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The Army Takes on Imran Khan Pakistan Faces Another Lost Decade

After a lifetime of chaos, citizens have no time for democratic norms. It's now a choice between a populist authoritarian or military rule.

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Vice is going bankrupt



BuzzFeed News is dead. What does it mean?

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How the West Has Been Insulting and Abusing Hindu Gods for Decades



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PM Modi Must Worry.

Karnataka is the latest sign of a deepening crisis ahead of 2024 LS polls

BJP needs a new narrative. The polarisation tactics, promotion of Hindutva, and dependence on Modi to deliver votes has made its electoral strategies predictable.



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The Election Shock Which Will Reverberate Around the World



(SAI Bureau) - Well, who saw that election bouncer coming? A long-established leader who seemed invincible has been shown to be vulnerable. An opposition which gave the impression of never quite being up to the job has achieved a notable success. Politics in a part of the world which seemed set in a groove has suddenly become unpredictable.

Contd. on page 20



How EU sanctions on Russian crude helped India save \$5bn last year

(SAI Bureau) - Tensions mounted between the European Union (EU) and India as External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday reacted to EU Foreign policy chief Josep Borrell's statement hinting at a crackdown on India's alleged sale of Russian oil as refined fuels, which sidetracks the sanctions imposed on Russia by the EU.

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Asian-American Heritage Month Celebrations were recently held at Town of Hempstead. Supervisor Don Clavin, Hempstead Town Board, and the Department of Community Affairs along with LILC, PACOLI, Turkish Cultural Center, Long Island Nepali Society, Bangladeshi Heritage, Chinese Center on Long Island and Filipino-American Organization hosted. Over 1000 guests from across America's largest township came together to enjoy traditional culture and music, face painting, henna tattoos and gifts for kids. Supervisor Don Clavin declared the month of May is the Asian Heritage Month with Proclamations and honored 8 community and business leaders for their contributions and community services.

Indian American Women Entrepreneurs Association Hosts "Spring Swing" Event with Special Guest, First Lady of New Jersey



(By our staff reporter) administration. Additionally, she Edison, NJ - The Indian American Women Entrepreneurs Association (IAWEA) recently hosted their annual "Spring Swing" event in Edison, NJ. The First Lady of New Jersey, Tammy Dr. Shukla, President and Founder of IAWEA, gave a heartfelt speech, thanking the Mrs. Murphy was welcomed with open arms by the IAWEA community and gave a passionate speech about the importance of women's entrepreneurship. She emphasized that she has been working with NJ State's economic development authority to provide access to capital for women entrepreneurs in their businesses.

Honor Banquet & Celebration of the 75th anniversary of India's Independence held by AIA National in New York

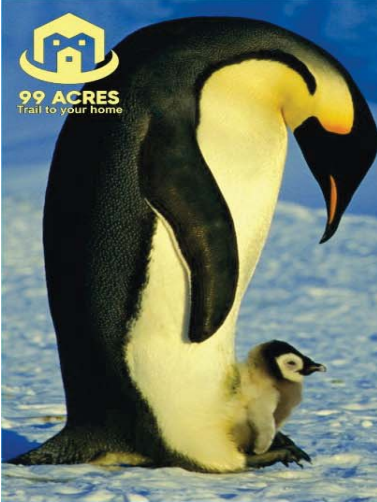


(SAI Bureau) The Association of Indians in America (AIA National) hosted 25th Honor Banquet and the celebration of the 75th anniversary of India's Independence in a beautiful venue at Terrace on the Park in Flushing Meadows Park, New York. The celebration of the 75th anniversary of India's independence was in keeping with the Indian Government's yearlong celebrations. The Honor Banquet was attended by 250 distinguished AIA members and esteemed guests in a sold house.

