the UAE while enjoying several exclusive benefits.

This has led to wealthy Indians looking to invest overseas to once again turn to the UAE for opportunities, industry experts said. The surge in property investments in Dubai is also on account of the approaching July entry date for implementation of the 20 percent tax at source on overseas remittances, announced in this year's budget. Industry experts said the rising yields on property investments in Dubai is another major factor in the recent rise in Indian investors looking for real estate investments in the Gulf city.



# US Presidential advisory panel recommends extending H-1B visa's grace period

(SAI Bureau) A US Presidential sub-committee has advised that the federal government extend the grace period for thousands of retrenched H-1B workers from the existing 60 days to 180 days so that they have enough opportunities to find a new job or other alternatives.

With the recent mass layoffs, thousands of highly skilled foreign-born workers have lost their jobs and are now struggling to find new employment. With just 60-day period under their work visas following the termination of their employment to stay in the country, many have been forced to leave the country. "The immigration subcommittee recommends the Department of Homeland Security and the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to extend the grace period for H-1B workers, who have lost their jobs, from 60 days to 180 days," Ajay Jain Bhutoria, member of the President's Advisory Commission on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders, said on Tuesday.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows companies to employ foreign workers in occupations that require

theoretical or technical expertise. Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year. In his presentation, Bhutoria highlighted the significant challenges faced by H-1B workers laid off from their jobs. The current 60-day grace

period presents numerous hurdles, including finding a new job within a tight timeframe, complex paperwork for transferring H-1B status, and delays in processing at USCIS, he said.

Bhutoria, in his presentation, strongly advocated for the

extension of the grace period, citing the need to support highly skilled tech employees who he said are essential to the economic growth of the United States.

The extension would also provide affected employees with more time to navigate the complex and

time-consuming process of finding new employment opportunities and transferring their H-1B status, he said.

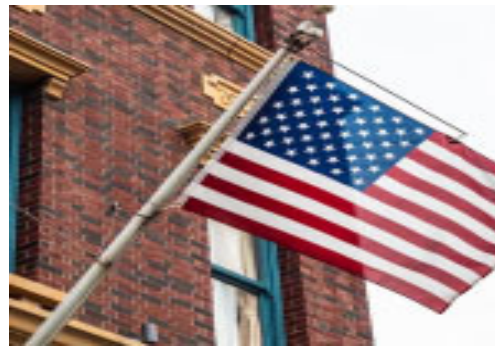
Members of the commission, recognising the importance of supporting and retaining highly skilled tech employees, supported the move.

## Bill introduced in the US House to streamline immigration and eliminate visa backlogs

(SAI Bureau) Friday saw the introduction of a bill that was supported by both parties in the US House of Representatives to ensure that the employment-based visas that are given out annually in accordance with current federal immigration law are utilized appropriately. Presented by Senator Raja Krishnamoorthi from the Progressive Alliance and Larry Bucshon from the GOP, the Killing Excesses Demonstration of 2023 would give more prominent adaptability to utilize existing designated work visas that businesses frantically need, its creators said.

The bill will make it easier to get rid of visa backlogs and make sure that visas given out under the current federal immigration law can be used in the right way.

Krishnamoorthi stated, "Even as our country's high-skilled immigration system assists us in attracting top talent from around the world, current law caps the number of employment-based visas



available based on workers' country of origin, leaving thousands of visas that would otherwise assist our economy unused."

He stated that the legislation aims to end discrimination based on nationality in high-skilled immigration to ensure that all visas are utilized to attract skilled workers from all over the world to help strengthen the American economy, create jobs, and maintain investments in the domestic workforce. "To ensure that our workforce can meet the demands of our economy in Indiana

and across the country," Bucshon stated, "under the current federal immigration law, there are a certain number of visas allocated annually for skilled workers, such as doctors and engineers."

The number of foreign nationals with specific skills and training who can work in the United States is limited annually.

In any given year, only 7% of the employment-based slots are available to any one nation. Despite the nation's pressing need for more skilled workers, he stated, hundreds of thousands of these visas have not been utilized due to bureaucratic policies and delays. Bucshon stated, "This will assist in supporting an immigration system that encourages and rewards legal applicants and boosts our economy." According to a media release, US immigration officials did not use approximately 9,100 employment-based visas in FY2020 and over 66,000 in FY2021, respectively.

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**VOLUNTEERS ARE WELCOME**



# Cancer survivor vows to 'look after every kid with cancer in India'

CanKids, a charity dedicated to kids with cancer in India, works with St. Jude so more kids live.



By Kristina Goetz : When Poonam Bagai talks about her deal with God, she casts herself as a nautanki, a drama queen of Bollywood films, beseeching the Almighty.

"Dear God, let me survive," she says with considerable flair. "I promise I'll go back to India. I'll figure out a way to reach every child with cancer."

When Bagai is laughing about her story, this is how she tells it. But the real account — though filled with much more fear and heartbreak — isn't so far off.

In 2000, Bagai was diagnosed with colon cancer at age 38. She had two boys, 7 and 3.

"I can die, and what do I have to show for my life?" she



remembered thinking. "I'm bright and smart. I had a great education. We're well-off. I have insurance. I have everything. And I've had lots of opportunities. But what do I really have to show for the fact that I could die today, and this is all I've managed to do?"

For nine months, she worried every procedure would be the last.

"I pledged that if I could live, if I could survive, then I promise I'll go back to India, and I'll look after every kid with cancer in India," she said. "That way, I could know that I survived for a reason. And I survived for my kids. It was like a plea bargain with God, honestly."

In a country steeped in patriarchy and bracing poverty, that was a monumental task for anyone. But Bagai hadn't lived in India for years. She'd been on a five-year leave as a civil service officer from the Indian government, living all over the world — London, Bangkok, Moscow, Warsaw — with her then-husband who worked in international banking. She'd worked as a bureaucrat and a United Nations consultant. In truth, she had everything but no idea what poor people whose children had cancer might need. Still, she was undeterred. And once she was cancer free, Bagai told her husband they were moving back to India — not to Korea for his next assignment. "I promised," she told him. "I have to do this."

Little knowledge, plenty of guts Bagai started by going to All India Institute of Medical Sciences, which has comprehensive facilities for teaching, research and medical care. That's where she met Sonal Sharma, a woman whose daughter had cancer about the same time as Bagai. They forged a friendship, volunteered together at the Indian Cancer Society and then co-

founded CanKids KidsCan in 2004, whose mission is to enable the treatment, care and support of children in India. The organization is one of the foundations that has recently joined St. Jude Children's Research Hospital's Global Alliance — a program that aims to increase survival rates of children with cancer and other catastrophic diseases worldwide.

The pair started in a single hospital, sitting on muddas, or small stools, talking to families. Their initial focus was to ensure that children who'd already reached a hospital got the care they needed. When a pediatric oncologist refused to start treatment until a family had all the funds, CanKids found the money. In hospitals with no space, Bagai brought chatais, thin woven mats made of river grass, opened her box full of files and set up shop on the floor. She called them chatai clinics. After a couple of years, CanKids began to focus on getting more children to the hospital. Then partnering with state governments. And finally, empowering patients and families to use their voices in a

country where there's still centuries-old gender bias, stigma and fear surrounding disease. "I want to tell you the reality of India," Bagai said. "I still remember there was a gentleman — a father — standing opposite me, asking me: 'You know, I think my boy's relapsing. He's the sixth of my children. Is it ok for me to stop treatment?' There was a mom who asked the same question once." Her daughter's arm had already been amputated. "Her cancer was not curing, right?" Bagai said. "She wasn't palliative. She wasn't terminally ill, but it was a long haul. And the husband had abandoned his wife. And she would keep asking me, in fact: 'Can you tell the doctor to tell me there's no further treatment so I can go home? It's too hard. And what will I do with her even if she survives? How will I ever get her married? How will I teach her to be independent? What a hard life I will leave her to have.'" Gender bias is one of the reasons CanKids started the Girl Brigade, girl cancer survivors who raise awareness that childhood cancer is curable — and that girls are worth saving.

## From Lebanon to Zimbabwe, 15 childhood cancer foundations join the St. Jude Global Alliance

Joining the global network enhances partners' fundraising for hospitals in their home countries to increase survival rates

(News Agency) — This month, 15 new members joined the St. Jude Global Alliance, a worldwide network of institutions working to improve survival rates for pediatric cancer and catastrophic diseases. In a historic first for the Alliance, these new partners are fundraising organizations rather than medical institutions, each dedicated to raising funds for hospitals in their home countries. Each year, an estimated 400,000 children worldwide develop cancer. Globally, approximately 90% of children with cancer live in low- and middle-income countries, and far too many of these children lack access to adequate diagnosis and treatment. Compounding the problem is limited public funding for pediatric research and care, and imbalances in the technology available to raise needed funds. Most of these children will unnecessarily die

from their diseases.

"Where a child is born should not dictate their health destiny -- but that is the reality faced by far too many kids and families around the world. We are delighted and humbled to see these mission-driven organizations join the St. Jude Global Alliance as part of a concerted effort to address global healthcare inequities for children with catastrophic diseases," said Richard C. Shadyac Jr., president and CEO of ALSAC, the fundraising and awareness organization for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. "The Alliance is a truly international movement of clinicians, researchers, fundraisers and marketers from all corners of the world each doing their part to ensure that every child, no matter where they live, has a better chance to survive." Adding these foundations, and others like them, to the Alliance

further the global collaboration among hospitals and fundraising organizations to advance the St. Jude mission: Finding cures. Saving children. Everywhere. These new partners will gain access to international networking and educational opportunities while strengthening their connections with like-minded organizations across the globe. By drawing on expertise developed over decades by St. Jude and ALSAC, these foundations will be able to accelerate their work raising critical funds and changing the trajectory of survival rates in their country.

"We, at the Children's Cancer Center of Lebanon, believe that cancer is best addressed together; and our membership in the St. Jude Global Alliance emphasizes our longstanding partnership and leadership in service of children with cancer in

the Arab region and beyond," said Hana Chaar Choueib, CCCL general manager.

The St. Jude Global Alliance was formed in 2018 to bring together individuals and institutions dedicated to the shared vision of improving access to quality healthcare and increasing survival rates of children with cancer and other catastrophic diseases with a specific focus on low and middle-income countries.

St. Jude Children's Research Hospital is leading the way the world understands, treats and defeats childhood cancer and other life-threatening diseases. Its purpose is clear: Finding cures. Saving children.® It is the only National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center devoted solely to children. When St. Jude opened in 1962, childhood cancer was largely

considered incurable. Since then, St. Jude has helped push the overall survival rate from 20% to more than 80%, and it won't stop until no child dies from cancer. St. Jude shares the breakthroughs it makes to help doctors and researchers at local hospitals and cancer centers around the world improve the quality of treatment and care for even more children. Because of generous donors, families never receive a bill from St. Jude for treatment, travel, housing or food, so they can focus on helping their child live. Visit St. Jude Inspire to discover powerful St. Jude stories of hope, strength, love and kindness. Support the St. Jude mission by donating at stjude.org, liking St. Jude on Facebook, following St. Jude on Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and TikTok, and subscribing to its YouTube channel.



# Manager of Transnational Fraud Scheme Sentenced to 41 Months in Prison

**Callers Based in India Impersonated Federal Employees and Netted Over \$2 Million From Victims Across the United States**



(News Agency) Earlier today, in federal court in Central Islip, Kamal Zafar was sentenced by United States District Judge Joan M. Azrack to 41 months in prison for conspiracy to commit wire fraud in connection with a

fraudulent scheme directed at thousands of individuals in the United States. As part of the sentence, Zafar was also ordered to pay restitution in the amount of \$3.2 million and forfeiture of \$232,362. Zafar pleaded guilty

to the charge in June 2022. Breon Peace, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, announced the sentence.

Mr. Peace thanked the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation, Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration and New York City Police Department for their assistance with the case. As alleged in the indictment and other court filings and proceedings, Zafar managed the fraud scheme by recruiting individuals to open bank accounts in the names of inactive and shell corporations and also assisted in the laundering of fraud proceeds. Between January 2018 and September 2018, operating from call centers in

India, the scheme targeted victims in the United States and falsely claimed to be employees of the Internal Revenue Service, the Social Security Administration or the Drug Enforcement Administration. The victims who were taxpayers were informed that they owed a sum of money to the Internal Revenue Service. The victims who were medical professionals were informed that they owed a sum of money to the DEA in connection with their licenses. Both groups of victims were told that they would be arrested the next day if the debts were not immediately paid. After the victims wired payments to bank accounts that Zafar had opened or directed to be opened to

receive the fraud proceeds, the funds were either withdrawn and laundered through additional bank accounts or wired to foreign countries. The scheme netted over \$2 million from victims across the United States. Zafar's six co-conspirators previously pleaded guilty. In January 2022, Ajay Sharma, the leader and organizer of the fraud scheme, was sentenced to 78 months in prison and five others are awaiting sentencing. The government's case is being handled by the Office's Long Island Criminal Division. Assistant United States Attorneys Charles P. Kelly, Charles N. Rose and Diane Leonardo are in charge of the prosecution.

## Seven Charged in Sophisticated Stolen Identity Tax Refund Fraud Scheme that Sought Over \$100 Million from the IRS

(SAI Bureau) On March 7, a federal grand jury in Austin returned an indictment, unsealed today, charging seven individuals with conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud and other crimes arising out of their scheme to defraud the IRS using stolen identities.

According to the indictment, from 2018 through 2021, Abraham Yusuff, of Round Rock, Meghan Inyang, of San Antonio, Christopher Eduardo, of Round

Rock, Christian Mathurin, of Nashville, Tennessee, Dillon Anozie, of San Antonio, Babajide Ogunbanjo, of Austin, and Aydin Mammadov, of Houston, engaged in a conspiracy to claim fraudulent tax refunds using the stolen identities of accountants and taxpayers by filing at least 371 false tax returns claiming over \$111 million in refunds from the IRS. Yusuff allegedly recruited and directed Eduardo, Mathurin, Anozie, Ogunbanjo and

Mammadov to provide addresses to him that could be used in the scheme. Yusuff and others then allegedly registered with the IRS, posing as authorized agents of multiple taxpayers using stolen information relating to the taxpayers and their real tax preparers. The conspirators then allegedly directed the IRS to change the addresses on file for the taxpayers and to send their tax information, including account transcripts and wage



records, to the addresses controlled by the conspirators. The conspirators then allegedly used this information to electronically file tax returns claiming fraudulent refunds and directed the refunds the IRS to split the refunds among several prepaid debit cards. Prior to issuing tax refunds to some taxpayers, the IRS allegedly sent verification letters to the addresses controlled by the defendants, and the defendants and others, pretending to be the taxpayers, instructed the IRS to release the refunds. The indictment also charges that Yusuff, Inyang, Eduardo, Anozie, Ogunbanjo and Mammadov obtained the prepaid debit cards that were to be used to receive the fraudulent refunds and that once the refunds were deposited onto the prepaid debit cards, they laundered the funds by purchasing, among other things, money orders from local stores in amounts low enough to avoid reporting thresholds. Yusuff and others also allegedly used the prepaid debit cards and money

orders to purchase designer clothing, home renovation materials and used cars at auction. The indictment alleges that all defendants kept or received money orders purchased with the fraudulent refunds as their share of the illegal proceeds. The indictment charges each defendant with varying crimes, including mail and wire fraud, conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud, aggravated identity theft, money laundering and access device fraud. If convicted, they face a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison for the mail and wire fraud and the conspiracy of said fraud, 20 years for money laundering, 10 years for access device fraud, and a mandatory sentence of two years for aggravated identity theft. In addition to any term of imprisonment, each of the defendants also faces a period of supervised release, monetary penalties, restitution and forfeiture. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

## Justice Department Files Sexual Harassment Lawsuit Against Michigan Rental Property Owner

(SAI Bureau) The Justice Department announced today that it has filed a sexual harassment lawsuit under the Fair Housing Act against the owner and manager of rental properties in Dearborn Heights, Michigan. The lawsuit, filed in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan, alleges that Mohamad Hussein, who owns or manages over two dozen rental properties in Dearborn Heights, has subjected actual and prospective female tenants to sexual harassment on multiple occasions since at least 2017. The complaint alleges that Hussein made unwelcome sexual comments and advances, and offered actual and prospective female tenants housing-related benefits in exchange for engaging in sex acts with him or sending him sexually explicit images. According to the complaint, many of these instances took place in the spring of 2020, during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, when it was difficult to secure housing in Michigan. The complaint also alleges that Hussein sent sexually explicit images of himself to prospective female

tenants. "No one should be denied the right to housing because they refuse to submit to a landlord's sexual demands," said Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division. "The Justice Department is committed to vigorously enforcing the Fair Housing Act and seeking justice for those sexually harassed by landlords and other housing providers." "Every resident of our district should be able to find and secure housing without facing discrimination," said U.S. Attorney Dawn N. Ison for the Eastern District of Michigan. "Any feeling of safety and security is ripped away when individuals face sexual harassment in their own home. Our Civil Rights Unit works closely with the Civil Rights Division to hold those who violate the Fair Housing Act accountable." Today's lawsuit seeks monetary damages to compensate persons harmed by the alleged harassment, civil penalties to vindicate the public interest and a court order barring future discrimination. The complaint contains allegations of unlawful conduct; the allegations must be proven in federal court.



# Two Men Charged for Breaching Federal Law Enforcement Database and Posing as Police Officers to Defraud Social Media Companies

**Defendants Allegedly Used Compromised Law Enforcement Passwords and Foreign Government Email Accounts to Obtain Victims' Personal Information and Threatened Victims with Release of that Information**

(SAI Bureau) A criminal complaint was unsealed today in federal court in Brooklyn charging Sagar Steven Singh and Nicholas Ceraolo with wire fraud and conspiracy to commit computer intrusions. The charges stem from Singh's and Ceraolo's efforts to extort victims by threatening to release their personal information online. Singh was arrested this morning in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, and will make his initial appearance this afternoon in federal court in Providence, Rhode Island. Ceraolo remains at large.

In pursuit of victims' personal information, Singh and Ceraolo unlawfully used a police officer's stolen password to access a restricted database maintained by a federal law enforcement agency that contains (among other data) detailed, nonpublic records of narcotics and currency seizures, as well as law enforcement intelligence reports. Ceraolo (with Singh's knowledge) also accessed without authorization the email account of a foreign law enforcement officer, and used it to defraud social media

companies by making purported emergency requests for information about the companies' users.

Breon Peace, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, and Ivan J. Arvelo, Special Agent-in-Charge, Homeland Security Investigations, New York (HSI), announced the charges.

"Singh and Ceraolo aptly belonged to a group called, as their crime was, 'Vile.' That conduct ends today," stated United States Attorney Peace. "As alleged, the defendants shamed, intimidated and extorted others online. This Office will not tolerate those who impersonate law enforcement officers and misuse the public safety infrastructure that exists to protect our citizens."

"As these charges make clear, the alleged unauthorized access of a US federal law enforcement system and impersonation of law enforcement officials are serious offenses, and the criminals who perpetrate these schemes will be held accountable for their crimes." stated HSI New York Special Agent-in-

Charge Arvelo. "HSI and its law enforcement partners are committed to safeguarding public safety infrastructure from cyber criminals and ensuring that those seeking to compromise these systems face the fullest extent of the law."

As alleged in the criminal complaint, Singh and Ceraolo belonged to a group called "ViLE," whose logo is the body of a hanging girl, as depicted below in the group's official roster: Members of ViLE sought to collect victims' personal information, such as names, physical addresses, telephone numbers, social security numbers and email addresses. ViLE then posted that information (or threatened to post it) on a public website administered by a ViLE member – an action known as "doxing." Victims could pay to have their information removed from or kept off the website.

ViLE members acquired victims' information by various means, including by impersonating law enforcement officers and sending forged requests or orders purporting to be from law

enforcement to social media companies, often demanding victim information on the pretense that loss of life was imminent.

As alleged in the complaint, in pursuit of victims' personal information, Singh and Ceraolo used a police officer's credentials to access without authorization a nonpublic, password-protected web portal (the "Portal") maintained by a U.S. federal law enforcement agency, whose purpose is to share intelligence from government databases with state and local law enforcement agencies. After both Singh and Ceraolo accessed the Portal, Ceraolo wrote to Singh: "were all gonna get raided one of these days i swear." Later that day, Singh wrote to a contact that the "portal [] i accessed i was not supposed to be there not one bit." Singh said he had "jacked into a police officer's account" and "that portal had some fucking potent tools." Singh continued: "it gave me access to gov databases," followed by the names of five search tools accessible through the Portal.

## Justice Department Investigation Leads to Takedown of Darknet Cryptocurrency Mixer that Processed Over \$3 Billion of Unlawful Transactions

**Vietnamese Operator of ChipMixer Charged with Laundering Money for Ransomware Perpetrators, Darknet Markets, Fraudsters, and State-Sponsored**

(SAI Bureau) The Justice Department announced today a coordinated international takedown of ChipMixer, a darknet cryptocurrency "mixing" service responsible for laundering more than \$3 billion worth of cryptocurrency, between 2017 and the present, in furtherance of, among other activities, ransomware, darknet market, fraud, cryptocurrency heists and other hacking schemes. The operation involved U.S. federal law enforcement's court-authorized seizure of two domains that directed users to the ChipMixer service and one Github account, as well as the German Federal Criminal Police's (the Bundeskriminalamt) seizure of the ChipMixer back-end servers and more than \$46 million in cryptocurrency. Coinciding with the ChipMixer takedown efforts, Minh Qu?c Nguy?n, 49, of Hanoi, Vietnam, was charged today in Philadelphia with money laundering, operating an unlicensed money transmitting business and identity theft, connected to the operation of ChipMixer. "This morning, working with partners at home and abroad, the Department of Justice disabled a prolific cryptocurrency mixer, which has fueled

ransomware attacks, state-sponsored crypto-heists and darknet purchases



across the globe," said Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco. "Today's coordinated operation reinforces our consistent message: we will use all of our authorities to protect victims and take the fight to our adversaries. Cybercrime seeks to exploit boundaries, but the Department of Justice's network of alliances transcends borders and enables disruption

of the criminal activity that jeopardizes our global cybersecurity." "Today's

announcement demonstrates the FBI's commitment to dismantling technical infrastructure that enables cyber criminals and nation-state actors to illegally launder cryptocurrency funds," said FBI Deputy Director Paul Abbate. "We will not allow cyber criminals to hide behind keyboards nor evade the consequences of their illegal actions. Countering cybercrime requires

the ultimate level of collaboration between and among all law enforcement partners. The FBI will continue to elevate those partnerships and leverage all available tools to identify, apprehend and hold accountable these bad actors and put an end to their illicit activity." According to court documents, ChipMixer – one of the most widely used mixers to launder criminally-derived funds – allowed customers to deposit bitcoin, which ChipMixer then mixed with other ChipMixer users' bitcoin, commingling the funds in a way that made it difficult for law enforcement or regulators to trace the transactions. As detailed in the complaint, ChipMixer offered numerous features to enhance its criminal customers' anonymity. ChipMixer had a clearnet web domain but operated primarily as a Tor hidden service, concealing the operating location of its servers to prevent seizure by law enforcement. ChipMixer serviced many customers in the United States, but did not register with the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) and did not collect identifying information about its customers.