The Honor Banquet was graced by the presence of US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Mayor of New York City Mr. Eric Adams. Consul General of India at New York Randhir Jaiswal graced the occasion as Chief guest. He was accompanied by his wife Dr Abha Jaiswal. NYS Assemblywoman Jennifer Rajkumar also graced the occasion. The program started with invocation and American & Indian National Anthem followed by classical dance performance by Maheshwari

Jagabattula on A.R. Rahman's Vande Mataram song. AIA National President Gobind Munjal in his remarks thanked his dedicated team in making this 25 th Honor Banquet a grand success. He talked about India's culture and values and the progress made by Indian Americans to fully assimilate in the main stream America. He remarked, "Indians in America bring distinct vision, values, needs and goals and we and our next generations should fully assimilate and participate in the political system and take active role in

shaping the future of this great country." AIA honored two very distinguished individuals with "Honor Award" for the outstanding achievements. Among the Individuals honored were: Padma Bhushan Arvind Panagariya, Ph.D. Professor of Economics and Jagdish Bhagwati Professor of Indian Political Economy in the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) at Columbia University since January 2004. From January 2015 to August 2017, he served as the first Vice Chairman of the NITI

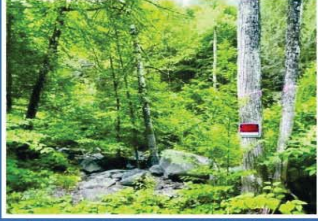


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Man Sentenced for Production of Child Pornography and Extortion

(SAI Bureau) A Canadian man was sentenced today to 32 years in prison for producing images and videos depicting the sexual abuse of children and for interstate extortion based on an online "sextortion" scheme.

According to court documents, from approximately 2014 to 2016, Muhammad Luqman Rana, 33, of Vaughan, Ontario, used the online messaging chat sites Omegle and Tinychat to target both adult and minor victims living in the United States and Canada to produce sexually explicit images. Rana tricked five minor U.S. victims, who ranged from ages 12 to 17, into producing sexually explicit images by posing as a minor male. Rana surreptitiously captured two of the minor victims changing in their bedrooms after they had accidentally left their webcam on after chatting with him. Once Rana had embarrassing and sensitive videos of his victims, he forced them to produce and send additional sexually explicit images



and videos via both live transmission and to his email account out of fear that he would publicly post the videos he had previously obtained if they did not comply with his demands.

In January 2021, Rana was arrested in Canada on a provisional arrest warrant. He was extradited to the United States on Jan. 25, 2022.

Assistant Attorney General Kenneth A. Polite, Jr. of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney Erik L. Barron for the District of Maryland, Assistant Director Luis Quesada of the FBI's Criminal Investigative Division, Special Agent in Charge Thomas J. Sobocinski of the FBI Baltimore Field Office, and Chief Myron Demkiw of the Toronto Police

Services made the announcement.

The FBI and the Toronto Police Services investigated the case. The Justice Department's Office of International Affairs conducted the requests for mutual legal assistance and extradition.

Senior Trial Attorney Jennifer Toritto Leonardo of the Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section (CEOS) and Assistant U.S. Attorney G. Michael Morgan Jr. for the District of Maryland prosecuted the case.

This case was brought as part of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative to combat the epidemic of child sexual exploitation and abuse, launched in May 2006 by the Department of Justice. Led by U.S. Attorneys' Offices and CEOS, Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state, and local resources to better locate, apprehend, and prosecute individuals who exploit children via the internet, as well as to identify and rescue victims.

United States Secret Service Hosts Visiting Police Executives at White House

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The U.S. Secret Service hosted seven visiting police executives Saturday at the White House as part of National Police Week. The guests were from select police departments and were treated to a guided tour of the mansion, as well several demonstrations from the U.S. Secret Service Uniformed Division.

The group was greeted by U.S. Secret Service Director Kimberly Cheatle and the tour was led by Chief Alfonso Dyson and Assistant Chief Richard Macauley of the Uniformed Division. Those participating in the event include representatives from the:

Atlanta Police Department
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department
Chicago Police Department
Miami-Dade Police Department
Milwaukee Police Department
Philadelphia Police



The U.S. Secret Service hosted visiting police executives Saturday at the White House as part of National Police Week. The guests were from the Atlanta Police Department, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, Chicago Police Department, Miami-Dade Police Department, Milwaukee Police Department, Philadelphia Police Department and Phoenix Police Department. Guests were treated to a guided tour of the mansion, as well several demonstrations from the U.S. Secret Service Uniformed Division.

Department screening capabilities; a Phoenix Police Department presentation from the Hazardous Agent Mitigation Team; a meet and greet with the U.S. Secret Medical Emergency Response, or HAMMER, and personnel Team;

the counter sniper and Embassy Row in Washington, specialized rifle units; a tour of the Crime Scene Search Unit; a discussion with the Emergency Response Team; a briefing from the Mission Assurance Mobile Field Force; and more.

"The Secret Service values the strong relationships we have with our local law enforcement partners," Director Cheatle said. "We work hand in hand with local law enforcement to protect our nation's leaders and investigate cases of financial fraud. Inviting our partners to the White House gives them a glimpse of our mission and capabilities, and we believe it will encourage further collaboration." The U.S. Secret Service Uniformed Division is comprised of roughly 1,600 officers. These men and women safeguard the White House, the Vice President's residence at the Naval Observatory and

D.C. They also travel around the world to work with the Secret Services' more than 3,600 special agents to secure facilities and venues for protectees.

"Opportunities like this allow us to come together for fellowship and collaboration," said Commissioner Danielle Outlaw of the Philadelphia Police Department. "It gives us an incredible view of what the Secret Service provides and what services are available in times of need."

"I just want to thank the Secret Service for their partnership," said Michael Sullivan, Interim Chief of Police for the Phoenix Police Department. "It is especially important today when we are here for the Candlelight Vigil at Police Week to be able to see the history and what we all swore an oath to defend."

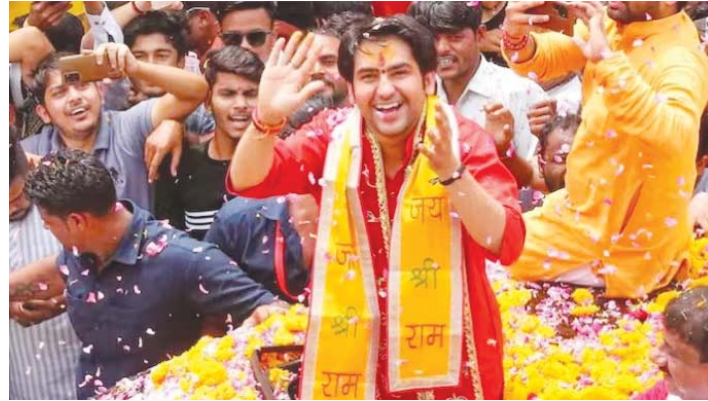
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Nitish Kumar slams Baba Bageshwar's 'Hindu Rashtra' remark; Lalu Yadav says 'Who Baba?'

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Tuesday slammed self-styled godman Dharendra Krishna Shastri aka Bageshwar Dham Sarkar for his "the fire of Hindu Rashtra will be ignited in Bihar" remark. The Bihar CM said that the state government does not interfere with anybody's faith.

(News Agency)- Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar slammed self-styled godman Dharendra Krishna Shastri aka Bageshwar Dham Sarkar for his "the fire of Hindu Rashtra will be ignited from Bihar" remark. 'Baba Bageshwar' is in Bihar's Patna for a five-day congregation. Slamming Shastri's comment, Nitish Kumar said that the people making such comments about Hindu Rashtra were not even born when the Constitution came into being.

"After fighting the freedom struggle, the Constitution came into existence and the name given that should be acceptable to everyone...Were all those who are saying this born during the freedom struggle?... What is the need of saying this? Follow any religion you want. But proposals for renaming are surprising. Is that even possible?," said the Bihar CM. "They must understand the Constitution," he



advised. The Bihar CM further added that the state government does not interfere with anybody's faith and that they ensure that everyone gets their right to worship the way they want, reported news agency ANI.