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# Rahul Gandhi, Cambridge and the 'Craft of Ranting' for a Lost Battle

Rahul Gandhi's ostensible remarks on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have always been miscued and tantamounts to some irresponsible rants. Gandhi, in his talk on the 'Craft of Listening' at Cambridge, made politically immature accusations of the breaking down of the Indian democracy and claimed to have the 'repair work' going on by the Congress and also alleged malfunctioning of the Indian Parliament where he feels being 'stifled'.

His intellectual naiveté knows no bounds when he makes juvenile remarks on the security and integrity of India, by stating how he feared a possible terrorist attack in Kashmir valley and eventually the terrorists didn't attack him only due to his power to listen.

## INC FACING A NEAR-ANNIHILATION SITUATION

The reactions of this illogical Indian become logical as his fief, the Indian National Congress (INC) is facing a near-annihilation situation and is at the crossroads of life and death. In 2014, the Congress won a helpless figure of 44 seats and in the 2019 General elections, the party won only 52 seats out of 542 seats which constitutes a meagre 9.6 percent seat sharing. Due to the party's consistent political miscalculations and the Gandhi family's misgivings, at least 460 leaders left the Congress between 2014 and 2022. Around 177 MPs/MLAs left the party during elections, while 222 electoral candidates left the Congress for other parties. Coming to electoral performance, till now, since 2014, the Congress has lost 43 out of 48 Assembly polls. Since 1998, the Congress has had a low strike rate of 26 percent, of the total 20,847 Assembly seats contested since 1998, the party has won just 5,397 till the end of 2022, which will further decline after their complete defeat in the last three Assembly elections in the Northeast.

## A DEMOCRATICALLY AND MORALLY UN-ANCHORED GANDHI TALKS ABOUT EROSION OF DEMOCRACY

Ironically, Rahul Gandhi, the defacto supremo of a party where the dynasty's wish is the follower's command, tries to make an international image of being democratic and libertarian. But in reality, he stands in complete contradiction to such ethico-legal underpinnings. In the crudest exhibition of power, Rahul never showed any respect towards the senior party men or the PM or the Cabinet in the two UPA regimes. One such instance which brought severe humiliation to the Congress was when Rahul tore a copy of an Ordinance in 2012 publicly, in an election campaign in Lucknow brought by the UPA government, and then rebuking the then PM Dr Manmohan Singh. Gandhi, who is falsely portraying the world his belief in liberal-democratic ethos, is the greatest violator of democratic practices including the procedural 'substantive

democracy', which encompasses a 'core set of beliefs', crucial to the well-functioning of a democracy, ranging from intra-party democracy to a 'bottom up' approach in the decision making of a party.

But the monolithic Gandhi lineage has set aside inclusivity and what predominantly has prevailed, is a pre-disposition of 'lineage worship' which Sonia Gandhi conveniently refers to as 'we three' (Sonia, Rahul and Priyanka). For the first time in the past 24 years, no member of the Gandhi family was a candidate for the Congress party's top post. Sonia Gandhi has been the party's longest-serving president, in its 137-year-old history for 24 years, except for two years of Rahul Gandhi. Congress held the elections in 2022 just to create a facade of decentralisation of the party authority and her shadow still looms large on the party. This is evident from the fact that the senior party leaders officially asserted that the Gandhi family will continue to play a key role in the future. It is noteworthy that Sonia Gandhi still heads the Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) which shows the Gandhi family's grip over a toy Congress.

## AN ABSENTEE PARTY DEFACTO

Rahul Gandhi's disillusionment and despair is sinking him into a position of nowhere and he is turning all his agenda to malign PM Modi and the BJP government. During the entire period of electioneering in the three states of the Northeast, when the BJP leadership under the PM was campaigning and working hard on the ground level in a competitive environment, Rahul Gandhi was either skiing in Gulmarg or out in Britain conspiring against the Indian government by making seditious comments.

He couldn't stay back to chalk out concrete strategies to come out of the pathetic performance of his party, unlike PM Narendra Modi, who has always been like a solid block of support for his party workers. Rahul's Bharat Jodo Yatra was nothing but a ploy to be away from party responsibilities. Maybe democracy, as per his limited understanding, is facilitating the perpetuation of the defacto, de jure rule of the Nehru-Gandhi lineage over India.

## ATMANIRBHAR BHARAT IS AN INTEGRATED BHARAT

A little recollection of the undemocratic manoeuvring this political dynasty did is sufficient to historically prove that tempering with Indian democratic credentials is embedded in their genes. And Indians are defiantly democratic and hence, the Congress is at its all-time low. With enormous political disappointment (losing Congress bastion of Amethi) and consequent frustration, the Gandhi scion now turns to subvert his political disconnect and non-commitment to blaming the vibrant democratic practices followed by the Modi government.

# Russia-Ukraine conflict is driving a strategic transformation of our world order

On Tuesday, one Russian SU-27 fighter jet forced down a U.S. surveillance drone, leading it to crash into the Black Sea.

This was the first highly consequential military encounter of the kind that could have resulted in a direct conflict between Russia and the U.S.

Even if Moscow and Washington manage to avoid such a catastrophic clash, their proxy war over Ukraine, which is in its second year, will transform the world in the long term, nevertheless. Here are top three strategic changes to watch.

## Permanent war in Europe

All of the three parties to the war — Moscow, Kyiv and Washington — are incentivized to continue the bloodshed. Putin views the outcome of the war as existential. Russia, which has seen its buffer zone with NATO reduced to as little as 100 miles after the Baltic states joined NATO in 2004, has drawn a red line over Ukraine. Russia's capacity and manpower outmatch Ukraine's, enabling Putin to continue a war of attrition.

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy cannot back down either. His entire persona is wrapped up in the image of a wartime president and freedom fighter. Losing his status of international hero by capitulating to Putin would mean that Zelenskyy could no longer secure U.S. and European cash, on which his country is fully dependent for survival as Ukraine's industrial capacity and agricultural base are destroyed.

Washington views U.S. support for Ukraine as a cost-effective investment in militarily and economically weakening Russia, a primary U.S. adversary. Given the largely bipartisan

support in Congress for funding Ukraine, some form of military assistance can be expected to flow to Kyiv. This will likely prevent Russia from securing a clear military victory but won't stop Putin.

The upcoming admission of Sweden and Finland into NATO will further exacerbate Russia's security fears. Russia shares an 832-mile border with Finland. These two countries' acceptance into the alliance will automatically double the border between NATO and Russia, from around 750 miles to about 1,600. This will likely drive Russia to ratchet up its destabilizing activities in the region, creating a permanent flashpoint in Europe.

The 2023 annual threat assessment issued by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) flagged as "significant" the risk of an escalation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict to a broader military confrontation between Russia and the West. This would have a lasting destabilizing effect on Europe.

Quadruple threat from emerging anti-Western coalition

The DNI intelligence assessment warned of "complex" threats against the U.S. posed by China, Russia, North Korea and Iran. Each of them individually already present a significant threat to our country. If they coordinate actions, the threat would multiply exponentially.

All four countries have formidable cyberattack arsenals and routinely target U.S. networks. China, Iran and North Korea have been providing military assistance to Russia, prolonging the conflict in Ukraine. Russia and Iran likely have concluded a secret nuclear deal, which would allow uranium transfers to Tehran's illicit weapons program. Members of this emerging anti-U.S. coalition are emboldened by their growing closeness.



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# What SVB's shocking collapse means for the tech industry-and the US

With the shocking failure of Silicon Valley Bank on Friday, I'm sure the lights are on late this weekend at the White House, Treasury, Fed and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. SVB, the second largest US bank ever to go under, was hit by a garden-variety bank run accelerated by a high concentration of large uninsured deposits. Yes, there were failures of risk management and regulatory supervision. And there are likely some other banks whose balance sheets have been similarly weakened by the rapid increases in interest rates, which dramatically diminished the value of Treasuries and mortgage-backed securities. According to FDIC Chair Martin Gruenberg last week, banks have yet to recognize about \$620 billion of losses in market value caused by rising interest rates.

Despite the panic over SVB's collapse, this situation isn't likely to

morph into a broader banking crisis. Since the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008, the largest US banks have been forced by regulators to be much more resilient. They also rely far more heavily than SVB on retail depositors, who tend to have a greater share of their deposits covered by FDIC insurance and are less prone to run at the first sign of trouble.

Of more immediate concern is the potentially systemic impact this will have on the tech sector, which has already seen mass layoffs and investments shrivel up in recent months. Close to half of all listed US venture-backed tech and health care firms were SVB customers and many of these companies were racing to line up funds to make payroll in the aftermath of the collapse. Given US strategic technology objectives and the broader implications for national security, the government should intervene if a significant portion of

these tech firms need cash to survive. It's possible that may not be necessary — if most of the affected tech depositors have sufficient alternative sources of cash or can be quickly restructured in bankruptcy and continue to bring their innovations to market, then the government doesn't need to intervene with taxpayer-funded support. If, however, a large fraction cannot survive, then it is in the US government's own interests to step in. It can do that in a number of different ways. The SVB catastrophe could, for example, serve as a catalyst for the government to establish a new domestic industrial development bank, as proposed by Senator Chris Coons, which could provide bridge loans to the tech industry. For some tech startups, the Small Business Administration could step in with emergency loans, as was done when Covid hit in March 2020. California and the federal government each have a

Technology Modernization Fund that could potentially provide grants to keep specific types of research and development alive. But these approaches may be too slow. Many tech firms that lost access to their SVB deposits may be unable to keep the lights on for long. There are already signs that the government is taking swift action. The FDIC, the government agency charged with SVB's workout and insuring some of its deposits, has said that insured depositors would have access to their deposits by Monday, and that it would pay uninsured depositors an "advance dividend within the next week." But plenty more may need to be done. The tech sector is an engine of economic growth and a key element of US national security, especially given the rivalry between the US and China. If the government decides that it needs to help the tech sector through this mess, then it will need to act quickly.

## Biden's banking busts include this single biggest monetary policy mistake in half a century

### Biden has been obsessing on woke causes while banks are on the brink

The failure of three banks in the last two weeks, including Silicon Valley Bank on Friday and Signature Bank on Sunday, is a saga of utter government incompetence. Call these bank collapses Biden's Banking Busts. The Biden administration has been obsessing on woke causes while banks teeter toward insolvency.

Three days before Silicon Valley Bank collapsed, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen cautioned that climate change puts the banking industry at risk. Yellen was in la-la land, speculating that future storms and tornadoes could diminish the value of banks' assets.

Weather is a risk, but she was oblivious to the much more immediate problem facing banks -- the plummeting value of the bonds they own. She was heedless to the impending downfall of SVB and possibly several other small banks that had purchased long-term bonds when interest rates were near zero. In 2022, after doing nothing to tame inflation the previous year, the Federal Reserve hiked rates repeatedly to make up for their previous inaction. Those rapid rate hikes, the most drastic in decades, made the banks' bonds lose value. A week before Yellen's climate change harangue, Moody's Investors Service already had delivered bad news to SVB that it was about to

be downgraded several notches because its inventory of bonds was not worth enough to repay depositors. A day before Yellen's loony speech, Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. Chairman Martin Gruenberg also cautioned that the diminishing value of the bonds held by banks meant a \$620 billion problem ahead.

The Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, a part of Yellen's Treasury, is responsible for examining the financial condition of national banks. It failed to avert the SVB collapse.

Yellen has been an outspoken activist for climate change, women's rights and diversity, including appointing the Treasury's first ever racial equity officer. Apparently, the hordes of bureaucrats working under her are also too busy with diversity, equity, and inclusion seminars to prevent banks from failing. As the SVB crisis unfolded, Yellen was MIA. Now she says she's monitoring several banks "struggling with the whiplash in prices" of their bonds.

Financial experts warn smaller banks are in for a rough ride, though the big banks like JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America, Wells Fargo and others are not apt to be in trouble. Admittedly, SVB's managers made mistakes. Banking's first rule is that assets

should match deposits. If depositors can demand their money back anytime, then using their money to buy long-term bonds is risky. SVB had to sell \$21 billion worth of bonds at a fire sale, taking a \$1.8 billion loss.

Trading was suspended Friday in the stocks of several small banks whose share prices plunged on fears they were in the same situation. On Sunday, New York bank regulators shut Signature Bank.

President Joe Biden created the perfect storm for what may become a string of banking busts. In 2021, he lied about inflation, saying it was temporary and "no serious economist" considered it a threat. Yellen and Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell, whose first term was about to expire, went along with Biden and did nothing to bring down prices. It was the single biggest monetary policy mistake in half a century.

Then in March 2022, newly reappointed Powell launched aggressive rate hiking to cure what the Wall Street Journal called "a mess largely of the Fed's own making." As rates rose fast, startup companies could no longer afford to borrow, and instead started withdrawing their bank deposits. Without regulatory intervention, the downfall of SVB was almost a foregone conclusion. On March 7,

Powell predicted that the Fed will likely "increase the pace of rate hikes" to continue bringing down inflation. A task made more difficult by our spendaholic president's budget proposal, which is an inflation accelerator.

As rates rise, more banks could be in trouble. Continued government incompetence is not an option.

Mr. President, get rid of your woke minions and appoint competent people. Our money and jobs are at stake. On Sunday night, Biden said he's "firmly committed to holding those responsible for this mess fully accountable." Look in the mirror, Mr. President.

Instead, he's looking at the list of Democratic campaign donors and scurrying to bail them out. Ninety-eight percent of all political contributions from people who worked at internet companies went to Democrats in 2020. Silicon Valley residents coughed up nearly \$200 million for Democrats. No surprise that the Treasury and the Fed are offering bailouts, whether they use that word or not. Biden's reckless spending and incompetent monetary policy are causing this string of banking busts. And John Q. Public will end up paying one way or another.



# Why Rahul Gandhi's Congress represents India's new fringe

**The Congress's loss of entitlement in the last few years has been so grave and irreversible that it has rendered them confused, bitter and rudderless, making them vilify India abroad in their sheer helplessness.**

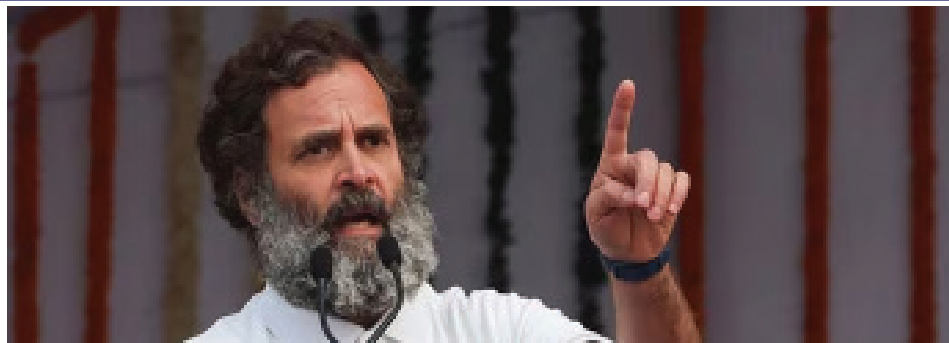
There is a clear, creepy and evil method to Rahul Gandhi's madness. His belaboured attempts to sully India's credentials abroad are borne out of a despondent realization that Congress is now an obsolete force with no chance, nor the wherewithal to compete in the transformed political space in India unless there is concerted damage inflicted upon the country by foreign powers. This notorious, debauched wishful thinking renders the Congress party incompetent for democracy.

Since Rahul Gandhi's most blatant attack has been on democracy being dead in India, let me address that first.

Democracy in its simplest inference is providing opportunities to the deserving and cancelling the long rope enjoyed by entitled non-performers. To that extent, Smriti Irani's spirited fight and defeat at Amethi in 2014 and her subsequent victory in 2019 is the best example of the robustness of our democracy.

It is the same democracy that provided a safe haven to Rahul Gandhi in the Wayanad constituency down south, but instead of learning from his mistakes and recovering lost ground, Gandhi's sheer ineptitude will have him chucked out of the Lok Sabha in 2024, paving the way for a less entitled, more competent Congress.

Another recent example of the robustness of our democracy is how



the Christian-dominated states of the North East now shun the Congress and naturally vote for the BJP- a party that delivers on the ground.

Thus, democracy is about ensuring equal opportunities through merit and hard work. The only people who hate equal opportunities for all are those who were hitherto shielded by entitlement. The Congress's loss of entitlement in the last few years has been so grave and irreversible that it has rendered them confused, bitter and rudderless, making them vilify India abroad in their sheer helplessness. The sickest part of Gandhi's behaviour is the brazen hypocrisy it carries. On one hand, Rahul Gandhi has never ceased any opportunity to plant canards about Veer Savarkar and paint him as 'maafiveer'. On the other hand, he has now virtually begged in front of the British lawmakers and media, pleading for their intervention. Such treachery from an Indian MP is unprecedented and raises question

marks about his maturity as well as mental status.

These are a few other false narratives that Rahul Gandhi has tried to peddle, with the similar objective of painting the country in a poor light. His own doublespeak on those issues, however, has exposed him as a habitual liar. For instance, on the issue of China, Gandhi seems utterly confused. He has repeatedly praised China's "idea of spreading prosperity" to the world. And then, suddenly attacked the Indian government, accusing it of having no knowledge of the threat from China. Rahul Gandhi's doublespeak on China has been exposed repeatedly. The real mystery lies in the motives behind it. If an Indian MP can publicly demean India in front of Britishers and virtually beg for their support, what guarantee is that he wouldn't be badmouthing India privately in front of the Chinese and begging for similar support? The relatively mature leaders in the Congress like Mallikarjun Kharge have

expectedly remained quiet on Rahul Gandhi's vile utterances, knowing its ugly implications for India. At a time when India holds the G20 Presidency and countries all across, and increasing their India engagement, the Congress diatribe is intended to create doubt about the India story. It is to create obstacles in the India-UK FTA talks by making British policy makers sceptical. It is to make India seem weak and fragile like Ukraine, with whom Rahul Gandhi has drawn equivalence for our country.

There are umpteen examples I can give here of how the Congress party has trampled our democracy over decades. But that is not the point of this article. The point here is the obnoxious perfidy unleashed by a sitting MP and his party who feel it is fine to spread falsehood about their country on foreign soil in order to avenge their electoral failures. It will be unfortunate if Rahul Gandhi is not penalized by Parliament for his indiscretions that impinge on India's sovereignty. Sadly, the party that proudly boasts about its contribution to India's freedom movement is now a national embarrassment and represents India's new fringe - a group that shrugs off its own incompetence and instead chooses to deride the nation globally.

## How RRR's nationalism struck a chord with the West

**There are reports that the RRR team spent more than Rs 80 crore in marketing the film in the US but the RRR juggernaut went full steam ahead on its own once it was initially screened in the US last year.**



With the Oscars around the corner, more than a billion Indians are hoping that director SS Rajamouli and RRR return home with the Oscar for Best Original Song. There are reports that the RRR team spent more than Rs 80 crore in marketing the film in the US but the RRR juggernaut went full steam ahead on its own once it was initially screened in the US last year. The Western audience loved the film and though it was three hours long, they watched it for the sake of

Bheema's friendship and their anti-colonial struggle have been depicted in struck a chord with the Western audience and though critics implied there was a strong current of Hindu nationalism in the film, it is perhaps also one of the reasons why the West has been enamoured with SS Rajamouli's magnum opus. While many have tried to connect the portrayals of Raju and Bheem with the nationalism narrative in India, the fact is that the two men showcased in the film were real life freedom fighters - only their friendship and the story was Rajamouli's imagination. Hinduism and the caste system are an inherent part of Indian culture and

traditional tapestry and they have been depicted in various forms in innumerable Indian films, not just RRR. Coming to the context in which RRR was set, it was during the times of India's freedom struggle and these revolutionaries are part of our history books. The underlying nationalism and patriotism that Raju and Bheem feel is depicted through the passion and love they have for their homeland. The two revolutionaries come together as friends to defeat the men who have enslaved them and, in this journey, Raju and Bheem are not pessimistic - there is tremendous hope and positivity that one day they will achieve their goal of freedom.

(Contd. on page 23)



# Rishi Sunak's Big Political Gamble Ahead Of Election

Declaring that "enough is enough" and that the system is "not fair," British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak last week unveiled a five-point plan in the House of Commons to tackle illegal immigration. This plan involves setting up a new permanent unified small boats operational command, enhancing the capacity of immigration officers to focus on enforcement, slashing costs by ceasing to use hotels for asylum seekers, increasing the number of asylum caseworkers, and a new pact with Albania to expedite cases from the nation. Along with a raft of measures with France to jointly address illegal boat crossings across the English Channel, this is by far the most ambitious plan by any British government in recent memory to address illegal immigrations. What makes this even more interesting and significant is that those behind this overhaul are Sunak and his Home Secretary Suella Braverman - both immigrants.