TEJ PRATAP YADAV SLAMS SHASTRI FOR CALLING CROWD 'PAGAL'

Shastri also stoked controversy during his 'Divya Darbar' session when he reportedly called his followers 'pagal' as he had to

cancel 'aarti' citing concerns over the crowd beyond the capacity of the venue. "There is too much crowd now, an enormous crowd...crazy people have arrived," Shashtri had said.

Former Bihar CM and RJD national president Lalu Prasad Yadav's son and Bihar minister Tej Pratap Yadav slammed Shastri for his comment and said, "This Baba is abusing Biharis and calling them 'pagal'. Politics is being done to divide the country." "WHO BABA", ASKS LALU YADAV

When asked about Dharendra Shastri not being stopped from holding an event in Patna, Lalu Prasad Yadav said, "Who

Baba? Is he a Baba?"

OVER 100 DEVOTEES FALL SICK DURING BABA'S EVENT

Earlier on Monday, over hundreds of devotees fell sick during the 'Divya Darbar' session of Dharendra Shastri at Naubatpur area of Patna.

BJP MP Ram Kripal Yadav accused the state government of mismanagement and said that more than hundreds of devotees attending the 'Divya Darbar' of Dharendra Shastri of Bageshwar Dham fell sick during Sunday's session due to high humidity and the heavy crowd inside the venue.

The organisers had said that the five-day Hanumanth Katha event will conclude on May 17. The 26-year-old chief priest of the Bageshwar Dham temple burst into national limelight in January, after a well-known rationalist questioned his claims that he had healing powers and could read people's minds.

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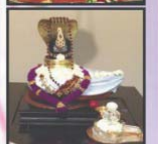
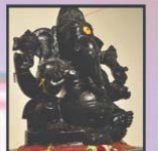
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Internet ban in Manipur extended till May 20, complaint number issued to report rumours

Clashes broke out in Manipur after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts on May 3, to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. At least 73 people were killed, 230 injured and 1,700 houses, including religious places, were burnt during the violence.

(News Agency)- The Manipur government on Tuesday extended the suspension on internet services across the state till May 20.

An order, issued by the Home Department of Manipur, stated, "Police communication suggests that there are still reports of incidents like fighting amongst volunteers and youths of major communities residing in the state with reports of arson of houses. There is apprehension that some anti-social elements might use social media extensively for transmission of images, hate speech and hate video messages inciting the passions of the public which might have serious repercussions for the law and order situation in the state of Manipur."

"To thwart the design and activities of anti-national and anti-social elements and to maintain peace and communal harmony and to prevent any loss of life or danger to public or private property, it has become necessary to take adequate



measures to maintain law and order in public interest, by stopping the spread of disinformation and false rumors, through various social media platform such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter besides others, on mobile phones and Short Message Service (SMS), for facilitating and mobilization of mobs, agitators and demonstrators, which can cause loss of life and damage to public

and private property by indulging in arson and vandalism and other types of violent activities," the order stated.

"Under the above mentioned reasons, in which the situation is likely to cause serious disturbances to the peaceful co-existence and maintenance of public order, do hereby order further suspension and curbing of mobile data service, internet and data services including

broadband in the entire state of Manipur. The order is issued to prevent any disturbances of peace and public order in the jurisdiction of the state and shall be in force for another five days with immediate effect," the order further stated. Meanwhile, Manipur's security advisor, Kuldip Singh, said, "We have introduced one phone number (9485280461) for having 'Rumour Free Manipur' so that anyone having knowledge of any rumour or incident which is suspected to be correct or incorrect should dial this number and narrate it."

On May 3, mobile internet services in the state were banned, while all other forms of internet, including broadband, were banned on May 4. The overall situation in Manipur remained peaceful on Tuesday with no major report of violence. The violent clashes in the state have so far claimed at least 73 lives, besides leaving another 230 people injured. Over 1,700 houses were reduced to ashes after being torched by miscreants.