Last year, 45,700 people used small boats to travel to the UK from France - a record - putting political pressure on the Sunak government to come up with a policy response to a problem few have good answers to. Facing a precipitous decline in the popularity of the Conservatives, Sunak also views this as a political priority, given that the issue resonates well with the rank and file of the Tories.

A new bill aimed at removing people who arrive in the UK illegally "within weeks" and banning them for life from claiming asylum is generating headlines around the world. The UNHCR has expressed concern, suggesting this is "effectively closing off access to asylum in the UK for people arriving irregularly" and "is a clear breach of the Refugee Convention." The opposition Labour Party has described the Bill as a "con"; Labour leader Keir Starmer argued that while "the problem has got to be dealt with, the crossings over the Channel...this isn't a workable plan".

Yet, against a fusillade of criticism, Sunak remains defiant, declaring he's "up for the fight" and that "it is this country (the UK) - and your government-who should decide who comes here, not criminal gangs". He knows that with this policy he is setting the narrative for next year's general elections and forcing the Labour Party, so far leading in opinion polls, to fight the electoral battle on terms set by the Conservatives.

Economically too, this is an attractive option for the Tories. At a time when the British economy is still struggling, there will be considerable support among the people for a hard line against immigrants, especially low-skilled workers seen to take jobs away from native Britons. Sunak has made it clear that he wants to attract

highly skilled and talented migrants, something that other developed countries have also been pursuing, though perhaps more subtly.

A big reason for Brexit in the first place was the disaffection in the UK about immigrants from EU countries seemingly taking jobs away from local workers. Sunak, a Brexiteer by instinct, is basically taking that policy to its logical conclusion with his new immigration agenda.

The proposed law will not face too many bumps in the House of Commons, where the Conservatives enjoy a large majority. Despite the Labour Party's opposition - mostly centred around the unworkability of the announced measures and not on the fundamental idea behind it - the Sunak government will not face any serious problems in the House. But there might be challenges and amendments in the House of Lords. Then the courts may intervene, especially as the Home Secretary has been unable to guarantee in parliament that the plan is compatible the European Convention on Human Rights. Suella Braverman has even admitted it has "more than a 50% chance" of being found unlawful. Sunak has suggested that he is also considering withdrawing from the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) to facilitate his immigration policy.

The consequences of this immigration debate are playing out

much beyond the political space. Even the BBC is now under pressure after Gary Lineker, the broadcaster's highest-paid presenter, was suspended over his criticism of Britain's immigration policy last week. Mr Lineker called it a "cruel policy directed at the most vulnerable people in language that is not dissimilar to that used by Germany in the 30s".

Several presenters walked out in his support and the BBC had to put out an apology. Sunak refused to step into the controversy, though he underlined that it was important to maintain perspective, given the seriousness of the problem, with 45,000 people risking their lives crossing the Channel illegally last year.

The crisis at the BBC merely underscores the passions that the new immigration policy is generating and how Sunak is hoping that his tough stance will serve him well politically by rallying the Tories around in his support.

At the start of 2023 he had declared tackling small boats as one of his priorities - he is now delivering on that promise. Politically, this puts Sunak in a relatively stronger position vis-à-vis Labour, but it is not clear if his immigration policy will actually stop small boats from crossing the Channel. Nevertheless, Sunak has decided on a huge political gamble, one that he hopes will pay during elections.

## China achieves what even US could not in the Middle East

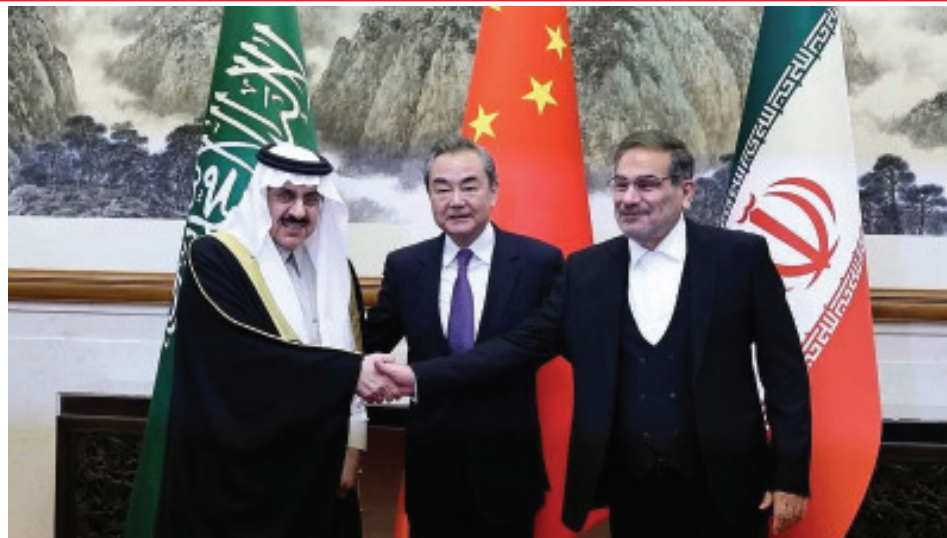
### US has sanctioned five Chinese companies for selling aerospace components to Iran, which is supplying drones to Russia for use in the Ukraine war.

Li Qiang, a Xi ally with little national experience, was appointed as the next premier of China. A PLA officer sanctioned by the US, Li Shangfu, was appointed as the new defence minister. Beijing brokers diplomatic détente between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Taiwanese president Tsai Ing-wen is set to visit New York and California, say sources. Taiwan will resume direct flights to 23 mainland Chinese cities suspended since 2016.

#### China over the week

When Li Qiang walked out on the stage with President Xi Jinping and five other members of the Politburo Standing Committee in October 2022 during the 20th Party Congress meeting, it was clear that Xi had set his mind on making the former his next premier.

Last week, Xi's presidential order confirmed it. Li comes from a humble background, unlike Xi, a princeling. Li studied agricultural mechanisation



at Zhejiang University and later joined the Communist Youth League. He earned an executive postgraduate degree from the Chinese Communist Party's Central Party School.

Between 2004 and 2007, Li served as Xi's chief of staff while the latter was the party secretary in Zhejiang province. It's the reason Li became Xi's most trusted protégé, and the

relationship has paid off for Li as he moved swiftly into the role of party secretary in Jiangsu and later Shanghai.

One of Li's successes was convincing Elon Musk to set up Tesla's first overseas factory in Shanghai. But Li was implicated in mismanaging the response to Covid during the massive Shanghai

lockdown.

Reuters recently reported citing unnamed Chinese officials that Li played a role in accelerating plans to dump China's stringent Covid measures in December. But Reuters sources may have been attempting to prop Li up as a suitable candidate who would continue the agenda of economic growth.

"He inherits a job that has so many headwinds, starting with the real estate crisis, the debt burden, US sanctions, the ageing of China and the sentiment being down," Jörg Wuttke, head of the EU Chamber of Commerce in China, told Financial Times. Li's elevation to the premiership comes at a time when Xi is doing everything to devolve the decision-making authority of the State Council. The Chinese premier is the head of the State Council and ensures smooth running of public institutions.

(Contd. on page 23)



# The Migrant Malaise-Search for Belonging in Tamil Nadu

Sunil Kumar's signature dish when he applies for a job at a Chennai home is rasam. The cook from Jharkhand has perfected the balance of tamarind and spice, impressing prospective employees by making variations of one of the most popular dishes in the country. For over two decades, he has been perfecting his culinary skills, learning to make traditional south Indian food, picking up the nuances of the language and finding his way around Chennai.

Yet each time his phone lights up with a message about an incident involving migrant workers, he instinctively checks on his friends, calls home, and weighs his options, pushing down the fleeting thought of going back. When recent videos of north Indian migrant workers being beaten up went viral, Kumar and thousands like him plugged into the informal network they have formed in the absence of effective government information systems or welfare mechanisms to double check ground reality.

The Tamil Nadu state government was quick off the blocks to dispel the videos as "false and baseless" and arrest some for spreading rumours, but it fell short of completely allaying the fears of workers who keep the manufacturing hubs humming and service sectors functioning smoothly across the state. Migrants like Kumar - who weathered past cases of mis-

information, patiently waited for Covid restrictions to be lifted and stuck to their jobs - are aware that while the videos were fake, the reality is that their jobs are precarious and their acceptance in the workplace limited.

Kumar has reconciled to the fact that he will always be considered an outsider in the city where he first arrived as a 15-year-old to work with a catering company, learnt the basics of cooking and slowly went on to become a full-time cook. But for thousands of younger men and women making the journey into a state where Hindi is opposed, where they are often dubbed 'Biharis' and where they face locals who are deeply resentful of "outsiders stealing their jobs", rumours are enough to send them rushing to buy a return ticket home.

Many took two days off from work, losing wages to stay in their rooms and watch if the fake videos led to any real violence. Some packed their bags, unwilling to wait for something to happen, feeling safer on board a train home.

## GROWING NUMBERS

Researchers estimate that there are around 100 million inter-state migrants in India, while the last Census of 2011 puts the figure at around 4.1 million. Tamil Nadu has the highest number - over 25 lakh people - engaged in factories in India while states like Jharkhand and Bihar

are amongst the lowest, according to the Economic Survey of 2022-23.

State government estimates suggest there are between 6 to 10 lakh migrant workers across manufacturing and service sectors in Tamil Nadu. Post pandemic, while there were promises of a database to account and provide for migrant workers, they have mostly remained on paper. Ad hoc help desks set up at railway stations and manufacturing hubs have failed to effectively capture the movement of largely unskilled workers from Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Chhattisgarh to brick kilns, rice mills, farms, construction sites, spinning mills, factories and services sector in the south. Government-run skilling programmes have been big contributors to this rising number in recent years, with tens of thousands of trained youth finding placement in factories down south.

There are now factories that employ only "out of state workers" who put in extra shifts, don't unionise and rarely miss work. In Tirupur and Sriperumbudur, where thousands of migrants work in the auto manufacturing units, there are an increasing number of translators being hired on factory floors to facilitate communication between managements and workers, while canteens are reworking their menus to suit the north Indian palate. Employers are putting these mecha-

nisms in place, aware of the fact that in the future they will be hiring many more young migrants as the local labour force declines. The Population projection report of the health and family welfare ministry suggests that Tamil Nadu is expected to have among the lowest population growth rates (8%) between 2011-2036, when India's population will rise to over 150 crores, and urban growth would account for about three-fourth (73 percent) of this total increase.

## SENSE OF BELONGING

The absence of a coherent action plan that compliments the slogan that Tamil Nadu is a welcoming and safe state for workers is reflected in the frequent newspaper reports on skirmishes between migrants and residents or trending memes and YouTube videos on the lifestyle of migrant workers. Pictures of policemen playing Holi with migrant workers and asking them to share it with others, the latest in a series of outreach attempts by the state government, are viewed only as a quick fix. On Kumar's WhatsApp feed, worried discussions continue even as he plans to bring his wife and three young children to Chennai this summer, hoping to show them a better life in the port city - the beach, idlis, better schools and the friends he has made over the years.

## Modi govt's reforms lack finesse. It must raise the bar to make India \$10 trillion economy

India has all the ingredients for success in manufacturing but ready-to-wear garments for export is 40 per cent more expensive here than in Bangladesh.



the US and China.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has urged the nation to drive toward becoming a developed nation in the next 25 years. The government continues to lead the spendings in infrastructure development, with a proposed capital expenditure of Rs 10 lakh crore for FY2024.

### Lessons from the past

At large, the global capital, political leadership, Indian industries and citizens expect India to materialise its dream. The government claims there has never been a better alignment of factors in favour of India's interests. So, is India's prime time here? Can we put behind the challenges of our size, scale, and decades of underperformance in GDP growth to graduate to the next level of prosperity? While the answers are anyone's guess, this is not the first time that India has been hyped to be the

leading light of global growth.

In the mid-1990s, the world touted India to be the ideal manufacturing hub but the red-tape culture and sluggish political economy passed on this opportunity to China. During the 2008-09 global financial crisis, the country gathered a strong momentum under Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (much like today). While the western world faced the Lehman Brothers crisis, India emerged as a fundamentally strong economy, aiming to undertake an export and infrastructure-led boom. But rather we created a pile of bad debts and non-performing assets (NPA), which rendered a stressed banking sector for decades to follow. In 2014, with Modi's arrival, India hoped to have the Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher moment of pro-industry reforms. The BJP government, however, failed to deliver in sectors of land, labour

and agriculture; finally stumbling the economy with its demonetisation decision.

So, every time the India growth story has developed, either our political and policy leadership or our cultural lack of long-term thinking has managed to punt the opportunity. The country's working age (15-64) population is expected to be over 90 crore in 2023. A mere 1 per cent drop in GDP results in the loss of nearly 40 lakh jobs. To keep its working population employed, a growth rate of 7 per cent plus is a non-negotiable necessity. In contrast to previous times, we simply cannot afford to overlook the current opportunity. There are valuable lessons from the past that we must take heed of.

### Sell the reforms

Producing ready-to-wear garments for exports is 40 per cent more expensive in India than Bangladesh, (Contd. on page 23)

India will be the world's fastest-growing major economy in 2023." — International Monetary Fund, December 2022. India will drive a fifth of the world's expansion this decade." — Morgan Stanley, January 2023.

"Don't Bet Against India — New Delhi is brewing a comeback." — Foreign Affairs Magazine, February 2023. The outlook for major western economies is projected to be bleak over the next decade. And China is grappling

with a variety of concerns such as Covid-19 management, declining population, and strenuous geopolitical relations. But India, with its increasing consumption, young demography, and quest to be a \$10 trillion economy by 2035, continues to grab positive headlines. Its growth story euphoria coincides with the year of the G20 presidency, its circumstantially elevated geopolitical stature amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and continued escalations between



# North-South divide is feeding migrant fears. But no one asks why Bihar has no factories

**Indians spreading disinformation about mistreatment of migrant labourers in Tamil Nadu must ask why northern states lag southern states in achieving basic governance.**

Weaponising social media in bad faith is now a tool of choice for political partisans. The latest instance of that ugliness came from several BJP politicians in Bihar as well as the party's Uttar Pradesh spokesperson who falsely claimed in viral posts that Bihari migrants were being murdered in Tamil Nadu. Elsewhere, two stray murders — neither of which involved Tamils — were similarly falsely attributed to ethnic hatred of Biharis by Tamils. The posts caused panic among the lakhs of migrant workers in Tamil Nadu. The police have registered a case against those spreading disinformation; but as it happens in these cases, disinformation travels fast because it's designed to appeal to people's fears and biases. Truth, meanwhile, in all its boring complexity, is hardly forward worthy. While the political partisans sink to new lows, it's useful to understand why lakhs of people migrate to southern India from the Hindi heartland, in search of work.



Consider the states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand. These six states together have a population of about 520 million (52 crore). If they were a country by themselves, they would be the third most populous country. In 2018, these six states combined had about as many factories as Tamil Nadu — a state

with a population of 70 million (7 crore). And these factories in Tamil Nadu employ more people than those in all of central and northern India. Moreover, wages in southern India are significantly higher compared to the rest of the country. That is, if you are a working age person in northern India, the simple probability of you getting a job in the organised sector

is low. And even if you do, your wages are likely going to be low. Many people in those states, therefore, do what any rational human being would: go to places where there are more jobs that also pay better. And those places are in southern India. The complicating factor in this is that the southern states happen to be culturally and linguistically dis-

tinct. The migration, therefore, has political consequences as all large scale migrations do. While the local reaction toward these migrants becomes news, the question that all thinking citizens should be asking is: why are there so few factories and so few jobs in north India? The answer is complex but a simple fact is: factories need human capital and are often set up in places where there is good governance, adherence to the rule of law and, above all, good educational and health outcomes. Tamil Nadu, for example, has a gross enrollment ratio of 84% at the higher secondary level, the highest in the country among large states; Bihar at 29% has the lowest. Tamil Nadu's infant mortality rate — the most robust health indicator in a developing society — is 15 (infant deaths per 1,000 live births), against Uttar Pradesh's 41 or Bihar's 29 as per the Sample Registration System data for 2019.

(Contd. on page 22)

## India must prepare for these 3 wars before tackling China, Pakistan threat

**There's a chance India will have to fight simultaneously with China and Pakistan. But it does not alter the type of conventional war it has to undertake.**

The Russia-Ukraine war has highlighted the relevance of a key tenet laid down by 18th-century Prussian military general and theorist Carl Von Clausewitz—on the conduct of war. Clausewitz's warning to heads of State and military commanders was this: "Recognize the kind of war they are undertaking, neither mistaking it for, nor attempting to turn it into something it cannot be because of the nature of the circumstances." Furthermore, he regarded this task as "the first, the supreme, the most decisive act of judgement" that policymakers and military strategists must observe. As global and regional geopolitical tensions surge, Clausewitz's warning becomes more relevant to India's strategic planners. There is a need to seek answers to a pressing question: What sort of wars should India be prepared for? Though we must learn from others' wars, our po-



litico-strategic framework must keep the Indian context in mind. This context will determine the constellation of several dynamic forces that could come into play, like leadership decision-making, unique technological products and actions of multiple external actors.

At the fundamental level comes the element of geography. India's geography forms a crucial layer

in its conflict landscape. The internal physical terrain provides resources that can be potentially harvested for development, progress, and security. Since all required resources are unavailable within India's geographical realm, trade — involving the exchange and movement of goods, services, and people — becomes an abiding imperative for development and security.

Externally, a country's geography decides its strategic neighbourhood. Technology and rapidly improving connectivity are constantly collapsing distances and expanding the scope of this strategic neighbourhood notion. In terms of proximity, India has continental and maritime boundaries with China, Nepal, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and

Pakistan. National boundaries and connected disputes of varying intensity — all of which impact the movement of goods, services, and people — have led to conflicts with China and Pakistan getting militarised. Additionally, the safety of connectivity avenues to sources of political, economic, technological, and social imperatives is a cause of security concern due to continuing territorial and maritime disputes and piracy involving non-State actors. The potential for war lies in contested geographic spaces such as land, air, sea, space, and cyberspace.

**Wars India must prepare to fight** War is organised violence applied to achieve political purposes. And this objective nature does not change, no matter the type of war. War, however, must not be confused with warfare.

(Contd. on page 22)



# This is the most polluted city in India. It's not Delhi

Nearly 60 per cent of cities in India surveyed for the report had pollution at nearly seven times the WHO standards.



(SAI Bureau) India's air quality is seven times worse than the standards set by the World Health Organisation (WHO). The fifth Annual World Air Quality Report revealed that while New Delhi is the second most polluted capital city in the world, it is not the most polluted city in India. The most polluted city in India in 2022 was Rajasthan's Biwadi. The city had an annual Particulate Matter 2.5 (PM2.5) level of 92.7, and nearly 60 per cent of cities in India surveyed for the report had pollution at nearly seven times the WHO standards. The report has been

released by IQAir, a Swiss air quality technology company, which collected data from more than 30,000 air quality monitoring stations across 7,323 locations in 131 countries. India in 2022 had committed to resetting its National Clean Air Program targets with the aim of reducing particulate matter concentrations by 40 per cent by 2026. However, the report also highlights policy decisions including the relaxation of environmental regulations for coal mines, allowing for increased production that drove particulate matter.

"It is clear that the air quality in India is in a dire state, and the government needs to take urgent action to reduce air pollution. Stricter regulations on industries

and vehicles to reduce air pollution are the need of the hour. Additionally, investment in renewable energy in a decentralised manner should be a priority. Furthermore, the government should also invest in 'real' public transportation systems such as buses and suburban rail to reduce the number of vehicles on the roads," Avinash Chanchal, campaign manager at Greenpeace India, said in a statement.

The top five most polluted countries in 2022 included Chad, Iraq, Pakistan, Bahrain, and Bangladesh. It found that the region of Central and South Asia was home to eight of the world's ten cities with the worst air pollution.

The report stressed that while the number of countries and regions with air quality monitoring has steadily increased over the past five years, there remain significant gaps in government-operated regulatory instrumentation in many parts of the world.

"Too many people around the world don't know that they are breathing polluted air. Air pollution monitors provide hard data that can inspire communities to demand change and hold polluters to account, but when monitoring is patchy or unequal, vulnerable communities can be left with no data to act on," Aidan Farrow, Sr. Air Quality Scientist, Greenpeace International added.

## Land-for-job scam: What CBI chargesheet against Lalu Yadav & family says

Former Railway Minister Lalu Prasad, Rabri Devi, and several others are under CBI scanner in connection with the alleged land-for-jobs scam where people were allegedly given jobs in the railway in return for land parcels gifted or sold at cheap rates.



(SAI Bureau) The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) filed a chargesheet in an alleged land-for-jobs case against former Railway Minister Lalu Prasad Yadav, former Bihar Chief Minister Rabri Devi, and 14 others. All the accused have been summoned by a special court on March 15. The CBI chargesheet, which was

filed in October 2022, mentioned that "irregular/ illegal appointments of candidates were made in Central Railways, violating the norms, guidelines and procedure of railways". The case pertains to people allegedly given employment in the railways in return for land parcels gifted or sold at cheap rates to the Yadav family and its associates.

A day before Lalu Yadav, Rabri Devi, and others appear before the court in the land-for-job case, here's a look at what the CBI chargesheet states: As a quid-pro-quo, selected candidates, directly or through immediate relatives or family members, sold land to family members of Lalu Prasad Yadav, who was the then Railway minister. The land was sold at a discounted rate of one-fourth to one-fifth of the prevailing market rate.

During 2007-2008, the then railway minister Lalu Prasad Yadav with the intent to buy and acquire land parcels situated in Patna's Vill-Mahuabagh and Vill-Kunjwa entered into a criminal conspiracy with his wife Rabri Devi, daughter Misha Bharati,

officers of central Railways and several others. The parcel of land was situated adjacent to the land parcels already owned by Lalu Yadav's family members. The chargesheet names central railways officials Sowmya Raghvan, Kamal Deep Mainrai, and residents of Vill-Mahjabagh Vill-Bindaul, and Patna City, namely Raj Kumar Singh, Mithlesh Kumar, Ajay Kumar, Sanjay Kumar, Dharmendra Kumar, Vikas Kumar, Abhishek Kumar, Ravindra Ray, Kiran Devi, Akhileshwar Singh, Ramashish Singh. All the candidates after their engagement as substitutes were subsequently regularised. In lieu of getting them appointed in railways, Lalu Prasad Yadav got the lands transferred owned by candidates and their family members in the names of his wife Rabri Devi and daughter Misha Bharti for sale consideration, which was much less than the prevailing circle rates as well as the prevailing market rates. A special court has issued summons to Lalu Yadav and others named as accused while taking cognisance of CBI chargesheet.

## Punjab farmers stage protest at Delhi's Jantar Mantar over water distribution, MSP scheme

Punjab farmers staged a protest at Jantar Manta in New Delhi. The farmers sought proper distribution of water and implementation of the MSP scheme promised by the Centre.



memorandum, the farmers urged Modi to ensure proper distribution of water for their agricultural activities and ensure implementation of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) scheme, as promised by the Centre, at the earliest.

Jarnail Singh, a protesting farmer from Punjab's Tarn Taran district, said, "Our demands are the same. We need better distribution of water for the farmers... for the state. 'All the water is going to Rajasthan and Delhi. What will the Punjabi farmers do? The government has also not done anything on MSP on wheat and pulses. Our families are suffering.'"

(By Staff Reporter) Scores of farmers from Punjab on Monday gathered at Jantar Mantar to protest against the Centre and press for their demands, including equal distribution of water and implementation of the Minimum Support Price scheme. Five farmers' unions from Punjab staged the protest amid heavy police presence. A delegation of farmers also submitted a memorandum addressed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to officials concerned. In their



# 9 Punjab officers to face action over PM Modi's 2022 security lapse

**During a visit to Punjab in January 2022, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's convoy was stuck on a flyover in a major security lapse. Nine senior officers in Punjab are facing action over the security breach.**

(By Staff Reporter) Nine senior officers in Punjab are set to face action in connection with the security lapse during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the state in January 2022.

The officials include the then Chief Secretary Anirudh Tiwari; the then Punjab Director-General of Police (DGP) S Chattopadhyaya; Senior Superintendent of Police Harmandeep Singh Hans and Charanjit Singh; Additional DGPs Nageswara Rao and Naresh Arora; Inspector generals Rakesh Aggarwal and Inderbir Singh; and the then deputy IG Surjeet Singh (now retired). This comes after the Union government expressed displeasure over the alleged delay in administrative action against the nine senior Punjab officers. The AAP-ruled Punjab government was accused of delaying the action against the officials, even though it had been six months since the report was submitted. The probe panel investigating the matter had submitted its report to the Union government in August 2022 and it was sent to the Punjab government in September 2022.

Chief Secretary Vijay Kumar Janjua



hinted that action was being taken against the senior officers on the recommendation of CM Bhagwant Maan. "The probe has been ordered and the accused officers will be asked to file their replies. We are sending an interim reply in a couple of days stating that action was being taken," Vijay Kumar Janjua said. Earlier, the Supreme Court-appointed inquiry committee, headed by retired judge Indu Malhotra, had found that the attitude of the officers in manning the

PM's security was very "casual".

The officers who have been indicted in the report are facing administrative action. According to government sources, the punishment may include a reduced service period, stoppage of the annual increments, or even lowering of the rank. Punjab chief secretary Janjua has already recommended action against these officers, as per sources.

## What happened?

On January 5, 2022, Prime Minister

Narendra Modi landed in Bathinda from where he was scheduled to go to the National Martyrs' Memorial at Hussainiwalla by chopper. But due to rain and poor visibility, it was decided that the PM would travel by road, which would take over two hours. The route was planned after confirming the necessary security arrangements by the Punjab top cop. Around 30 km away from the National Martyrs' Memorial in Hussainiwalla, when his convoy was on a flyover, it was found that the road was blocked by protestors. The PM's convoy remained stuck on the flyover, in a major security lapse. Soon after the lapse, the Home Ministry constituted a three-member committee that summoned over a dozen top Punjab Police officers, who were responsible for the PM's security during his visit to Punjab's Ferozpur. The team began the probe with a visit to the flyover where PM Modi's convoy was stuck for nearly 20 minutes as protestors blocked the road. The Home Ministry had then asked the Punjab government to "fix responsibility for this lapse and take strict action".



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# Defence ministry focuses on developing infra along border with China

**Defence Minister Rajnath Singh today chaired a meeting with all stakeholders to discuss infrastructure development projects along the northern border with China.**

(By Staff Reporter) Top ministers, led by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, held a meeting today to develop infrastructure along the border with China - from Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh chaired the meeting with all stakeholders to discuss the infrastructure development projects along the northern border with China.

The meeting was attended by union ministers Nitin Gadkari, RK Singh, Ashwini Vaishnav, Bhupendra Yadav, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, Air Force chief Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari, and Army

Chief General Manoj Pande.

Top government functionaries of Uttarakhand, Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh and other states along the border with China were also present. The focus of the meeting was developing the border areas and creating infrastructure there to help improve connectivity in terms of both roads and communication, along with creating employment opportunities for the locals. The meeting comes at a time when India has been focusing majorly on building roads and other infrastructure in the border areas to improve the conditions there.



## Khalistan referendum has 'nothing to do with Indian Sikhs', says former pro-Khalistan leader; lauds PM Modi

**Jaswant Singh Thakedar said those in Punjab don't demand the referendum and added that people in Canada, US or Britain don't have the right to vote for the secession.**



(South Asian Insider Bureau) Former pro-Khalistan leader and founder of Dal Khalsa Jaswant Singh Thakedar said the Khalistan referendum campaign being organised in few western countries is a doing of 'Pakistan's ISI' and it has nothing to do with Sikhs in India. He added that 'some Sikhs are working as tools' for the Pakistan government. He also said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi worked on 'major demands' by the Sikh community.

The UK-based Sikh separatist

leader was being interviewed by news agency ANI and he was referring to a referendum campaign kickstarted by the US-based secessionist group called Sikhs for Justice (SFJ), headed by Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, in 2020 seeking consensus among Sikhs in a bid to secede Punjab from India. Thakedar said those in Punjab don't demand the referendum and added that people in Canada, US or Britain don't have the right to vote for the secession. "It is 'pakhand' (sham) to mislead people. People are understanding it a source of income for them," he was quoted as saying by ANI. Pointing out the incident of defacing the Indian Consulate in San Francisco last year allegedly by some pro-Khalistani miscreants, Thakedar said 'there

is no hand of Sikhs in this'. Talking on last month's Atnala violence by supporters of 'Warris Punjab de' chief and Khalistani separatist leader Amritpal Singh, Thakedar said he knows nothing about Khalistan but 'earned a lot on the name of it'. "He (Amritpal Singh) himself, when he was in Dubai, was clean-shaven. He was not a (traditional) Sikh. He does not know anything about Sikh history. I must add that several Amritpal like him will come because those who are used by ISI, they are not used for lifetime," he added. The former pro-Khalistan leader lauded PM Modi's work for the country's Sikh community. He said PM Modi has worked 'to meet major demands put forward by members of the Sikh community'.

## Opposition parties to discuss strategy for cornering govt over Adani issue in Parliament

**As the Budget Session resumed on Monday, the Opposition raised the Adani issue in Parliament and demanded a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) probe on the Hindenburg-Adani report.**



Opposition on Tuesday once again raised the Adani issue in Parliament and demanded a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) probe of the Adani-Hindenburg row. A report from the US-based short-seller firm Hindenburg Research surfaced on January 24 claiming that the Adani Group had weak business fundamentals and was involved in stock manipulation and accounting fraud, among others. The session, which began on January 31, is likely to conclude on April 6. Parliament is meeting after a month-long recess which allows various parliamentary panels to scrutinise allocations made in the Union Budget for different ministries.

(South Asian Insider Bureau) As the Budget Session of the Parliament resumes, leaders of 18 Opposition parties will hold a meeting on Wednesday to discuss further strategies to corner the government on the Adani-Hindenburg row. According to sources, a proposal for a letter to be signed by all MPs may also be discussed. In addition to this, a proposal to march to the Enforcement Directorate (ED) office may also be considered. The

## 'Salman Khan Apologise or Be Ready to Face Consequences': Lawrence Bishnoi Threatens Actor

(South Asian Insider Bureau) Jailed gangster Lawrence Bishnoi has made headlines once again after he threatened Salman Khan in a recent interview. He asked the actor to apologise or be ready to face the consequences. Bishnoi said that Salman humiliated his community by allegedly killing a blackbuck. "There is anger in our society for Salman Khan. He humiliated my society. A case was filed against him but he did not apologise. If he does not tender an apology, be ready to face the consequences. I will not depend on anyone else," he told ABP news. He added that there is anger

in his mind for Salman since childhood. "Will break his ego sooner or later. He should come to our deity's temple and apologise. If our society forgives, then I will not say anything," he said. Last year, Salman Khan's security was upgraded to Y+ from the existing X category after the actor received threats from the Lawrence Bishnoi gang. Salman was also granted a weapon license. According to sources, the police from Punjab, Delhi, and Maharashtra discovered that gangsters Lawrence Bishnoi and Goldy Brar had planned fatal attacks on Salman Khan in Mumbai.





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# Watches, cufflinks, earrings: What Imran Khan took from Pakistan's Toshakhana

On Sunday, Pakistan made public the details of foreign gifts retained by public office holders between 2002 and 2022. The details were updated on the website of the Cabinet Division.

(News Agency) Imran Khan received five expensive wristwatches, including a Graff watch, worth 3.8 million Pakistani rupees (PKR) -- around Rs 1.1 million at current rates -- in gifts during his tenure as the prime minister of Pakistan, data released by the country's government showed. Khan retained these gifts in October 2018 after paying a quarter of a million. In September 2018, Khan paid PKR 20 million to retain a different Graff wristwatch worth PKR 85 million, a pair of cufflinks worth PKR 5.6 million, a pen worth PKR 1.5 million, and a ring worth PKR 8.75 million. A Rolex worth PKR 1.5 million was also retained by Khan for PKR 294,000.

In November 2018, he retained another Rolex worth PKR 900,000 and paid PKR 338,600 for it and some other items.

A year later, in October 2019, he retained a boxed watch, assessed at PKR 1.9 million for Rs 935,000. In September 2020, another Rolex, assessed at PKR 4.4 million, was retained for PKR 2.4 million. This amount also in-

cluded other gifts. The same month, his wife, Bushra Bibi, kept a necklace worth PKR 10 million, a bracelet worth PKR 2.4 million, a ring worth PKR 2.8 million, and a pair of earrings worth PKR 1.85 million for PKR 9 million.

The data was released as Pakistan amended its Toshakhana policy to cap the gifts for its top officials at under \$300. The new policy comes amid the infamous Toshakhana case, in which Imran Khan is accused of not sharing details of some of the gifts he received.

On Sunday, Pakistan made public the details of foreign gifts retained by public office holders, including the country's presidents, prime ministers, federal cabinet members, politicians, bureaucrats, retired generals, judges and journalists between 2002 and 2022. The details were updated on the website of the Cabinet Division.

Prominent personalities who benefited from the Toshakhana gifts included President Dr Arif Alvi, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, former prime ministers Imran



Khan, Nawaz Sharif, Shaukat Aziz, Yousuf Raza Gilani, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, Raja Pervaiz Ashraf, and Zafarullah Khan Jamali, former presidents Asif Ali Zardari and Pervez Musharraf, and other top politicians.

Here's a list of gifts retained by Pakistan's top politicians between 2002 and 2022:

## Nawaz Sharif

The three-time prime minister and PML-N chief, Nawaz Sharif, between 2008 and 2017, retained a Mercedes Benz, several high-end wristwatches, including Rolex and Piaget, jewellery and other items

worth PKR 119.58 million. He paid just PKR 24.39 million for them.

## Asif Ali Zardari

Former president and PPP co-chairperson Asif Ali Zardari in January 2009 retained a BMW car and a Toyota Lexus, worth over PKR 100 million, for just PKR 16.1 million. He got another BMW car for just PKR 4 million. In 2011, he retained two wristwatches worth PKR 3.25 million, a gun and other items for just PKR 668,469.

## Arif Alvi

President Dr Arif Alvi's wife, Samina Alvi, retained a neck-

lace worth PKR 1.19 million in October 2019 and paid PKR 865,000 for it and other items in a jewellery box. The president himself retained a PKR 2.25 million Rolex wristwatch in February 2022 for PKR 1.2 million.

## Other leaders

Former prime minister and National Assembly Speaker Raja Pervaiz Ashraf retained a Graff wristwatch assessed at Rs 890,000 in November 2012 after paying Rs 218,000 for it and other items.

## Sri Lanka's economy shrank by record 7.8 per cent last year

The data showed some improvement in Sri Lanka's fiscal position with inflation moderating to about 50 percent in February, down from a record high of 69.8 percent in September.

(News Agency) COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's crisis-hit economy shrank a record 7.8 percent last year as long blackouts and critical fuel shortages put a chokehold on local commerce, official data showed Thursday. An unprecedented economic crisis sparked huge protests in the island nation, culminating last July when a mob stormed the home of then president Gotabaya Rajapaksa, forcing him to flee the country and resign. Since then a new government has worked to repair Sri Lanka's battered public finances and secure a sorely needed International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout.

Last year's contraction -- the biggest in the country's 75 years of independence -- compared with 3.5 percent growth in 2021 and a 4.6 percent contraction in 2020 as the coronavirus pandemic hit. It was "caused by the deepening of the economic crisis... frequent power disruptions, shortages in fuel, raw materials, (and) foreign currency", Sri Lanka's census and statistics department said in a statement.



The data showed some improvement in Sri Lanka's fiscal position with inflation moderating to about 50 percent in February, down from a record high of 69.8 percent in September. President Ranil Wickremesinghe has raised taxes and ended generous subsidies on fuel and electricity to boost government revenue after his predecessor defaulted on Sri Lanka's \$46 billion foreign debt last year. The reforms are a precondition of a \$2.9 billion rescue package from the IMF,

which Sri Lanka expects to finalise next week. But the tax and price hikes have been roundly unpopular, triggering protests and industrial stoppages around the country. About 40 trade unions warned Thursday that they planned a general strike next week if their demands for concessions on the austerity programme were not met. Wickremesinghe has said Sri Lanka can expect to remain bankrupt until at least 2026 and insisted his government has no option but to implement the reforms demanded by the IMF.

## 68 dead, 4 missing after plane crashes in Nepal resort town

(News Agency) A plane making a 27-minute flight to a Nepal tourist town crashed into a gorge Sunday while attempting to land at a newly opened airport, killing at least 68 of the 72 people aboard. At least one witness reported hearing cries for help from within the fiery wreck, the country's deadliest airplane accident in three decades. Hours after dark, scores of onlookers crowded around the crash site near the airport in the resort town of Pokhara as rescue workers combed the wreckage on the edge of the cliff and in the ravine below. Officials suspended the search for the four missing people overnight and planned to resume looking Monday.

Local resident Bishnu Tiwari, who rushed to the crash site near the Seti River to help search for bodies, said the rescue efforts were hampered by

thick smoke and a raging fire. The flames were so hot that we couldn't go near the wreckage. I heard a man crying for help, but because of the flames and smoke we couldn't help him,



Tiwari said. It was not immediately clear what caused the accident, Nepal's Civil Aviation Authority said. A witness said he saw the aircraft spinning violently in the air after it began descending to land, watching from the terrace of his house. Finally, Gaurav Gurung said, the plane fell nose-first towards its left and crashed into the gorge. The aviation authority said the aircraft last made contact with the airport from near Seti Gorge at 10.50 am before crashing.



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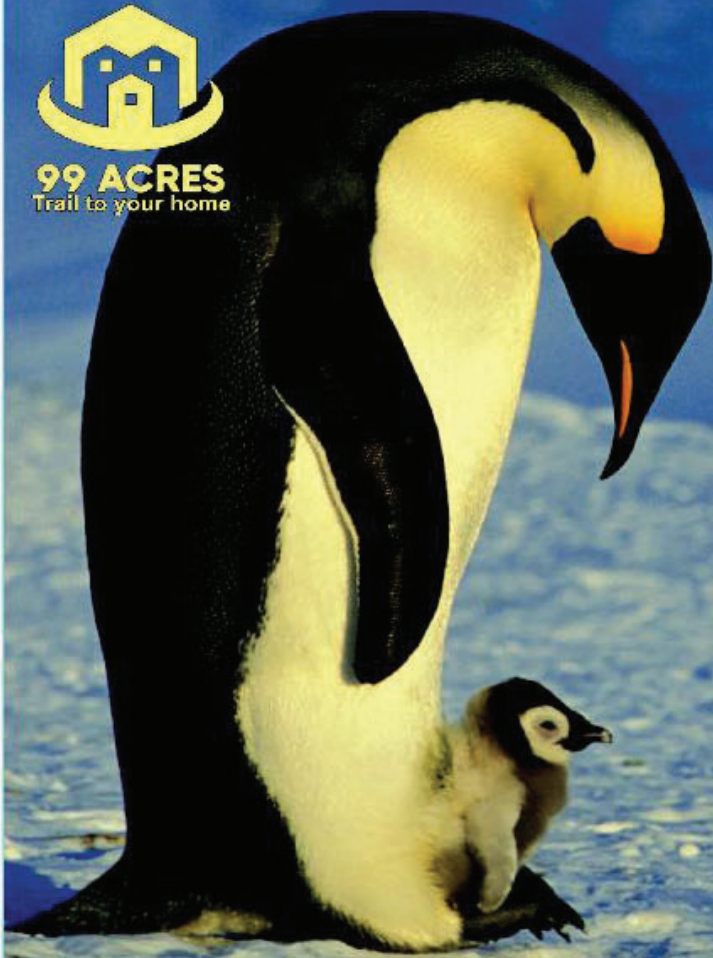
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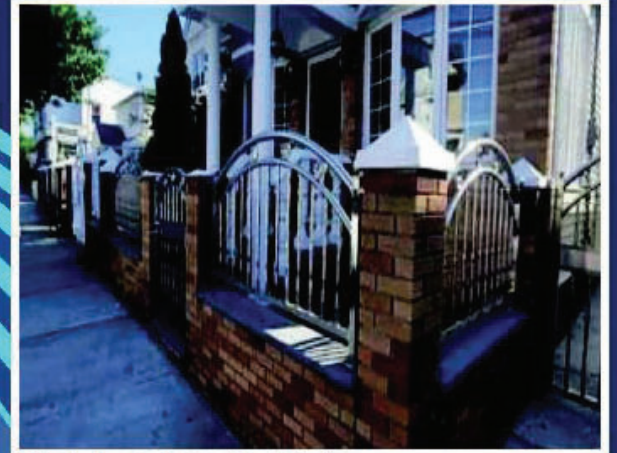
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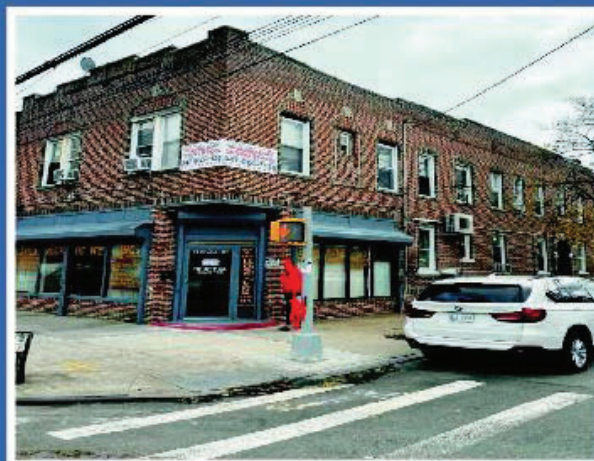
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# Taliban to participate in course Pakistan Facing "Perfect Storm" Of Crises: Foreign Minister Bhutto

**The online course is a part of the extensive Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme under the foreign ministry and is open to nationals of various countries, including Afghanistan.**

(News Agency) Taliban officials from Afghanistan will participate in a course by the Ministry of External Affairs which will be conducted by IIM-Kozhikode. This is being seen as a significant development in the Indo-Afghan relations under the Taliban.

The online course is a part of the extensive Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme under the foreign ministry and is open to nationals of various countries, including Afghanistan. The programme - An Indian Immersion - will be held online from March 14 to March 17 and according to the ITEC website, it is designed for "cross-sectoral foreign delegates to develop a deeper understanding of India's business environment, cultural heritage, and regulatory ecosystem". The ITEC, instituted in 1964, is one of the oldest and the leading capacity-building platforms by the MEA and its programmes have seen the enrollment of over 200,000 officials from more than 160 countries. The Taliban's participation came to




light after a letter by the head of Afghanistan's Institute of Diplomacy, under the Taliban foreign ministry, asked officials to register for the course. While several nations are participating, the Taliban's decision comes as a surprise as India still maintains that it hasn't officially recognised the Taliban regime in Afghanistan that swept power on August 15, 2021. However, India recently provided humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan.

India also recently announced that it would provide an additional 20,000 metric tonnes of wheat to Afghanistan. The wheat will be supplied in partnership with the UN World Food Programme. The announcement came months after India pledged 50,000 metric tonnes of wheat to Afghanistan, which was reeling under a severe food crisis. India is amongst the few countries that run missions in Kabul, which reopened in June 2022, with the government terming it a "technical mission". Meanwhile, India Today TV learnt that top Indian officials have recently held a meeting with the Taliban.


(News Agency) Islamabad: Pakistan Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari on Wednesday said that the country is facing a "perfect storm" of crises as it battles worsening political, economic and security issues, Pakistan-based Geo News reported. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, while speaking during an interview with The Daily Show, said: "Unfortunately, Pakistan is facing a perfect storm. Not only do we have heightened partisanship and political polarisation, to the extent that political parties or political stakeholders aren't even in a position to sit in a room and discuss issues amongst themselves, we're also facing an economic crisis."

The Daily Show (TDS) is an American late-night talk and satirical news television program. As the country faces a security threat and crisis following the Afghan government's fall, he said, it is also suffering from the increasing frequency of terrorist attacks and reeling from the aftermath of the biggest climate catastrophe in history, according to Geo News.