Siddaramaiah is next Karnataka CM, DKS to be his deputy: Sources



CM, is likely to be offered Deputy CM post with plum portfolios.

Congress leaders DK Shivakumar and Siddaramaiah were the two top contenders for the CM post. They both met the party's top leadership in New Delhi on Tuesday. Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday held a

(News Agency)- After days of suspense over who will be the new chief minister of Karnataka, seems like Congress has finally zeroed in on the next Karnataka Chief Minister. Siddaramaiah will be the next chief minister of Karnataka, sources reported.

The swearing-in ceremony is likely to happen tomorrow post lunch. Reportedly, Siddaramaiah will take oath alone.

Also, Congress legislator party meeting will be called tomorrow on Thursday at Kanteerava Stadium around 3.30 pm.

DK Shivakumar, who was another contender in the race to be Karnataka

meeting with Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge as the party was set to announce the next Karnataka CM on Tuesday. Surjewala was also present at the meeting.

In the May 10 elections to the 224-member Assembly, the Congress secured a simple majority with 135 seats, while the ruling BJP and the Janata Dal (Secular) secured 66 and 19, respectively. Both Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar played a significant role in the Congress's emphatic win in the recently held Assembly election in Karnataka in which the party won 135 of the 224 assembly seats, and ousted the BJP from power.

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What happened to Elon Musk? Why India Must Keep Aces Up Its Sleeve While Dealing With West

By Frida Ghitis

For years, Elon Musk was a mysterious, intriguing and widely admired figure. That was back before he purchased Twitter and clasped his hands firmly on the wheel of the social media platform, boosting his influence and magnifying his voice, in the process revealing that the man behind the spectacular business achievements of Tesla and SpaceX is not quite what he had led us to believe.

Just in the past week, Musk has behaved in ways that cause potentially far-reaching harm, while shedding more light on the contradiction between his public pronouncements and his actions.

Musk craves the attention, so one hesitates to feed him precisely what he wants. But even those of us who make it a point to ignore his regular trolling find it necessary to note just how harmful and hypocritical the former world's wealthiest man truly is.

Over the weekend, Musk – whose claim that he is a “free speech absolutist” has already appeared self-serving in the past – surrendered to demands from the increasingly authoritarian government of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, blocking some accounts and more than 400 tweets in the country.

Twitter complied with the Turkish court orders just in time to possibly boost the chances of Erdogan – the president who has imprisoned journalists, critics and rivals – as he faced one of the toughest

elections of his life.

Appalled, Enes Kanter Freedom, the Turkish-born former NBA player, a fierce critic of Erdogan, told CNN, “I don’t want to hear about Elon Musk talking about free speech ever again. He’s literally bowing down to dictatorship.” (Twitter said it took the action “in order to keep Twitter available over the election weekend.” It added that of five Turkish court orders issued against it, it had objected to four.) Then the day after the election, Musk launched a Twitter assault on George Soros (more on that in a moment), the Jewish billionaire supporter of liberal causes, framing his criticism of the Holocaust survivor in terms that made scholars of antisemitism warn that Musk’s messaging would worsen the growing plague of antisemitic and racist violence.

He also slandered a respected international investigative journalism organization, and argued that it is, “bullsh*t” to think that a massacre allegedly carried out by a man with Nazi tattoos and a vast track record of racist, antisemitic and misogynistic posts means the incident is linked to white supremacy.

It’s hard to square the man who regularly promotes wild conspiracy theories to his tens of millions of followers with the supposedly thoughtful visionary of his pre-Twitter days. Sure, he was already running roughshod over the rules back then, **(Contd. on page 19)**

Democrats’ message to Americans: If you’re not a migrant, go to the back of the line

By Betsy McCaughey | Creators
Syndicate

Democrats’ new rule: If you’re not a migrant, go to the back of the line. Gary Moretti and his fiancée booked 30 rooms at The Crossroads Hotel in Newburgh, New York, for their bridesmaids and guests for a June 24 wedding. But New York City Mayor Eric Adams’ migrant-first policy demolished their plans.

Over the last two weeks, Adams has rolled out a scheme to bus hundreds of migrants to upscale motels in Newburgh, Orangetown and Yonkers, pleading that New York City is out of space. It didn’t matter that many of the motel rooms were already occupied or booked. Money talks. New York City pays above-market rates to house migrants, averaging \$8,000 per room, per month, taxpayers be damned. The motels acted fast to clear their rooms. “We had a legal contract to have those rooms,” Moretti said. Nearly two dozen struggling homeless veterans also got the boot, including some who had served in Vietnam or Afghanistan.

People staying at the Ramada Inn in Yonkers were told to clear out as well. Up to 100 migrant families are expected there within a week. Savannah Harp, who’s been living there with her 18-month-old son, resents that she’s had to pay for her room, while the migrants displacing her will get rooms for free. Big city Democrats like Adams give migrants top priority.

Protest and you’re called “racist” or “xenophobic.” Even so, some local leaders are fighting back against Adams’ takeover of hotels and motels in their counties. Rockland and Orange counties are in court, arguing that Adams doesn’t have the right to set up shelters outside New York City.

Other counties are putting Adams on notice to not even try it. Nassau County Executive Bruce Blakeman, a Republican, made it clear, “we are not a sanctuary county.” The battle unfolding in New York will likely be repeated in many locales. Connecticut alerted towns to prepare for migrants. The immigration industrial complex — a web of Democratic politicians, immigration lawyers and nonprofits that survive on public funding — pushes relentlessly for more money and more “rights” for migrants. Adams plans to house migrants in upstate hotels and motels for up to four months, with shuttle service provided three times a day to wherever they want to go. What a deal.

Democrats promised migrants sanctuary from immigration law enforcement, luxury accommodations, three meals a day, and health and legal services. Now they express surprise at the deluge of people heading to New York City, and insist all counties share the burden. The New York Civil Liberties Union is suing Rockland and Orange counties, claiming the counties’ resistance amounts to “xenophobic harassment and discrimination.” **(Contd. on page 19)**

By: Minhaz Merchant

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has a busy global schedule over the next few days. First, the G7 summit in Hiroshima, Japan, on May 20 where he will meet US President Joe Biden on the sidelines. Then, in between a stopover in Papua New Guinea (PNG), the island strategically located north of Australia in China’s Indo-Pacific backyard, a series of engagements in Sydney, including a bilateral with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese.

Next month Biden will host Modi for a four-day state visit in Washington, beginning June 22, with a black-tie banquet dinner at the White House thrown in. It’s only the third state visit Biden has hosted for a foreign leader since he took office in January 2021.

What lies behind the US charm offensive? India has to be careful not to be swept off its feet. Washington needs India for three reasons: China, China and China.

The West’s break with China is existential. Economic ties are being loosened. Alternative supply chains are being set up. China will remain the world’s factory for some time to come. But the unravelling has begun. Beijing’s deepening support of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has added to the West’s conviction of the economic and security threat China poses to a Western world order. That threat is serious enough for Washington to forgive India for shipping Russian crude to Europe as refined fuel, including diesel, thus evading sanctions.

Europe is less forgiving. This week in Brussels the European Union’s foreign policy chief Joseph Borel said that India should be penalised for avoiding sanctions in this roundabout

manner. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, with Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal looking on at a press conference in Brussels soon after Borel’s comment, minced no words in calling out Europe’s double standards: “Look at EU Council regulations. Russian crude is substantially transformed in a third country and not treated as Russian anymore. I would urge you to look at Council’s Regulation 833/2014.”