On the ongoing unrest in Pakistan following news of the possible arrest of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chief Imran Khan, the foreign minister said that while the country deals with the chaos and simultaneous crises, the PTI chief believes the country's law doesn't apply to him. Heavy police forces on Wednesday morning reached Imran Khan's Zaman Park residence after Islamabad police failed to arrest him amid fierce clashes between the PTI workers and the anti-riot force in and around the party chief's residence that left dozens of activists and police personnel injured since Tuesday. "He's resigned from parliament and ran away from the system. In this particular instance, it's not a question of me wanting to arrest Mr Khan [...] I would never want any politician in my country or any country to go to jail for political reasons. In Mr Khan's case, he's under the threat of arrest because of his ego," the minister said, adding that the former prime minister thinks he's "too important and won't turn up to the court," Geo News reported.



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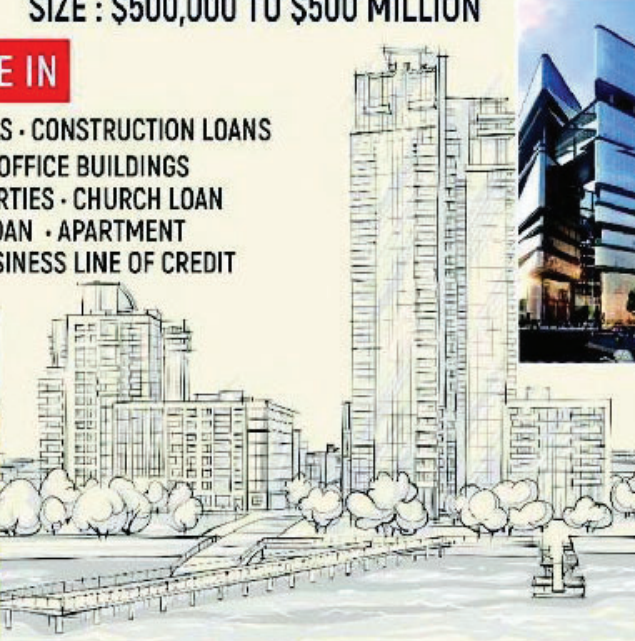
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# North-South divide is feeding migrant fears. But no one asks why Bihar has no factories

The political partisans in Bihar and the rest of northern India who are spreading disinformation about mistreatment of migrant labourers in Tamil Nadu would do well to ask their own governments why their states lag their southern counterparts in achieving basic governance. Fixing that takes real work of democratic participation, unlike spreading fake news or hatred for political benefits.

## A constant struggle

The corollary in states like Tamil Nadu is: what do these societies owe their northern counterparts? Do they let their factories hire labour from poorer parts of the country and therefore lose their own progress in labour rights and the virtuous cycle of development where better jobs yield even better outcomes for their own society? Or do they resist that at the risk of being viewed as parochial/protectionist? This gets even more complicated when one considers the

fact that northern India, by virtue of its demographic might, owns political power in this country; worse, that power is set to expand at the expense of southern India given the looming delimitation crisis.

A visceral instance of that power taking on hegemonic proportions, if one is Tamil, is the implicit and explicit push for Hindi. What frustrates the Tamil is that every few years, they have to fight the same fight with a new Union government that they thought CN Annadurai had won for them. Tamil Nadu's first chief minister had famously said when there was a move in the 1960s to make Hindi the sole official language of India: "Since every school in India teaches English, why can't it be our link language? Why do Tamils have to study English for communication with the world and Hindi for communications within India? Do we need

a big door for the big dog and a small door for the small dog? I say, let the small dog use the big door too!"

In this day and age, governments need no link language. They can simultaneously translate all official documents into different languages. And governments ought to speak to the people who elect it in their language; that's the point of a democracy. It's only people who need languages to communicate among each other. And that, if the migration pattern is any indicator, will happen in the opposite direction of what the government of India seeks.

Yet, if anything, Hindi's centrality has only accelerated in the past couple of decades. There are exams for central government jobs that are conducted in Hindi/English but not in any other language. There are laws enacted and policies implemented that govern citizens in languages they don't speak. Laws on

taxes, at that! MPs are expected to get permission in advance to speak in the language of their electorate in Parliament. Union Home Minister Amit Shah explicitly sought to replace English with Hindi wherever possible. And the three language formula in schools, implicitly or explicitly, pushes for Hindi to be one of the languages children learn.

When political power and prosperity are juxtaposed across two groups with such stark dichotomy, it's only natural that both groups act in ways to claim the gold medal in their imagined victimhood olympics. A reasonable compromise then is to not formalise link languages or policy making at the level of 1.3 billion people; instead, decentralise everything in the extreme. Except India has a democracy that incentivises the opposite. It makes for a difficult future that looks bleak if you are imagining it sitting in Chennai.

# India must prepare for these 3 wars before tackling China, Pakistan threat

The latter talks about the methods used in the application of violence and shapes the character of war, which often changes, driven mostly by human agency and technology. War must be viewed as a state of the relationship between political entities that could be State or non-State actors. In war, violence is the predominant means of communication. It can also be accompanied by channels of dialogue, which could either be diplomatic or conducted through other means.

In the author's view, India must be prepared to fight three wars: nuclear war, conventional war, and unconventional war.

## Nuclear war

India's nuclear doctrine perceives that its nuclear arsenal would deter its nuclear-armed adversaries. They are believed to be political weapons that would not serve a military purpose. It is thought that if India has enough weapons to survive a first strike and still retaliate punitively to cause unacceptable damage, it should be able to deter any nuclear adversary besides preventing atomic blackmail. In all probability, nuclear war is expected to transpire from an ongoing conventional or non-conventional war that escalates due to misjudgement, miscommunication and misperception of the parties involved. The possibility of escalation would be the main factor in deterring the use of nuclear weapons and preventing any conventional or non-conventional war from escalating to the

nuclear realm.

## Conventional war

Though the Russia-Ukraine War has highlighted the world's return to large-scale conventional war, it must also be noted that a nuclear-armed Russia invaded a non-nuclear Ukraine. But it is not a relevant lesson for India as, in our context, any war likely to occur would only be between nuclear-powered adversaries.

When fought under the nuclear shadow, conventional wars are inevitably limited in terms of feasible political objectives. The scope, intensity and duration are also curtailed. The importance of the issues at stake would probably determine the risks that political leaders would take to expand the scope of conventional war in aspects relating to intensity and geography.

## The China-India context

For several reasons, a large-scale conventional war is unlikely on the northern border and in the China-India context. First, capturing large chunks of the claimed territory is unnecessary to fulfil China's political objective of getting India to expend its resources and stymie its growth toward becoming a global maritime power that could pose a strategic threat to China, because peninsular India, like a sword, juts out into the Indian Ocean through which China's crucial resources such as energy transit. Second, a conventional war would require China to invest extensive resources into launch-

ing large-scale offensives. Presuming they succeed in capturing territory across the Himalayas, it would be difficult to hold on to them and would certainly be at the cost of its use of force over Taiwan.

Third, a large-scale offensive might trigger the alert of nuclear weapons. It can open the possibility, however remote, of nuclear weapons being used – not so much after thorough deliberation but due to misjudgement and accidental reasons.

The type of war is likely to be constrained in scale, scope, and goals. Territorial capture in calculated doses and India's reaction would shape its course.

The Indo-Pacific maritime domain could also be India's war zone. Its purpose for war would be to use force when necessary and protect the sea lines of communications. It is also where common interests with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) and other partners can foster cooperation to keep the Indo-Pacific free and open for trade and security.

## Conventional war in the India-Pakistan context

In the case of India and Pakistan, a conventional war in the continental and maritime domains could result from India's reaction to a terrorist attack. But here too, the nuclear shadow would come into play and pose the threat of escalation, thus limiting it to below the 'alerting of nuclear weapons' and containing the war. The possibility of nuclear use—

however remote—would limit both the intensity and duration of the war. There is a possibility that India will have to fight wars simultaneously with both China and Pakistan. But it does not alter the type of conventional war India has to undertake.

## Non-conventional wars

The non-conventional war is distinguished from the conventional war by the fact that capture and holding of ground is not the primary purpose. Instead, the goal is to inflict damage and destruction, and attrite India's will to force it to concede political demands. In this realm, counter-insurgency abetted by adversaries is the main type of war that India must be prepared for. Such wars are of long duration, as experienced in Jammu & Kashmir and the Northeast. Nuclear, conventional and non-conventional war must be viewed as layers that constitute war and blend in varying degrees into each other. They are connected and could be occurring within the same war. For India, these types not only sit atop one another, but the presence of a nuclear shadow is perennial. Ultimately, what matters are the limitations imposed on achieving political objectives. This is the central point that must be noted.

The profusion of American buzzwords like Grey Zone, Multi-domain and Hybrid warfare must not distract us from limitations imposed by the truism that all types of war between nuclear powers cannot escape the nuclear shadow.



# China achieves what even US could not in the Middle East

Another sign of the evolving role of the State Council is the decision to establish a new data regulatory body which will sit at the top of the food chain and deal with all matters related to data governance.

Li is an unusual choice because he has never held a national-level office, and his rise was made possible due to his personal equation with Xi.

In other appointments, Ding Xuexiang, He Lifeng, Zhang Guoqing, and Liu Guozhong were confirmed as vice-premiers of the State Council. He Lifeng will likely replace Liu He as the next economic tsar.

Another key appointment was Li Shangfu as the defence minister. In 2018, he was added to the sanctions list by the US for working with Russia's defence and intelligence organisations.

Li Shangfu is an aerospace engineer with a degree in automation from Chongqing University and

advanced military education from the National University of Defence Technology. In 2016, he served as the deputy commander and chief of staff of the PLA Strategic Support Force. In October 2022, he was inducted into the Central Military Commission.

Though the defence minister has little influence in China's military hierarchy, Li Shangfu will become the face of public diplomacy involving complex issues such as Taiwan and the regional dimension of US-China tensions.

While it may appear that Xi has installed a whole new team, that's not entirely the case. Beijing has retained its Central Bank governor Yi Gang despite deciding to set up a new financial regulatory body. Xi was 'unanimously appointed' president for a third term by securing 2,952 votes by NPC deputies in his favour and zero votes against him. According to a Financial Times report, Taiwanese

President Tsai Ing-Wen is set to visit the US. On Thursday, journalist Kathrin Hille reported that Tsai would meet US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in his home state of California with stops at Hudson Institute in New York. After the US leg of the trip in late March, Tsai will visit Guatemala and Belize, both of which maintain official diplomatic ties with Taipei.

McCarthy was supposed to visit Taipei, a plan that could have triggered a military response by Beijing. As the presidential elections loom over Taiwan, the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) is cautious about allowing the opposition Kuomintang Party to blame Tsai's government for triggering another crisis like the one we saw during former US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's Taipei visit.

Meanwhile, Mark Magnier of South China Morning Post has revealed that

Beijing examined alternate plans to mitigate the fallout from McCarthy's visit to Taipei by suggesting a 'track two' approach to schedule a visit by the US vice-president to Beijing at the same time.

In 1997, when then-US House Speaker Newt Gingrich visited Taiwan, US vice-president Al Gore was sent to Beijing to cushion the domestic pressure resulting from a high-level visit by US officials to Taipei. McCarthy has said he hasn't cancelled his plans to visit Taiwan, which means Beijing may deploy such a strategy in case the House Speaker does decide to visit Taipei later this year. It may appear that military tensions across the Taiwan Strait remain at an all-time high, but the reality is somewhat complicated.

Taiwan has decided to resume flights to 23 mainland Chinese cities, suspended since 2016, to stabilise the cross-strait relations.

## Modi govt's reforms lack finesse. It must raise the bar to make India \$10 trillion economy

which is now world's second largest garment exporter. While India seems to have all ingredients for success including demand, design, raw materials, the archaic labour laws prevent manufacturers from achieving scale. Similarly, while over 60 per cent of our population continues to be engaged in the agricultural sector, their contribution to GDP is about 17-20 per cent, implying very poor per capita incomes for this population. The lack of reforms has led to farmers owning smaller lands, and they cannot leverage any economies of scale. The Indian political economy can be broadly termed as 'naturally populist, seldom liberal.' Economically liberal ideas and reform agendas are seldom implemented, but major public policy and spending flow into popular schemes.

The term socialist is part of India's constitutional preamble and it is a general understanding that as a society, we like a pro-poor and anti-rich approach, in which the rich are perceived as evil. The country's economy has seen significant reforms kick in only when the government has had its back to the wall. The first set of reforms came in 1991 with only a few days of foreign reserves left, and then in 2001 under the NDA government, which inherited a slow-down. Reforms usually come with a lag and don't produce immediate electoral benefits. Therefore, political parties don't sell them and cater to populist tones of

'gareeb ke saath' to strike resonance with the common citizen. Unfortunately, there is no shortcut to a nation's long-term economic prosperity, and it has to traverse the reforms route. While Modi has intended to execute reforms over the past eight years, he has lacked the finesse and last mile credibility to get them implemented. It was recently seen with the much-needed agricultural reforms, which were critical for India's economy as well as its citizens' nutrition needs. But the government lacked the clinical skills to convince all stakeholders and ended up polarising the topic, rendering it untouchable for years to come. PM Modi currently banks upon more political capital than ever experienced in the past decade by any prime ministers. He seems to operate with a non-permeable Teflon coat, and possess the connection with the nation to sell the idea of reforms to the masses. We need him to raise the bar, avoid defaulting to polarising instincts, and leverage his deep political resources to build a pro-reform public mindspace.

### Address the fundamentals

India has one of the biggest gaps between rich and poor. Nowhere else is the super wealthy growing faster than in India, as they control 22 per cent of national income (vs 14.8 per cent in China). Over the past decade, the Indian stock market has generated over Rs 105 trillion of wealth, but of

which Rs 85 trillion has been generated by only 12 companies. Such concentration of wealth at the top is typical of low-growth and low-trust societies like ours, and can be compared to nations like Mexico and Brazil. On the more concerning front, the size of India's consuming middle-class remains fairly small. While there is a large debate on the true size, the latest PEW research projects that only 66 million, or 5 per cent, Indians will meet the global purchasing power criteria to be termed as middle class. This population is heavily concentrated in urban agglomerations and represents the true addressable market opportunity for modern consumer businesses. For

most of the 72 per cent of the country's rural population, access to cellphones and home appliances has increased. But their educational skillset has a phenomenal mismatch with the demand. About 54 per cent of Indians in the 20-29 age group are currently unemployed since the manufacturing sector growth is stagnant, and these young people lack the skill set to participate in the services sector. Another fault line is the participation of women and minority groups, which has been significantly lower. Only 9 per cent of Indian women participate in the formal jobs sector owing to discriminatory barriers at the workplace, according to

Bloomberg News. Similarly, while over 14 per cent of the country's population is Muslim, they account for only 2.6 per cent in corporate roles and have inferior per-capita income levels.

We often draw parallels with China, and it is important to note that while the over-spending on infrastructure initiatives has now started to become a negative drag on its economy; the large consuming middle-class has emerged to be its true asset. The 'Make In India' campaign aimed to achieve manufacturing as 25 per cent of GDP but only managed to attain a 17.4 per cent share in 2020, which is not significantly better than a 15 per cent share in 2001.

## How RRR's nationalism struck a chord with the West

They celebrate life every step of the way – with Naatu Naatu - through all the hurdles they face because of the love they have for their people and India. And what they achieve in the end is extraordinary. If loving one's country and people, and saving them from evil is patriotism, then all Marvel and DC films are patriotic. In fact, Captain America is considered as the superhero who embodies the American identity and core values. Extrapolating this to RRR, Raju and Bheem embody the Indian

identity and values of the time, and Raju being Hindu and Bheem, a Gond tribal, the characters have been portrayed as such.

India is a nation with 80 per cent Hindus and if Rajamouli had wished to do away with the thin layer of religion in his film, would RRR be what it is? Wasn't it precisely because it is set in a culturally rich and vibrant India, where Hinduism is a way of life, that the foreign audience loved it? Wasn't it the history of India and the emotional freedom struggle story that drove people to theatres to see Raju and

Bheem succeed? When Ram Charan, who essayed the role of Raju, was asked about the nationalism angle in RRR by the American media, he replied, "I heard this, about nationalism and patriotism. And I still feel it's a movie about two friends, and how misunderstood and great their relationship is, and how it broke and how it comes back together. The nationalism, and the imperial time of British rule, all of that is many, many layers behind. It's just the premise for the movie to be in some era. That was not the intention of the director."



# A medieval Malayan king beat Cholas at their game. Almost created a superpower

The military expeditions of Rajendra Chola I in Southeast Asia were perhaps the most audacious raids carried out by a medieval ruler from the Indian subcontinent. These expeditions helped the Cholas subjugate Kedah, the gateway to the Indian Ocean, and may have helped Tamil merchants secure a foothold in Southeast Asian and Chinese markets. They are sometimes considered proof of South Asia's overwhelming military and cultural superiority over Southeast Asia. But new archaeological excavations, coupled with the evidence of Sri Lankan and Tamil sources, reveal that Rajendra I's expeditions were not an exception: In the world of the medieval Indian Ocean, such raids were not only commonplace, but one Malayan king, Chandrabhanu, actually conquered part of Sri Lanka and battled with the armies of the Pandya kings of Tamil Nadu. His story reveals a great deal about the religious and political dynamics of this forgotten world.

## The meteoric rise of Tambralinga

Tambralinga, "the land of the Copper [Coloured] Shiva Linga", was an unlikely candidate for a superpower. In the Tirukkaiyur inscription of Rajendra Chola I—one of a handful of Chola records claiming overseas conquest—it is described as "the great Tamralingam, firm and fierce in many great battles". In reality, it was just one among the many squabbling ports and city-states that dotted the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra in the 11th century CE, participating in the globalised exchanges of the Eastern Indian Ocean. It was centred around Nakhon Si Thammarat (Nagara Sri Dharmaraja) in the southern part of present-day Thailand—though its incorporation into Thai dominions was the result of a disastrous military expedition to Sri Lanka, on which more later.

In The Rise of Tambralinga and the Southeast Asian Commercial Boom in the Thirteenth Century, Japanese scholar Sumio Fukami studied Chinese court records in conjunction with archaeology. In the Indian Ocean World, dispatching an embassy to the Chinese court was a sign of global status and a statement of economic ambitions. The Cholas, for example, sent an embassy there in 1015, after the successful conquests of Rajaraja Chola I. Records maintained by the Chinese court at the time offer a valuable insight into the Indian Ocean's turbulent politics.

Fukami's study noted that Chinese sources generally used the term "Sanfoqi" to refer to a number of Southeast Asian States up to the late 1100s, after which they mention embassies from a single power: Danmaling, or Tambralinga. Danmaling, according to the Chinese, ruled all of the Malay Peninsula and was one of the dominant States of the region. China's awareness of Southeast Asia also grew clearer from the 1100s to the

1300s: The number of places named in court records almost doubled through this time, suggesting that Southeast Asia's internal commercial networks were becoming denser.

In The Malay Peninsula: Crossroads of the Maritime Silk Road, archaeologist Michel Jacq-Hergoualc'h argued that there was a "commercial boom" in the Malay Peninsula in the 12th–13th centuries, with a sudden increase in the number of finds across sites. Beads,

ceramics, and glass items from West Asia were discovered, having been imported for local consumption. Most tellingly, Tambralingan sites showed a sudden increase in the production of high-quality ceramics, suggesting, as Fukami notes, "that they were made by seasoned artisans brought in from elsewhere." Whether these artisans had immigrated there or been captured is unclear. However, by the 1200s, Tambralinga had clearly become a major

power and had a large, prosperous elite class interested in acquiring luxury goods. But it was still an upstart, and radical measures were needed to legitimise its hegemony.

## Gambling for superpower status

In Sri Lanka and South-East Asia: Political, Religious and Cultural Relations from A.D.C 1000 to C. 1500, historian W.M. Sirisena notes a couple of vivid lines in a text called the Hatthavanagalla-vihara-vamsa.

# Mexican cartels are as dangerous as al Qaeda and ISIS. Will Team Biden ever wake up?

I know what the face of terror looks like, and this new threat to the homeland is killing Americans indiscriminately, yet the terrorists committing these acts are not motivated by warped religious views. They're motivated by profit with the goal of destabilizing the United States. On 9/11, we were introduced to al Qaeda, the Taliban and ISIS. Today, thanks to Joe Biden's open border policy, America has been introduced to the Sinaloa, Gulf, Juárez, Knights Templar, and Los Zetas cartels, just to name a few.

These are the new faces of terror, and the Biden administration is doing nothing to stop them. Their campaign of deadly drug trafficking and brutal violence has taken hold of our communities and is killing Americans every single day. These cartels are working relentlessly to bring illegal drugs into the country to profit off killing our young people. The DEA estimates that 90% of all

of the illegal drugs in the United States enter through our southern border, which has been responsible for killing over 100,000 Americans in 2022 alone. These horrific overdoses and deaths can largely be attributed to the record number of illegal immigrants being used as unwilling mules for the cartels. Mexican cartels have also created drug pipelines throughout the United States that have contributed to the rise of violent crimes and drug addiction among millions of Americans. Mexican cartels have full operational control of our southern border, making it easy for them to smuggle people and drugs into the United States. As a congressman representing part of the Greater Houston Area, which is known as the human trafficking capital of the world, closing off our southern border would significantly reduce the number of drugs these cartels smuggle into Texas. Unfortunately, the

Biden administration has no such plans to stop this activity. Under President Biden, America has lost more people to drug overdoses than Americans who perished during WWI. The number of deadly drug overdoses recorded under President Biden triples the number of Americans who died during the Vietnam war. Much of this drug activity is due to the Mexican drug cartels running rampant throughout America.

In addition to preventing the flow of drugs across the border, efforts must be made to eliminate the Mexican drug cartels operating within the country. Federal agencies, working in conjunction with state and local law enforcement, need to launch a comprehensive program to identify, sanction and dismantle the cartels operating in our neighborhoods. The DEA's latest assessment found that major Mexican cartels are operating in at least 60 American cities.