Jaishankar had called out Europe’s hypocrisy earlier as well: “Our trade with Russia is at a very small level — \$12-13 billion, in comparison with European countries. I don’t think people should read more into it other than the legitimate expectations of any country to increase its trade. I would urge you to look at these figures. There is a website called Russia Fossil Fuel Tracker that gives you country-by-country data of who is really importing what and I suspect that might be very, very helpful.” Washington has prosecuted the war against Russia with the same uncompromising ruthlessness that enabled it to colonise the new world, push indigenous Americans into impoverished Reservations, and use African slaves shipped across the Atlantic by European slave traders to create the world’s most powerful country.

The US has wielded its hegemonic power on behalf of the West for over a century. America’s foreign and military policy from 1950 onwards was tailored to defeat the Soviet communist threat. That mission was accomplished in 1991 with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. But the West missed seeing in plain sight the rise of China.

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Pakistan Army Has Never Lost a War at Home, But Imran Khan Refuses to go Quietly into the Sunset

By: Vivek Katju

As I write these lines a week has passed since the arrest of former prime minister and head of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) party Imran Khan from the premises of the Islamabad High Court on 9 May. These seven days plunged the country into turbulence with internal divisions within organs of state and its institutions and confrontation between state organs and institutions coming out into the open. The authority of the state and of its vital institution-the Pakistan army-was challenged in an unprecedented manner by Khan's supporters immediately after his arrest on May 9. They attacked army installations and public property in many cities. Both symbolically and substantially none of these actions of Khan's supporters was more significant than the ransacking of the residence of the army's IV corps commander based in Lahore. That house was initially the property of Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the founder of the Pakistan state, and is known as Jinnah House. The



visuals of some fires being lit and furniture and artefacts being smashed in the corps commander's house as they spread, first on social media, should have sent shock waves through the country leading all sections of the political class, the army and the judicial organ of state into an introspective mood and into informal consultations. But that did not happen. The fundamental chasms in Pakistan's polity are too deep and entrenched interests so obstinate about the righteousness of their cause that it would be asking for the moon to expect for them to

act constructively for the good of the state. However, a semblance of normalcy seems to be returning to the Pakistani street over the past 48 hours. All relevant actors have made their necessary moves and a relatively quiet period, however short, may now occur despite unresolved issues of powerplay relating to personalities, parties and above all institutions. Before the latter part is dwelt upon, a look at the former would be useful. A special corps commander conference was held under the leadership of army chief General

Asim Munir on 15 May. The language of the long statement which was issued after the conference was somewhat more restrained than the army's earlier statements which directly attacked the PTI. There is no doubt that the army firmly expressed its resolve to bring the perpetrators of the 9 May attacks to book including, in military courts, and also alleged that political motivations were behind the violent demonstrations but the statement did not name the PTI nor its leader. More strikingly it emphasised "need of national consensus among all stakeholders to address ongoing political instability at priority so as to restore public confidence...". Earlier the army had refuted allegations that martial law may be imposed. This formulation seems to indicate that the army leadership is conscious that ultimately the political imbroglio can only be resolved through elections. The question is if it will be ready to allow Imran Khan to contest the election especially after his direct attack on General Asim Munir as also

his predecessor General Qamar Bajwa.

The crusading chief justice of Pakistan, Umar Ata Bandial, who has through his seeming acts of partisanship on behalf of Imran Khan seems now reconciled that even though the court may give categorical orders to hold elections to the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assembly on a certain date-as it did in April for elections to be held on 15 May for the former assembly-there is little that it can do to have its orders implemented in the face of the opposition of the government and of the National Assembly. The latter cannot be hauled up for contempt. And, if the government does not provide funds for the election and cannot assure security there is little that the Election Commission can do. Thus, in its hearing on the subject on 15 May the chief justice was once again constrained to advise the government and the opposition to sit together to thrash out the election issue. The fact is that in any country the judicial organ of state is the weakest of the three and in Pakistan this has been especially so notwithstanding the theatrics of some former chief justices whose own records could hardly bear the weight of full scrutiny. The next date of hearing on the election case is 23 May but it is unlikely that the government or the PTI would go, if at all, beyond a charade of consultations.