# Why do phone batteries explode and how to prevent such incidents

This isn't the first time a smartphone has exploded. As per the latest report coming from 91Mobiles, a Xiaomi 11 Lite NE phone exploded in Bihar recently while it was placed on a bed. The report states that the phone belonged to Sanjeev Raja, a resident of Mohaddinagar, Bhagalpur in Bihar, who shared videos and images of his damaged phone catching fire with the publication.

## Xiaomi phone explodes: what happened

In most past incidents, smartphones exploded when they were connected to the charger but that wasn't the case this time. Raja claimed that the phone exploded even when it was not connected to the charger. The good thing is that no one was harmed as the phone was away from the owner and the members of his family when it exploded.

Raja claimed that his Xiaomi 11 Lite NE 5G, which he purchased in December 2021, started emitting smoke suddenly while it was placed on his bed. As per the report, the impact of the blast was so severe that at least 2-3 layers of the mattress were burnt, and the back cover of the phone was glued to the bedsheet due to the fire.

## What the company said

Xiaomi was quick at investigating the matter and classified the explosion under "customer induced damage". In an official statement, the company noted, "Post our investigation, the cause of this unfortunate incident has been identified as physical tampering with the device. The damage was caused due to puncture marks on the battery and thus, this is classified under 'customer induced damage'. We are in constant touch with the customer to guide him through the resolution process. Further, at Xiaomi India, we have a strong after-sales network of 2000+ Xiaomi Authorised Services centers that work relentlessly to provide 24X7 support to our fans and customers. We would request our customers to refrain from opening their devices or applying external pressure and visit Xiaomi Authorized Service centers if they require any assistance."

## Explained: Why do phones explode?

This isn't the first time that a smartphone has exploded. But the question is – why exactly do smartphones blast? In most instances,

blasts are to do with the phone's battery. So, ensuring that the battery of the phone is in good shape is the responsibility of the customer.

Smartphones these days are equipped with lithium-ion batteries, which have a balance of positive and negative electrodes that allow them to recharge. When the components of a phone battery break, it results in a volatile reaction and that often leads to phone exploding incidents. Several factors contribute to the damage to a phone battery, but the most common is excessive heat. So, if a battery heats up quickly when on charge or during heavy usage, the chemical makeup of a phone battery can be damaged and that can result in a chain reaction called thermal runaway. This process makes the battery generate more heat, which in turn results in phones catching fire. Another reason that can affect the integrity of the battery is any kind of physical damage. So, ensure to not drop or bend the phone at any point in time. Some of the other reasons that can end up damaging the phone battery are -- the phone being exposed to the sun for too long, malware in the CPU, and charging devastation.



# 'Open to...': Elon Musk to buy Silicon Valley Bank after collapse?

Silicon Valley Bank (SVB), a four-year-old US lender and a cornerstone of the tech startup scene, collapsed on Friday after a stunning 48 hours, making it the second biggest bank failure since the 2008 financial crisis. The bank served mostly technology workers and venture capital-backed companies, including some of the industry's best-known brands, news agency AP said in a report. California regulators closed down the tech lender and put it under the control of the US Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. SVB failed after depositors hurried to withdraw money this week amid anxiety over the bank's health.

Musk's remark comes after Min-Liang Tan, co-founder and CEO of American global gaming hardware manufacturer Razer, suggested Musk turn the failed bank into a digital bank. "I think Twitter should buy SVB and become a digital bank," he wrote on Twitter. To this, Twitter's boss replied, "I'm open to the idea." His comment quickly gained popularity on the internet,

drawing a range of responses from users. One user said, "What an opportunity. 2-3 years to get a banking charter otherwise. Just make sure you go through those toxic assets with a fine-tooth comb!" While another user started a poll to see if Elon Musk should buy SVB. Over 5,000 users have already voted, with a majority of affirmative responses.

Musk, who is also the founder of Tesla Inc. and SpaceX, recently bought Twitter in a much contested \$44 billion deal to 'ensure the sanctity of free speech'.

## SILICON VALLEY BANK COLLAPSE

The Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) collapse became America's biggest banking failure since 2008 with some comparing the situation with that of Lehman Brothers' bankruptcy. The California Department of Financial Protection and Innovation, after taking control of the bank, cited insufficient liquidity and insolvency. The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation was designated as the receiver.

## Why something from the West becomes science and East a superstition?

Most Indians are not aware of the depth of mysticism and spiritual processes that have happened and still continue to happen in India. Right from ancient times, many numbers of visitors have visited India, and so did the great American writer and thinker Mark Twain. After his short visit, he said, "Anything that can ever be done either by man or God has been done in this land." Most Indians are not aware of the depth of mysticism and spiritual processes that have happened and still continue to happen in India. This land has always been known as the spiritual capital of the world, simply because no other culture has looked at the inner sciences with as much depth and understanding as this culture has. But in the last hundred years, because of a very upstart-ish attitude towards life, we have dropped many things. Because of political and other kinds of dominance, we have come to a kind of

conclusion that if something comes from the West, it becomes science; if it comes from the East, it becomes superstition. Many of the things that your grandmothers would have once told you are today being discovered in top scientific laboratories as "great" discoveries about human nature. Everything that they are saying after billion-dollar research studies, we have already said in our culture, because this is not a culture which has evolved out of compulsions of living. This is a culture which was evolved consciously by sages and saints — seeing how you should sit, how you should stand, and how you should eat. It was designed for what is best for human wellbeing, and there is immense scientific value in it. Today, particularly in the last few years, a phenomenal amount of research has gone into water and the potential of

## RRR's 'Naatu Naatu' and The Elephant Whisperers make history at the Oscars 2023. Indian cinema must make the most of these wins

Both The Elephant Whisperers and RRR (Rise, Roar, Revolt) are Indian productions that tell stories deeply rooted in India and its culture. The Kartiki Gonsalves-directed The Elephant Whisperers is a heartwarming documentary about Bomman and Bellie, a couple belonging to an indigenous tribe in south India, who dedicatedly look after orphaned baby elephants named Raghu and Ammu, forging a family like no other. In contrast, S S Rajamouli-directed RRR is a grand cinematic tale that packs action, adventure, music and dance as it follows the friendship of two revolutionaries who fight the British in the 1920s. (Contd. on page 25) When musician M M Keeravani and lyricist Chandrabose received the coveted golden statuettes for Best Original Song at the Academy Awards, it marked the culmination of the euphoria that 'Naatu Naatu', the electrifying song-and-dance sequence from RRR had kicked off. The song's immense popularity — 126 million views on YouTube and counting — powered the RRR team's tireless campaign, spearheaded by Rajamouli. This campaign acquired a special significance since the RRR team continued its efforts to bring home the coveted golden statuette even after being snubbed during India's official selection made by the Film Federation of India (FFI) for the country's official entry for the Academy Award in the Best Foreign Film category.

When the FFI chose the Pan Nalin-directed Chhello Show as India's entry (Chhello Show was later shortlisted for the Academy Award), for a brief period it was feared that RRR's Oscar campaign might be cut short.

In the past, movies such as The Lunchbox (2013) and The Disciple (2020), could not sustain their Oscar campaign when they were not picked as India's official entry despite receiving impressive international acclaim. Emboldened by the love and appreciation the Telugu-language RRR had received since its release abroad, the team submitted the film for Oscars nomination in 14 categories.

Notwithstanding the incredible buzz generated by this period drama, RRR made it to just one category — Best Original Song — in the final Oscar shortlist. That's still a commendable feat since the Rajamouli directorial didn't have the official backing. RRR continued to make its presence felt in the award season with multiple wins, the most prominent being the Golden Globe Award for Best Song, five Hollywood Critics Association Awards and two Critics' Choice Movie Awards. This kind of success for a mainstream Indian movie during the award season could change the way Indian filmmakers pursue international glory and recognition.

Recalling his pre-Oscar experience, A R Rahman (who won the Oscar in 2009 for Best Score in Slumdog Millionaire) in a social media post recalled feeling like a "gladiator" with everyone around cheering for him. Rajamouli and his team must have experienced similar emotions. With the Oscar win, what they have achieved is unprecedented. They have also acquainted the foreign audience with older works of Rajamouli, which were re-released in American theatres as well as sought out by curious film lovers. Will this lead to the audience discovering other popular

Indian movies? That is possible if their makers can find a way to capitalise on this momentum. We now have a resounding proof with RRR's Oscar victory that the foreign audience loves song and dance just as much as Indians do. After all, the loudest applause at Dolby theatre during the award ceremony was reserved for the exuberant 'Naatu Naatu' performance. This momentum, however, was not created by RRR alone. The Shaunak Sen-directed All That Breathes was nominated for the Best Documentary Feature Film category of the 95th Academy Awards while The Elephant Whisperers, produced by Guneet Monga and Achin Jain, was a frontrunner for the award in the Best Documentary Short Film category. All That Breathes follows two brothers who have dedicated their lives to rescuing and treating

the Black Kites in Delhi undaunted by its pollution as well as a changing social fabric. In fact, All That Breathes had been garnering high praises and awards, including L'OEil d'Or award during the Cannes Film Festival, since its world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival in January 2022. Never before has India had three productions nominated at the Academy Awards — besides an Indian celebrity presenter, actor Deepika Padukone — in the same year. This is enough to evoke jubilation among film lovers in the country. In the run-up to the award ceremony, the details of special dinners and parties attended by the nominees only heightened that feeling. The awards have also put the spotlight on Indian talents as well as the country's unique storytelling traditions.

## India and the Anglosphere

For China, AUKUS, along with the Quadrilateral forum or the Quad, is one of the dangerous "small cliques" that the US is building in Asia. China's Global Times has warned Canberra that Australia is making an "expensive mistake" that will "plant a time bomb" in the region.

Between those two contrasting positions, there is a range of opinion among Australia's neighbours. Their individual reactions have been shaped by their respective appreciation of the shifting Asian security dynamic. Most analysts, however, agree that AUKUS could well be an inflexion point in the evolution of Asian geopolitics. To be sure, Canberra, London and Washington will have to overcome

several technical and policy issues in implementing the AUKUS road map. The current estimated cost of the project will be around \$250 billion (to the Australian taxpayer). It will be nearly three decades before an Australian-built nuclear submarine will enter service.

Projects of this scale will inevitably involve significant delays and cost escalation. It is easy to ask if the current political support in the three democracies for the AUKUS framework will endure in the years ahead. But the die has been cast and there appears to be strong bipartisan support in the three countries for a venture that will revitalise their alliance and make it consequential for the Indo-Pacific.



# BJP is obsessed with Nehru, freedom struggle. This keeps Rahul Gandhi in the news forever

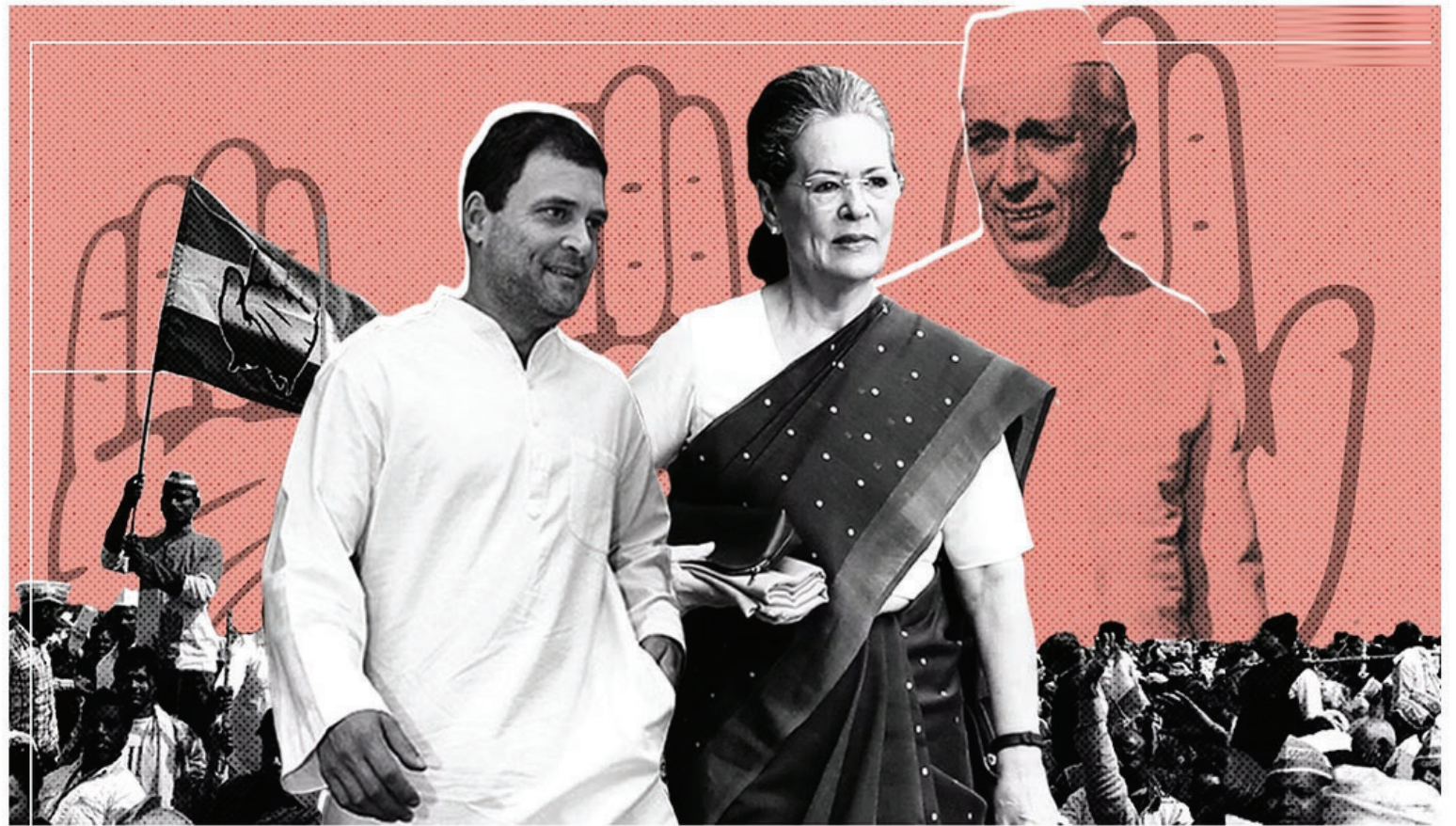
People who vote for the BJP support it because they admire Narendra Modi. Nobody votes for the BJP because of anything that occurred in the freedom struggle.

Should Rahul Gandhi have been critical of the way things are in today's India when he spoke in the UK? Does this amount to asking white people to colonise India as some BJP supporters have suggested? Or is he merely following in the footsteps of Narendra Modi who has also not always been complimentary on foreign soil about the situation in India, especially in the years after he first became Prime Minister? Is the BJP making the mistake of believing that attacking Narendra Modi's governance is the same as attacking India, as Congress supporters claim? There are no 'yes' and 'no' answers to these questions as we have seen over the last few days as the controversy has raged. My guess is that people who support the government will criticise Rahul while Congress supporters will argue that if he is asked questions about how things are in India, then he should tell the truth and not lie to make Modi look good.

Either way, how you approach this debate is largely determined by what you already believe. So I am not going to waste your time by recalling the arguments of the last few days all over again. Instead, I am going to ask a different question: is the BJP doing Rahul a favour by making him the centre of a new controversy every week?

Consider the reality of the situation. Ever since he became the Congress's chief campaigner, Rahul has faced setback after setback. He lost the 2014 election to the BJP and to Modi's charisma. He tried again in 2019 but was defeated again even in his own constituency of Amethi. During his period as the Congress's most visible leader, the party has lost state after state. Its top leaders, many of whom were Rahul's friends, have either left the party or, at the very least, tried to leave. The consensus is that Rahul will not be able to beat Modi at the next election either.

Given this background, does he deserve so much attention? As the BJP itself has told us, he is not fit to be a leader; in fact, it has said much worse things about him, not all of which can be repeated here.



So, if he is such a useless person, then why is the BJP so obsessed with him? Why does it use up so much energy in attacking him?

## BJP, a party of obsessions

You could argue that despite the Congress's dismal electoral performance over the years, one reason why Rahul has such a high profile and still acts as though he is the pre-eminent opposition leader is that the BJP takes him so seriously. No other opposition leader is subject to the kind of scrutiny the BJP subjects Rahul to.

In the early days of the BJP's Rahul obsession, I used to think that the single-minded focus on the Congress leader was strategic. Perhaps, the BJP wanted to shine a spotlight on him to show Narendra Modi in a better light. But that time has long passed. Nobody regards Rahul as the man who will topple Modi in the next election. So why does anything he says rattle the BJP so much?

My conclusion is that the BJP, despite its shrewd grasp of strategy, is becoming more and more a party of obsessions. Take the BJP's obsession with Nehru. Once upon a time it may have made sense to rubbish Nehru to discredit his descendants. But that ploy has run its course. Even those who support Rahul today do not do

so because his great grandfather, who died nearly 60 years ago, was a great guy.

The BJP's obsession with Nehru now extends to criticising the freedom struggle. It is entirely valid to say that we have made too much of Nehru and ignored other freedom fighters. But is it necessary to insult MK Gandhi and to praise his murderer Nathuram Godse as Sangh Parivar members have done? Certainly, it does not help the BJP electorally. The attacks are launched not for sound strategic reasons but because a section of the Parivar has its own bizarre obsessions.

Beyond a point, it only makes sense to go on about the freedom struggle if the BJP believes that the Congress massively benefits from its history as the party of Nehru and Gandhi. But does it really? Does anybody believe that this version of the Congress is the party that Gandhi once mentored? I doubt if the Congress gets any votes on that basis. There is a logic to going on about the freedom struggle if the BJP believes that its leaders have been insufficiently recognised for their role in fighting the British. But this is not the case. The BJP was only founded in 1980. The Jana Sangh, its predecessor, was only established in 1951.

Nobody can reasonably expect either party to have been part of the freedom movement because neither existed before India became independent. This should be fine. Most parties in today's India were not around before India became independent. They don't try and rewrite the history of a struggle they were not around for or abuse those who were. Why then does the BJP care so much?

## Why BJP does what it does

Yet such is the BJP's obsession with creating alternative icons that it strains credulity by hijacking historical figures. Yes, Vallabhbhai Patel and Jawaharlal Nehru had differences. But then so did Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani. That does not mean that Advani did not subscribe to the BJP's ideology. So it is with Patel who even banned the RSS. And so it is with Bhagat Singh who was a left-leaning (communist even) atheist who had nothing in common with the ideology the BJP now espouses. And yes, Subhas Chandra Bose did fall out with Nehru and Gandhi but he was hardly a Hindutva supporter. He named a brigade in the Indian National Army (INA) after Nehru and

after the war it was Nehru who defended INA veterans from persecution by the British. Even the case of VD Savarkar is complicated. Yes, he was a patriot and freedom fighter who suffered for his views. But to hold up Savarkar as your own icon against Gandhi, you have to explain away too many things: his apologies to the British, his differences with the RSS, his support of beef-eating, etc.

So here's my point: why does the BJP even bother? People who vote for the BJP support it because they admire Narendra Modi, respect his achievements and perhaps because they believe in a vision of a Hindu India. Nobody votes for the BJP because of anything that occurred in the freedom struggle. Or because the party now glorifies Bose or Bhagat Singh. The only explanation possible is that on some issues – Jawaharlal Nehru and his descendants, the freedom struggle and Gandhi in particular – the BJP goes beyond strategy and gives in to an obsession. It is an uncharacteristic lapse for a party that is otherwise so pragmatic and worldly-wise. But it works, I suspect, to Rahul Gandhi's benefit because it keeps him forever in the news and at the centre of the public debate.



# Balochistan is misunderstood. Its stunted development driving Pakistan back onto the rocks

A CPEC-proposed new road will devastate the local boat construction industry. The old town of Gwadar looks like a dump, but Rawalpindi doesn't care.



You mean they actually read books in Balochistan?" My Lahori friend sounded sceptical. For him, as for most Pakistanis, Balochistan is a war zone where people want guns not books. But, just back from the 2023 Gwadar Book Festival, I told him he was not only wrong but as wrong as wrong could be. Young Baloch are thirsty to know; they buy nearly three times more books than sold at literary festivals in Karachi, Lahore, or Islamabad.

More importantly, this festival — and others I have attended in Balochistan — was organic, energetic and unfettered. Thankfully, I neither saw nor heard support for BLA/BLF terrorists. With a shoestring budget, staffed by young volunteers, and held inside a rundown high-school compound, the GBF was unlike the tepid, uninspiring Karachi-Lahore type of lit-fests. Held in five-star hotels with abundant corporate and embassy funding, these are feel-good events with lots of self-congratulations, but topics and speakers deemed controversial are carefully excluded.

My friend was pleasantly surprised to learn that more female students than male students asked questions after my Gwadar University lecture. I had long complained to him that, over the past 35-40 years, female students at my old university in Islamabad have taken up the veil and turned into passive listeners, rarely summoning the courage to stand up and ask. But if my well-read, well-travelled, and well-meaning friend was so consistently wrong, what's going on in other minds? When news is blacked out, good news and bad news both stop. For fear of weakening CPEC, authorities are

hypersensitive about negative news. Except for that cleared from 'above', print and TV media may not touch Balochistan on anything.

None has underscored this sad fact more brilliantly than a fisherman's son, Maulana Hidayat-ur-Rahman of Gwadar's Haq Do Tehreek. At last year's Asma Jehangir Conference in Lahore, he stole the show. When a mouse found its way into a halwai's shop in Lahore, he thundered, Pakistani media was set ablaze. But when dead bodies appear by roadsides in Balochistan, none dare whisper. The redoubtable maulana, also a Jamaat-i-Islami leader, is currently under arrest and charged with murder. People say he is at the centre of a tussle between two agencies, one of which wants him in, the other out. As an outsider to Gwadar (last visit circa 1960) I could not figure out which of a multiplicity of security organisations has the top charge. Each protects its own turf and probably has its own extra-salary income sources. Along all highways and major roads, hilltops bristle with Omani-style forts and fortifications. Bunkers and check posts are everywhere.

Passing through the dry-as-dust town of Turbat, I wondered what made the local economy tick. Answer: smuggling. No attempt — not even the flimsiest — is made to hide the free flow of petrol, oil and LNG from across the Iranian border. On their way to Karachi and parts of Punjab, pickup trucks loaded with fuel-filled jerry cans are the largest fraction of road traffic. Luxury coaches to Karachi, I was told, have a tank under the chassis containing eight to ten thousand litres. Pre-assigned cuts warm

pockets along the way.

One fact — more than any other — strikes a visitor instantly. The men who designed New Gwadar wasted not a moment in worrying about Gwadaris, the original inhabitants. Pushed away from the harbour, areas permitted for their fishing keep shrinking. A proposed new road will devastate the local boat construction industry. The old town looks like a dump, but Rawalpindi doesn't care. Those building the port — the Chinese — are invisible. Locals humorously call them yajooj-majooj. Instead of romping around the incredibly beautiful beaches, they live inside that which from afar looks like a prison camp. Once the project is over, I am sure they will be anxious to get back home and savour freedom.

A near-accidental visit to the Gwadar Institute of Technology turned out to be a surreal experience. A plaque says this super-modern institution was handed over by China in 2021. The auditoriums, lecture halls, classrooms, and laboratories are picture perfect. I counted over 60 training simulators for cranes, gantries, heavy vehicles and forklifts. Later, upon googling, the per-piece price ranged from \$30,000-\$50,000. All are spanking new, still under plastic covers. On this vast but desolate campus there are no teachers, students, or staff — only chowkidars. No one has a clue of how to get things moving.

This is development gone mad. But who is to blame and who will foot the bill? Was there a PC-1 planning document, and what's in it? Still, Gwadar's development will doubtless

benefit those who have always won. Vast areas have been cordoned off with razor wire for various official organisations and their housing schemes. Colonisation, of course, is too strong a word to use here. Let's just say it's the familiar desire for officer colonies.

An unexpected encounter between Quetta and Gwadar led to a three-hour conversation with a junior army officer, a Kakul graduate. Brilliant and likeable, he engaged the TTP in firefights in South Waziristan. Well, how do they compare against BLF/BLA? He laughed: these are criminals and adventurers. But TTP are formidable hardcore terrorists. He then paused: he'd rather fight elsewhere where he would be liked by people, not here. Intriguing! This begged my question — why don't you people just go back home? Leave law-and-order to the local police and Baloch Levies? He sighed. Yes, this should happen sooner rather than later. But both are under-equipped, under-trained and, being locals, have families that terrorists can target. This young officer doesn't want to be seen as part of an occupation force. Though troubled, he still loves the army.

Those at the centre of power imagine Balochistan as some faraway, barren land of tribals. Far too rich to be left alone, they think it must be governed from afar. Stunted development springing from this regressive mindset is driving Pakistan back onto the rocks. Balochistan — and for that matter the concept of Pakistan — will have to be re-understood in very new ways. Else history will exact its awful toll as it did once. But next time around, the price could be still steeper.



# Silicon Valley Bank's demise began with downgrade threat

US-based Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) was shut down by regulators due to the sudden shutdown of Silvergate Capital Corp and the unmindful fundraising of SVB. Know how the downfall of Silicon Valley Bank started.



In the middle of last week, Moody's Investors Service Inc delivered alarming news to SVB Financial Group, the parent of Silicon Valley Bank: the ratings firm was preparing to downgrade the bank's credit.

That phone call, described by two people familiar with the situation, began the process toward Friday's spectacular collapse of the startup-focused lender, the biggest bank failure since the 2008 financial crisis. Friday's collapse sent jitters through global markets and walloped banking stocks. Investors worry that the Federal Reserve's aggressive interest rate increases to fight inflation are exposing vulnerabilities in the financial system.

Details of SVB's failed response to the prospect of the downgrade, reported by Reuters for the first time, show how quickly confidence in financial institutions can erode. The failure also sent shockwaves through California's startup economy, with many companies unsure how much of their deposits they can recover and worrying about how to make payroll. The Moody's call came after the value of the bonds where SVB had parked its money fell due to the higher interest rates.

Worried the downgrade could undermine the confidence of investors and clients in the bank's financial health, SVB Chief Executive Greg Becker's team called Goldman Sachs Group Inc bankers for advice and flew to

New York for meetings with Moody's and other ratings firms, the sources said. The sources asked not to be identified because they are bound by confidentiality agreements. SVB then worked on a plan over the weekend to boost the value of its holdings. It would sell more than \$20 billion worth of low-yielding bonds and reinvest the proceeds in assets that deliver higher returns.

The transaction would generate a loss, but if SVB could fill that funding hole by selling shares, it would avoid a multi-notch downgrade, the sources said.

## The plan backfired.

News of the share sale spooked clients, primarily technology startups, that rushed to withdraw their deposits, upending the capital raising. Regulators stepped in on Friday, shutting down the bank and putting it in receivership. SVB, Goldman Sachs and Moody's representatives did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

## THE UNRAVELING

As SVB executives debated when to proceed with the

fundraising, they heard from Moody's that the downgrade was coming this week, the sources said.

SVB sprang into action in the hopes of softening the blow. The bank lined up private equity firm General Atlantic, which agreed to buy \$500 million of the \$2.25 billion stock sale, while another investor said it could not reach a deal on SVB's timeline, the sources said. By Wednesday, SVB had sold the bond portfolio for a \$1.8 billion loss.

Moody's downgraded the bank, but only by a notch because of SVB's bond portfolio sale and plan to raise capital.

Ideally, the stock sale would have been completed by before the market opened on Thursday, to avoid the sale being jeopardized by any declines in SVB's shares once news of the sale got out. But the sources said that was not an option given the tight schedule.

SVB had not done the preparatory work needed to sign confidentiality agreements with investors who would commit to a deal of such a size. Its lawyers advised the bank that investors

would need at least 24 hours to digest new downbeat financial projections and complete the sale, the sources said.

Reuters could not determine why SVB did not start those preparations earlier.

SVB's stock plunged on news of the share sale, ending Thursday down 60% at \$106.04. Goldman Sachs bankers still hoped they could close the sale at \$95, the sources said. Then news came of venture capital firms advising startups they had invested in to pull money out of Silicon Valley Bank for fear of an imminent bank run.

This quickly became a self-fulfilling prophecy: General Atlantic and other investors walked away and the stock sale collapsed. General Atlantic did not respond to a request for comment. California banking regulators closed the bank on Friday and appointed the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) receiver. The FDIC will dispose of its assets.

In the past, the regulator has struck deals quickly, sometimes over just a weekend, something that some experts said could happen with SVB.

## Silicon Valley Bank crisis: Decoding the biggest US banking failure since 2008

Silicon Valley Bank became the largest US bank to fail since the 2008 financial crisis and its sudden collapse has stranded billions of dollars belonging to companies, investors and depositors. Here is all you need to know.

Global banking and financial stocks took a massive hit on Friday after US-based commercial lender SVB Financial Group was shuttered by US regulators, following an aggressive decline in its stock that led to a market loss of over \$80 billion.

With this, Silicon Valley Bank became the largest US bank to fail since the 2008 financial crisis and its sudden collapse stranded billions of dollars belonging to companies, investors and depositors. The SVB crisis unfolded in just 48 hours, following the bank's announcement that it was planning to raise funds worth more than \$2 billion to plug gaps in its balance sheet. This led to widespread panic among its clients and depositors and also triggered a massive selloff.

As panic grew among its investors and depositors, SVB was forced to shelve its fundraising plan, but the damage was already done.

### How SVB crisis unfolded

The embattled tech and startups-focused lender was closed by California regulators on Friday, and it has been put under the



control of the US Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC).

The overnight shock came after SVB's stock experienced another sharp 60 per cent decline in premarket trade, after panicked depositors rushed to withdraw funds. The SVB Financial Group was also

looking to sell itself after its failed fundraising attempt, but to no avail as deposits moved out "very quickly". As the crisis unfolded, the group even told its employees to work from home till further notice.

Shortly after, the FDIC confirmed that SVB

was closed by the California Department of Financial Protection and Innovation, and that it was appointed as the receiver. It may be noted that SVB is the first FDIC-insured bank to fail in more than two years.

### Decoding the SVB collapse

SVB Financial Group's collapse and takeover by the FDIC may have unfolded in just a couple of days, but analysts said the bank became a victim of sustained high interest rates, and fears of more rate hikes in 2023.

After a period of record low interest rates during the pandemic, central banks around the world, led by the US Federal Reserve, started raising key rates aggressively to tackle inflation. This has dampened investor sentiments and also hit the businesses of tech and start-up focused lenders like SVB.

This is because investors do not like to take risk when the money available to them becomes expensive due to higher interest rates. As a result of the higher interest rates, investors in technology startups – that are the primary clients of SVB – became reluctant to take risks.



# Xavier University School of Medicine Announces

## 20 Full Free Scholarships For 2023; School is Investing \$5 Million In New Scholarships This Year



(By Staff Reporter) (Woodbury, NY) – Xavier University School of Medicine is excited to announce the creation of the Shaping Xavier scholarship, a full-tuition scholarship opportunity available to 20 students entering Xavier University School of Medicine for the May 2023 and September 2023 semesters. The scholarship will cover the full tuition for students, with each scholarship valued at more than \$189,000. “We are excited to announce the Shaping Xavier scholarship opportunity,” said Ravi Bhooplapur, President of Xavier University School of Medicine. “We are launching an investment of more than \$5 million in new scholarships for 2023 to provide additional deserving students the opportunity to attend Xavier and have successful careers in medicine.” Five full-tuition scholarships will be available to students entering in the May 2023 semester, and 15 full-tuition scholarships will be awarded to students entering the September 2023 semester.

The Shaping Xavier scholarship has been launched in conjunction with the start of construction on Xavier’s new academic

campus in Aruba. Set to open for the Fall 2024 semester, construction on the new academic campus will last for approximately 18 months. This new academic area of campus will include a theater-style auditorium, state-of-the-art classrooms and labs, research facilities, seminar rooms, a new library, study areas for individuals, small groups, and large groups, student lounges, and a walk-in clinic. “Xavier’s new academic campus, combined with our new residential campus that opened in September of 2021, will become not only one of the best medical school facilities in the Caribbean, but one of the best in the world,” added President Ravi Bhooplapur. This new academic building will continue to attract some of the best and brightest students to medical school in Aruba, continuing the tradition of success Xavier University School of Medicine has had in preparing students for successful careers in the medical field in the US, Canada, and all over the world. As the most affordable fully-accredited and New York State approved medical school in the Caribbean, Xavier tries to make this quality education available at an

affordable price, offering numerous scholarships and financial aid options for the full cost of attendance.

### About Xavier University School of Medicine

An excellent school, a gorgeous environment, and the tools you need to succeed. Founded in 2004, chartered by the government of Aruba, and authorized by the Ministry of Education of Aruba, Xavier University School of Medicine (XUSOM) was named one of the Top 10 Caribbean Medical Schools by Money Inc. Magazine (2019), is fully accredited by the Accreditation Commission of Colleges of Medicine (ACCM), and is approved by the New York State Department of Education. With esteemed faculty comprised of distinguished physicians from all across the world, Xavier is unwavering in our dedication to upholding the highest academic standards in medical education, and providing this quality education at an affordable cost. Learn more about Xavier University School of Medicine at [XUSOM.com](http://XUSOM.com). Visit [XUSOM.com](http://XUSOM.com) Learn more about the Shaping Xavier Scholarship



# How to have a healthy gut this summer

**Excessive heat can cause gut issues, especially if you're not taking the right precautions.**

(News Agency) With the sudden soar in temperatures, experts are urging people to take measures to enjoy a healthy summer this year. The centre issued a set of guidelines as the country witnessed unusually high temperatures at the end of February.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) declared a heat wave in Mumbai last week as the maximum temperature was above 37 degrees Celsius. Due to the heat, many people face gut issues resulting in stomach aches, diarrhoea, nausea and vomiting.

The pathogenic germs multiply rapidly in warm weather and the consequences can spoil your gut, according to Dr Mukesh Mehra, Director, Department of Medicine, Max Super Speciality Hospital, New Delhi. "To avoid gut issues, it is advisable to take a few measures to prepare yourself before the holiday. So the key to a resistant body is a strengthened immune system, a large part of which is located in the intestine," said Dr Mukesh Mehra.

## REGULAR EXERCISE AND DIET

With regular exercise and a balanced diet, the body's defence mechanism will effectively fight against unwanted invaders and keep you fit. "Get moderate exercise but be on the lookout for extreme humidity or heat warning. A pleasant jog around your neighbourhood, while the

sun sets, is a great way to keep your digestive system moving," said Dr Mehra. A vegetarian diet consisting of broccoli, fresh berries, oranges, ginger, onions and nuts strengthens the body's defence system. The vitamins and antioxidants present in fruits and vegetables prevent summer flu.

## WASH YOUR HANDS FREQUENTLY

Wash your hands regularly as the pathogens of summer flu are transmitted by shaking hands. "Whenever you are in the house, do not run the air conditioning at full blast all the time. Properly ventilate the rooms, especially early in the morning and late evenings as well," as per the expert.



**KEEP YOURSELF HYDRATED** Drink lots of water as it is important to keep yourself hydrated, especially when you're out in the sun and sweating profusely. "Dehydration might be the cause of constipation also, along with other problematic digestive problems. It is advisable to consume all foods which are rich in fibre. Dark green veggies help with digestion," shared Dr Mehra.

## PROBIOTICS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR GUT HEALTH

Probiotics are great for your gut system as they provide balance in beneficial bacteria. "One way you can supercharge your gut palace is by supporting those good bacteria with probiotic-rich foods and supplements," he added.

# Caffeine could reduce obesity, risk of diabetes, finds study

**A study has found that high levels of caffeine consumption could reduce body fat and lower the risk of type 2 diabetes as well as major cardiovascular diseases.**



(SAI Bureau) High amounts of a study. According to a study published in the journal BMJ Medicine, this finding could link calorie-free caffeinated drinks

being used to reduce obesity and type 2 diabetes. However, further research is required. Type 2 diabetes is a lifestyle disorder when the body either doesn't produce enough insulin (a hormone) or resists its production. "It does not study or recommend drinking more coffee, which was not the purpose of this research," said Dr Katarina Kos, senior lecturer at the University of Exeter and co-author of the study. The researchers used a technique called Mendelian randomisation, which establishes cause and effect through genetic evidence.

Two common gene variants were found to be associated with the speed of caffeine metabolism, which was ultimately associated with lower BMI and body fat. It was found that nearly half of the reduction in type 2 diabetes risk was driven by weight loss, and caffeine, which is known to boost metabolism, increase fat burning and reduce appetite could reverse the disease. With a daily intake of 100mg is estimated to increase energy expenditure by about 100 calories a day. However, Dr Stephen Lawrence, associate clinical professor at the University

of Warwick's medical school noted that the Mendelian assessment had its limitations as it was "vulnerable to bias". Future studies could develop promising treatments, he said. However, the authors called the study a "big leap of faith" as weight loss brought by high consumption of caffeine could reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes and be an effective measure of reducing calorie intake. Whether a high amount of caffeine is a treatment for obesity or not should be explored, underscored Dr Lawrence.

# Excessive sodium intake leading cause of death and disease globally: WHO

**In its first report on reducing sodium intake, WHO stated that excessive sodium in unhealthy diets is one of the leading causes of death and disease globally.**

(SAI Bureau) Excessive sodium intake is one of the main culprits of death and disease globally, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared in its first report on sodium intake reduction. The report shows that the world is "off-track" to achieve its global target of reducing sodium intake by 30 per cent by 2025.

Sodium is one of the most essential nutrients for the body but the excess of it could increase the risk of heart disease, stroke and premature death. While table salt is the main source of

sodium (sodium chloride), this nutrient is also contained in other condiments such as sodium glutamate. WHO's global report states that implementing cost-effective sodium reduction policies could save 7 million lives in the world by 2030. However, only nine countries - Brazil, Chile, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Malaysia, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Spain and Uruguay - have a comprehensive package of recommended policies to reduce sodium intake. The global average salt intake is estimated to be 10.8 grams

per day, which is more than double the



WHO recommendation of less than 5 grams of salt per day (one teaspoon). WHO Director-General Dr Tedros

Adhanom Ghebreyesus said, "Unhealthy diets are a leading cause of death and disease globally, and excessive sodium intake is one of the main culprits. This report shows that most countries are yet to adopt any mandatory sodium reduction policies, leaving their people at risk of heart attack, stroke, and other health problems. WHO calls on all countries to implement the 'Best Buys' for sodium reduction, and on manufacturers to implement the WHO benchmarks for sodium content in food."



# HSBC buys UK arm of Silicon Valley Bank for Rs 99

HSBC bought the UK arm of stricken Silicon Valley Bank for a symbolic one pound on Monday.



(SAI Bureau) HSBC bought the UK arm of stricken Silicon Valley Bank for a symbolic one pound on Monday, rescuing a key lender for technology start-ups in Britain and helping curb the fallout from the biggest bank collapse since the financial crash. The move comes after US authorities moved to shore up

deposits and stem any wider contagion from the sudden collapse of its parent Silicon Valley Bank. The deal, which sees one of the world's biggest banks, with \$2.9 trillion of assets, take the doomed British arm of the tech lender under its wing, brings to an end frantic weekend talks between the government,

regulators, and prospective buyers. "HSBC is Europe's largest bank, and SVB UK customers should feel reassured by the strength, safety and security that brings them," Britain's finance minister Jeremy Hunt said.

"We were faced with a situation where we could have seen some of our most important companies - our most strategic companies - wiped out, and that would have been extremely dangerous," Hunt told reporters. Asked about HSBC's white-knight role, Hunt said the finance ministry's priority had been to avoid using British taxpayers' money. One pound is worth \$1.21. The Bank of England said it had organised the sale to underpin confidence in the

financial system and minimise any fallout for British technology firms. It said deposits at the bank were safe as a result of the sale, and that the wider banking system was safe. Britain's blue-chip FTSE 100 index of shares was down 1 per cent in early trading, after sliding 1.7 per cent on Friday amid wider global market turmoil sparked by SVB's collapse. HSBC shares were down 1.7 per cent. "On the face of it appears a good deal," Richard Marwood, senior fund manager and HSBC investor at Royal London Asset Management, said. "SVB lacked liquidity and depositor confidence - HSBC has both of those in spades." SVB UK is ringfenced from the US group, and HSBC said the assets and liabilities of

the parent company were excluded from the transaction.

"This acquisition makes excellent strategic sense for our business in the UK," HSBC CEO Noel Quinn said in a statement. SVB UK has loans of around 5.5 billion pounds and deposits of around 6.7 billion pounds, HSBC said, adding the takeover completes immediately. The Bank of England said SVB UK had a total balance sheet size of around 8.8 billion pounds. Unlike the United States, Britain has not announced broader liquidity measures for the banking system. Dozens of listed British companies issued statements on Monday about their exposure to SVB UK, seeking to reassure investors, or in some cases warn them, just as news of the rescue deal was announced.

## SVB, Signature Bank's failure puts US Federal Reserve in tough spot. Here's why

Two days after tech and startup-focused lender Silicon Valley Bank was shuttered by authorities, New York-based Signature Bank faced a similar fate. The sudden collapse of the two banks has put the US Federal Reserve in a tough spot.

(News Agency) The failure of two major US banks over the weekend made stock markets around the world nervous on Monday, as concerns grow over systemic risks at lenders in the world's most powerful economy. Two days after tech and startup-focused lender Silicon Valley Bank was shuttered by authorities, New York-based Signature Bank faced a similar fate. It became the third-biggest US banking casualty since the 2008 financial crisis. US authorities, including the Federal Reserve, Treasury and Federal Deposit Insurance Corp, announced a host of emergency

measures to boost confidence in the banking system following the sudden failure of the two banks. Among the important measures taken was a new facility to give banks access to emergency funds. The Federal Reserve also made it easier for banks to borrow from it in emergencies.

### Aggressive rate hikes

While the measures have provided relief to distressed Silicon Valley firms and global markets, analysts are still worried about systemic risks in small and mid-sized banks in the US, which do not have the same level of regulations as bigger banks. The sudden collapse of

the two banks has put the limelight on the US Federal Reserve's aggressive rate hikes, which has put pressure on the country's financial system and global markets.

The aggressive rate hikes that started last year have disrupted operations at small and medium-sized banks, which do not have the same level of emergency funds and diversification as their larger counterparts.

SVB, for instance, was a mainstay for the startup economy and thrived during the era of cheap money. However, SVB's risky bets led to major holes in its balance sheet as the



Fed aggressively hiked interest rates.

And analysts believe that SVB is just the tip of the iceberg and other smaller banks are also facing similar concerns, given the fact that the US authorities were quick to introduce measures to protect the banking system.

Many investors believe that the financial system will face further risks if the Fed does not pause raising interest rates.

### Will the Fed pause interest rate hikes?

The US Fed's next policy meeting is scheduled later this month, but analysts at Goldman Sachs no longer expect a rate hike, as the country's banking sector faces a stress test. They expect the measures taken by the regulators to provide substantial liquidity support to banks.

Goldman analysts said they expected the measures taken by

the regulators to provide substantial liquidity to banks facing deposit outflows and to improve confidence among depositors. Investors are now betting on the fact that the US Federal Reserve will take a pause during its policy review, following the biggest US bank failure since the 2008 financial crisis. Akira Takei, fixed income portfolio manager at Asset Management One in Tokyo, told news agency Reuters that the banking failure could put the Federal Reserve in a dilemma.

"If US Fed Chair Jerome Powell lifts interest rates next week, he will jeopardise this situation. If they don't prioritise financial stability, it's going to (breed) financial instability and recession," Takei said.

ING economist Rob Carnell told the news agency that people are already linking SVB's problems with aggressive rate hikes.

## Moody's sees harder times ahead for all US banks and puts six on 'downgrade' watch

(By Staff Reporter) Moody's Investors Service cut its outlook for the entire US banking sector and placed six US banks on review for potential credit rating downgrades, in the wake of last week's collapse of Silicon Valley Bank. The credit ratings firm said it expects more banks will come under pressure after SVB's failure — particularly those with large hoards of uninsured deposits and long-term Treasury bonds that have crumbled in value. Moody's said it expects pressure on the banking sector to persist as the Fed continues to hike interest rates to combat inflation.

Another concern: US banks are raising the interest rates they pay on savings accounts. Although they hope the higher rates will retain

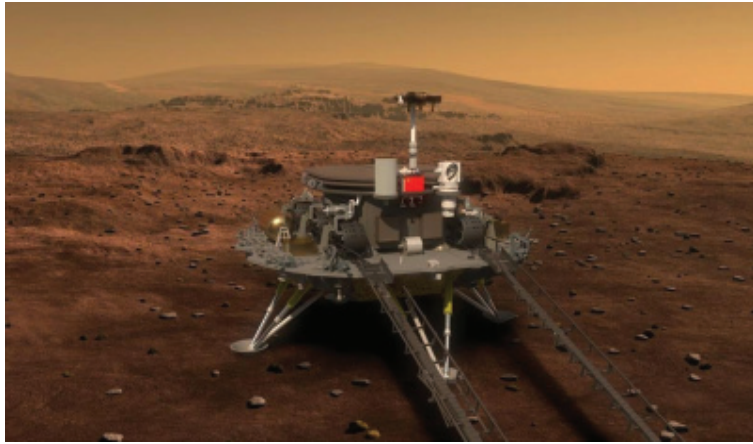
customers worried by the collapse of SVB, that could also eat into profits, Moody's warned.

The good news, Moody's said, is that America's banking system is generally healthy. It has enough cash and liquid assets to withstand an economic downturn. The bad news, for banks anyway, is that US regulators may require them to hold more capital after SVB's rapid failure. SVB was brought down by a bank run, but its exposure to long-term Treasuries that tumbled in value during the Fed's historic rate-hike campaign aggravated its liquidity problem. Moody's predicts the newly "stressed operating environment" for banks could lead some to lend less, buy back fewer shares or cut dividends to preserve capital in case of emergency.



# China plans to bring rocks from asteroid with Tianwen-2 mission

China National Space Administration (CNSA) has revealed that the mission has obtained official approval.



China's CGTN reported that the Tianwen-2 mission would be prepared with the objective of exploring an asteroid. The interplanetary mission will launch to a small near-Earth asteroid dubbed 2016 HO3. The mission will tug the asteroid, grabbing rock and soil samples from the surface and return it to Earth for deeper analysis.

Asteroids are rocky fragments left over from the formation of the solar system about 4.6 billion years ago. An asteroid is classified as a near-Earth object when its distance from our planet is less than 1.3 times the distance from Earth to the Sun (the Earth-Sun distance is about 93 million miles),

according to the Nasa Joint Propulsion Laboratory (JPL). Tianwen-2 will, however, not stop at just collecting and bringing the asteroid samples. CGTN reported that the mission will then soar into the depths of outer space and track a main-belt comet 311P for in-depth study and observations.

An academic seminar is set to be organized in April for the mission to finalize its science goals and the technological developments needed for the mission. Tianwen-1 was successfully inserted into an orbit around Mars in February 2021 in China's maiden attempt at an interplanetary mission. The orbiter mapped the entire planet

in just over a year capturing images ranging from Mars' poles to the surface features, canyons, and craters after circling the planet over 1,300 times. Meanwhile, the Zhurong rover, which accompanied the mission, landed on a large plain area within the largest known impact basin in the solar system on the Red Planet.

However, it seems that the rover has been unable to come out of hibernation on Mars. The spacecraft, which was in winter hibernation, is yet to signal back home and Chinese scientists are scrambling to find what has happened on the Red Planet. The rover was solar-powered, unlike other American rovers which are nuclear-powered.

(News Agency) After Tianwen-1 was sent. successfully launching and running the Tianwen-1 mission for over two years, China has now readied a plan for the second mission of the series. This mission will target asteroids and comets as against Mars where Tianwen-2.

# Google unveils 'magic wand' to draft documents as AI race tightens

California, - Alphabet Inc's (GOOGL.O) Google on Tuesday unveiled a flurry of artificial intelligence (AI) tools for its email, collaboration and cloud software, taking aim at Microsoft Corp (MSFT.O) days before its rival is expected to make a similar announcement.

In a replay of last month's dueling chatbot launches by the tech giants, Alphabet touted a "magic wand" for its popular Google Docs software that can draft a marketing blog, training plan or other text, then revise its

tone at users' discretion, a company official demonstrated to reporters. Microsoft, meanwhile, has teased a Thursday event about how it is "reinventing productivity with AI," which is expected to showcase its competing Word processor. Alphabet also said its AI will be able to summarize message threads in Gmail, craft slide presentations, personalize customer outreach and take meeting notes as part of its upgrade to Google Workspace, a product suite with billions of

users on free and paid accounts. The advances reflect how ChatGPT has spurred a race in Silicon Valley to imbue products with so-called generative AI, which learns from past data how to create content anew, just like the chatbot sensation.

Microsoft, Alphabet and peers are investing billions of dollars to build and deploy the technology, hoping business they win from speeding up writing and creative tasks for office workers will far outweigh the costs of these endeavors. "This next phase is



where we're bringing human beings to be supported with an AI collaborator, who is working in real time," Thomas Kurian, Chief Executive of Google Cloud, said in a press briefing. Alphabet is giving approved test users access to new Workspace features on a rolling basis throughout the year, before a wider launch, similar to it and Microsoft's phased release of their chatbot programs.

Kurian declined to say how much the upgraded Workspace might cost businesses or consumers.

## AI-GENERATED CORGI

Google also unveiled a range of generative AI tools for its cloud-computing customers, for instance previewing access to PaLM, one of its most powerful "large language models" that create human-like text. Google said customers can fine-tune its AI model with their own data while keeping the information and benefits proprietary.

In another enterprise software

example, Google showed how a fictional furniture business could build better customer-service chatbots capable of generating images as well as text, like showing how a corgi dog would look on a mid-century modern chair.

The chatbot could integrate with a payments system so a shopper then could buy the chair, a promotional video showed. Google aims for its AI to "transform" the work of marketers, lawyers, scientists and educators, according to the video. The Mountain View, California-based company announced a partnership with high-profile AI research lab Midjourney, with Google to provide cloud infrastructure including its custom "TPU" chips.

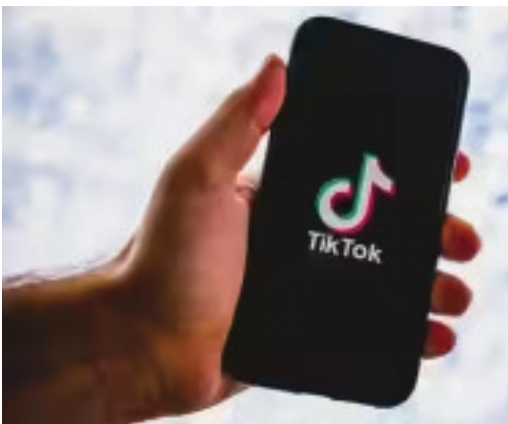
Microsoft's generative-AI rollout so far has outpaced that of Alphabet, which is wary of societal harm as well as damage to its reputation as a reliable source of information.

## UK to ban TikTok on government phones: Report

UK's National Cyber Security Centre has been reviewing whether TikTok should be barred from government phones, while the United States, Canada, Belgium and the European Commission have already banned TikTok.

Britain is set to announce a ban on TikTok on government phones on Thursday, PA Media reported, a move that would follow other Western countries who have barred the Chinese-owned video app over security concerns.

TikTok has come under increasing scrutiny due to fears that user data from the app owned by Beijing-based company ByteDance could end up in the hands of the Chinese government, undermining



Western security interests. Britain's National Cyber Security Centre has been reviewing

whether TikTok should be barred from government phones, while the United States, Canada, Belgium and the European Commission have already banned the app.

When asked about a potential ban on TikTok, security minister Tom Tugendhat said earlier in the week that understanding the challenges posed by these apps was "incredibly important." TikTok has said it would be disappointed by such a ban. The government is expected to

make a statement on the security of its devices later on Thursday.



# Why is the Oscars 2023 carpet champagne and not red?

**The Oscars this year featured a champagne-coloured carpet instead of a red runner. Read on to know why.**

Over the years, though a lot has changed about the Oscars, one thing has remained constant: the red carpet. At least for the last six decades. The hues of the carpet have been different shades of red, but this year, the organisers rolled out a champagne-coloured carpet.

At the carpet unrolling ceremony, host Jimmy Kimmel joked, "I think the decision to go with a champagne carpet rather than a red carpet shows how confident we are that no blood

will be shed." The champagne carpet was unpooled on Wednesday outside the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California in a special ceremony. The decision to change the colour from red to champagne came from creative consultants Lisa Love and Raul Avila (creative director for the Met Gala).

This is the first time since 1961 that the famous Oscars red carpet is not red but champagne instead. But this is only one of the many big changes that have



been witnessed this year.

According to the Associated Press, Lisa Love felt there was a disconnect between the elegant black tie dress code and the fact that it was mid-afternoon when people arrived at the event. With a covered carpet, she could change that. We chose this beautiful sienna, saffron colour that evokes the sunset, because this is the sunset before the golden hour," she told the news agency. The iconic Oscars red carpet dates back to 1961 when

the 33rd Academy Awards were held at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium and became the first televised ceremony. That was the time when the glorious red carpet was rolled out. However, viewers were only able to see the red carpet in 1966, when Oscars was first broadcasted in colour.

What is the colour of the carpet then? Lisa Love said that "champagne" and "sand" are apt colour descriptions.

Jamie Lee Curtis, who won the best supporting actress

award for her film *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, joked about the carpet on Twitter and wrote, "Apparently, at the Oscars, their carpet is going to match my drapes." At the 95th Academy Awards, the Naatu Naatu song from SS Rajamouli's *RRR* became the first Indian film song to win an Oscar in the best original song category. Guneet Monga's *The Elephant Whisperers* also won in the best documentary short film category.



## Kylie Jenner and Travis Scott file to legally change baby son's name to Aire...

(News Agency) Kylie Jenner revealed in January that she and Travis Scott had decided to name their son Aire after scrapping his original moniker last year.

And now the former couple are requesting that the one-year-old's name be legally changed from Wolfe Jacques Webster to Aire Webster, as per TMZ.

The outlet reports that both Kylie, 25, and Travis, 30, are in agreement on the name change and have both signed off on the petition. In the legal docs, the duo explained that they 'regret the initial name choice of Wolf Jacques Webster' and that Aire is a 'better fit' for their baby.

'Now that Petitioners have had the chance to spend time with their baby, they believe the name Aire Webster is a better fit.' Aire was born on February 2, 2022 and is the second child of Kylie and Travis.

The exes also share five-year-old daughter Stormi Webster.

Kylie and Travis' on/off romance kicked off in 2017 after crossing paths at the Coachella Valley Music Festival, where the rapper was performing.

Less than a year later, they welcomed daughter Stormi on February 1, 2018.

They first split in October 2019 but remained committed to co-parenting Stormi.

Kylie later referred to the hitmaker as her 'best friend' in a 2020 Harper's Bazaar interview.

The Kylie Cosmetics founder also revealed that their mutual love for their daughter inspires them to stay 'connected and coordinated.'

With her own parents having split in 2015, Kylie said that she often uses mom Kris and dad Caitlyn's amicable co-parenting relationship as an example. 'They were very hands-on with me, and I want the same for Stormi.' It was reported at the time that Kylie and Travis had joint custody of their little girl.

The pair rekindled their romance in May 2021 after reconnecting during the COVID-19 lockdown. There were rumors that they actually reconciled in 2020, but Kylie's nephew Mason Disick shutdown the speculation during an Instagram Live that year. By September 2021, Kylie revealed that she and Travis were expecting their second child together. She did so by sharing a video unveiling her burgeoning baby bump, as well as footage of the moment they found out she was pregnant.





# Mission Impossible Dead Reckoning Part One poster teases fans with Tom Cruise's insane stunt

**Mission: Impossible – Dead Reckoning Part One's official poster reveals Tom Cruise's crazy motorcycle stunt. The actor himself had said that this was the 'most dangerous thing' they'd ever attempted.**



## MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE DEAD RECKONING – PART ONE POSTER OUT

The official Twitter handle shared the official poster of Mission Impossible Dead Reckoning Part One. "Here's the official poster for #MissionImpossible - Dead Reckoning Part One starring @TomCruise. Only in theatres July 2023 (sic)," read the caption. The poster features Tom Cruise's insane motorcycle stunt. The makers had earlier shared a BTS video where the actor was seen riding a motorbike off a treacherous cliff. "This is far and away the most

dangerous thing we've ever attempted," said Tom Cruise

while introducing the stunt.

Mission: Impossible – Dead Reckoning Part One is an upcoming American action spy film. It has been written, produced and directed by Christopher McQuarrie. The film is a sequel to Mission: Impossible – Fallout, which released in 2018. It marks the seventh installment in the Mission Impossible series. The film is expected to hit the screens on July 14, 2023. Mission: Impossible – Dead Reckoning Part Two will release

in 2024. Written and directed by Christopher McQuarrie, Mission: Impossible – Dead Reckoning Part One will release in India in July in English, Hindi, Tamil and Telugu. Apart from Tom Cruise, Mission Impossible 7 stars Hayley Atwell, Ving Rhames, Simon Pegg, Rebecca Ferguson, Vanessa Kirby, Esai Morales, Pom Klementieff, Mariela Garriga, Henry Czerny, Shea Whigham, Greg Tarzan Davis, Frederick Schmidt, Charles Parnell, Rob Delaney, Cary Elwes, Indira Varma and Mark Gatiss.

After wooing his fans in Top Gun Maverick, Tom Cruise will next be seen in Mission: Impossible – Dead Reckoning Part One. This is one of the much-awaited films of the year and has created a great deal of buzz. Today, March 14, the makers dropped the official poster of the upcoming movie, which is expected to hit theaters in July this year.

## Punjabi actor Aman Dhaliwal injured in knife attack at US gym, now recovering in hospital

Aman Dhaliwal was critically injured in a knife attack while he was working out in a US gym. The actor was held hostage by the unknown assailant inside the gym, while he shouted for some water. In a video being shared on social media, Aman tries to contain the assailant, which is when he gets injured. Later, several men hold down the unknown man, while Aman is seen standing on the side, bloodied from the attack. The actor is now recovering in a hospital after his injuries were looked after. Several photos of the actor from the hospital show the extent of his injuries. His head has been bandaged up, and he has deep stab wounds on his neck, chest, shoulder and arm. The actor had undergone several stitches for the cuts.

In the video, the assailant is wearing a blue hoodie. He can be heard saying, "Please, respect us! Give me water. I need water!" The unknown man tries to intimidate Aman by screaming in his face and says to the others, "You want to take advantage of me." When he shows his face by removing the hoodie from his head, Aman tries to take him down. Other members of the gym also come to help him out. They hold him down and say, "Stop resisting!" Aman is standing barefoot on the side in a green sweatshirt and jogging pants. According to a TOI report, the accused was handed over to the police after the incident. The attack is said to have taken place around 9.20 am at the Planet Fitness gym in Corona, California.



## Mouni Roy shares video from Miami, deletes it amid hateful comments

**Mouni Roy shared a new Instagram Reels that shows her taking over the streets of Miami. However, she soon deleted it.**

Actor Mouni Roy dropped a fresh video from Miami on Thursday. It shows her taking over the sunlit streets of the vacation destination and showing off her beach outfit. However, she soon deleted the video from Instagram Reels. The video begins with Mouni, in an orange and white bikini top, orange sarong and a bag over her shoulders, walking around a street as her friend filmed her. After walking a few steps, Mouni feels a bit shy, wears her sunglasses and poses for the camera as music starts playing around her. A woman, likely a stranger, walks up to her and puts her arm over her shoulder. While the video seems harmless enough, many left hateful comments on

Mouni's post. They shamed her for her outfit and looks like Mouni decided to remove the video entirely. The video also got her a compliment from her friend Disha Patani, who wrote, "Look at this body!" Disha and Mouni had earlier shared more photos of the two from Miami. On Tuesday, Mouni took to Instagram and shared a few snaps with Disha.

In the photos, the two, dressed in their casual best, are grinning broadly. While Mouni is wearing a simple white outfit, Disha is seen in a white bralette and pink mini skirt. Sharing the photos, Mouni wrote, "Me and my D [Disha Patani] at random. When you know you know..." Reacting to the post, Disha commented, "Love you my mon mon."





# Pathaan 2 or War 2? Siddharth Anand spills the beans on the next Tiger-Pathaan crossover

**Siddharth Anand, in an exclusive chat with IndiaToday.in, speaks about the next Tiger-Pathaan crossover. He also reacted to what would be his next movie after Fighter.**

Pathaan is already breaking records ever since it was released on January 25, 2023. The film starring Shah Rukh Khan, Deepika Padukone and John Abraham was directed by Siddharth Anand. The director earlier helmed War, starring Hrithik Roshan and Tiger Shroff as well.

## SID ON PATHAAN-TIGER CROSSOVER

One of the biggest highlights of Pathaan was the epic Tiger (Salman Khan) and Pathaan scene. In the upcoming Tiger film, Pathaan will be seen making a cameo as well. When asked to spill details of his involvement in it, Siddharth said that he is not really involved.



He told IndiaToday.in exclusively, "I think the IP and the characters have been built



together with Aditya Chopra. And he has more say in this because these are his IPs and how he



wishes to have them crossover. So I'm not involved at all in Tiger. But Pathaan has actually set a

template because of his character, his appearance and his persona. So, it's easier for anybody coming in and doing that crossover to just pick up the pieces from there."

## WAR 2 OR PATHAAN 2, NEXT?

When asked if, after Fighter, he would begin work on War 2 or Pathaan 2, Siddharth mentioned, "No plans yet, honestly. So there's nothing yet and it will be unveiled soon. Whatever it is, but right now it's all Fighter for me." For those unaware, Fighter will see Hrithik Roshan and Deepika Padukone in lead roles. The movie is being shot extensively across the country.

## Ratna Pathak Shah calls formula films 'rotten', says 'thank god, they don't work anymore'

**Ratna Pathak Shah speaks about the shuffle in cinema. In an exclusive chat, she spoke about getting better opportunity to choose diverse characters**

Ratna Pathak Shah is known for frankly, because when you focus not mincing her words. The on the actor rather than the



story, then you get limited by the personality of the actor. I won't get the chance to challenge myself. It is a very good time for actors of all ages and genders, not

actress is currently seen in Happy Family: Conditions Apply. The senior star spoke to IndiaToday.in about the shuffle in showbiz today and reiterated that she is positive that the formula films won't work anymore.

## 'GOOD TIME FOR ACTORS OF ALL AGES AND GENDERS'

When asked if she feels times have changed for good in the film industry, Ratna Pathak Shah told IndiaToday.in, "It is certainly becoming easier for women of my age to get work. I don't believe in the kind of work that is designed around an actor. I don't find that very interesting,

just the binary to work."

## ROTTEN FORMULA FILMS WON'T WORK'

She added, "Suddenly, the world is becoming interested in how you live your life. I love that shuffling. Will we continue that way? We will see. God knows. I have hope too. But we have moved ahead in that direction and there is no going back. Ab dobara woh saddi hui formula wali filmein nahi suna payenge. Shukr hai (No more will the formula films work. Thank God)." Ratna Pathak Shah is known for her illustrated body of work, ranging from sitcoms to Lipstick Under My Burkha.

## Tu Jhoothi Main Makkaar box office collection Day 5: Ranbir, Shraddha's film hits Rs 70 crore on opening weekend

**Tu Jhoothi Main Makkaar is doing an amazing job at the box office. On its opening weekend, the film collected a whopping Rs 70 crore.**

Ranbir Kapoor and Shraddha Kapoor's Tu Jhoothi Main Makkaar could be the next big blockbuster! The film is doing wonders at the box office, and fans are loving Ranbir-Shraddha's fresh pairing. On its first weekend in theatres, TJMM minted a whopping Rs 70 crore.

## TU JHOOTHI MAIN MAKKAAR BOX OFFICE COLLECTION

On the opening day, the Ranbir Kapoor and Shraddha Kapoor-starrer earned Rs 15 crore in India. For the next three days, it remained steady by earning



Rs 10 crore in a single day. However, on Day 4, which was the film's first Saturday, TJMM saw a massive jump in its collection as it earned Rs 16 crore on March 11. On Day 5, March 12, it added another Rs 17.08 crore, taking the total to Rs 70.24. Meanwhile, Tu Jhoothi Main Makkar had an overall 23.53 per cent Hindi occupancy on Sunday, March 12. Trade analyst Taran Adarsh wrote on Instagram, "#TuJhoothiMainMakkaar packs a solid number in its extended weekend". Biz on Sat and Sun gave the film that extra

push. Weekdays crucial, all eyes on Monday! Wed 15.73 cr, Thu 10.34 cr, Fri 10.52 cr, Sat 16.57 cr, Sun 17.08 cr. Total: Rs 70.24 cr.

## ABOUT THE FILM

The makers had announced the title of Tu Jhoothi Main Makkaar earlier in a unique way. This is also the first time Ranbir

Kapoor and Shraddha Kapoor are coming together. The film released during the Holi 2023 weekend, March 8, 2023. The romantic comedy film, written and directed by Luv

Ranjan, is produced by Luv Films and T-Series Films. Anubhav Singh Bassi, Dimple Kapadia and Boney Kapoor play pivotal supporting roles in the film. The music of the film is composed by Pritam. All lyrics are written by Amitabh Bhattacharya. The film revolves around Ranbir and Shraddha who easily fall in love but struggle to breakup.

On the work front, Ranbir also has Animal in the pipeline. Shraddha, on the other hand, will soon begin shooting for Stree 2.





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