The PDM has railed against the Supreme Court for showing undue partisanship to Imran Khan. Maulana Fazlur Rehman and Mariam Nawaz directed their fusillades against Bandial but ensured that the sit-in before the court was peaceful. Now their supporters can claim that they have exposed Bandial's hypocrisy. It was certainly imprudent of the chief justice to greet Khan in his court-even if he, as he claimed, does so to others as well-and nor was it wise of him to wish Khan "luck", especially as he gave full relief to Khan. The lower courts, following the Supreme Court's lead, have given him bail in almost all cases, including in some of those that may be lodged in the future!

White House timidity on the debt ceiling is infuriating. What is it afraid of?

By Steve Phillips

One wonders what the Biden administration is afraid of when it comes to calling the Republicans's bluff on raising the federal debt ceiling. While White House officials no doubt have genuine legal and policy concerns about their ability to act unilaterally to defuse the crisis, the overriding reason is probably fear of the political consequences, and on that front they are both misreading the moment and misunderstanding the composition of the country's electorate. To quickly recap, Congress passes laws to "promote the general welfare" of the public, and those laws usually cost money. Not infrequently, the cost of those laws exceeds the amount of money the government has in the bank, so they have to borrow money to pay the bills. But because of an obscure 1917 law, the amount of loans the government can take out to pay its bills is capped at a set (and, frankly, relatively arbitrary) amount. When this happens, Congress must raise the limit of how much money can be borrowed to meet the country's obligations. When a Republican is in the White House, this basic duty



happens without any drama or fanfare. The limit gets raised, the bills get paid, and life goes on. But after Barack Obama was elected president, "burn it down" Republicans have taken to using the need to raise the debt limit as an opportunity to hold the government hostage and demand draconian cuts in spending programs - previously congressionally approved spending programs, mind you - in exchange for increasing the authority to borrow more money. Despite near-universal agreement that the economic shock and turmoil of

defaulting on the debt would be catastrophic, the Republicans don't care and use the potential economic crisis to pursue their destructive agenda. That is the behavior of terrorists.

For its part, the administration has said it won't negotiate with terrorists and is insisting that Congress pass a "clean" debt-limit increase. In a speech last week, President Biden said that Republicans are "literally, not figuratively, holding the economy hostage". So we are at a standoff with dire economic consequences, particularly for low-income Americans and people of color still working to overcome the nation's gargantuan racial wealth gap that accounts for much of the nation's inequality in education, housing and employment. In the face of this impending emergency, myriad proposals have surfaced to call Congress's bluff and ignore the ransom demand. Respected Harvard professor Lawrence Tribe has advocated for simply challenging the constitutionality of the 1917 law as a violation of "section 4 of the 14th amendment [which] says the 'validity' of the public debt 'shall not be questioned' - ever."



Congress in India and CHP in Turkey claim legacy but face existential threats against powerful opponents and similar challenges

Turkey's political swirl reflects state of the Opposition in India

By Iftikhar Gilani

Turkey and India - the two great democracies of Asia - may be thousands of miles apart and differ in style and characteristics, but there is a striking similarity in the political scenarios and behaviour of the political actors in these two countries.

Having covered Indian politics as a journalist for more than two decades and now observing Turkish politics closely since 2019 after moving to Ankara, it often looks like Indian politics is being replayed in Turkey with uncanny similarities.

While many analysts over the years have noted similarities in the style, strength, functioning, and political appeal of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and even have drawn parallels between Turkey's ruling centre-right conservative the Justice and Development Party, officially abbreviated as AK Party, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), there is a striking similarity not only between the main Opposition parties but also among other smaller parties. Interestingly, the secular centre-left Opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), which has a rich historical legacy, is struggling with similar problems as the Congress party in India. Just as the Congress, which played a role in the freedom struggle and the founding of the republic, claims

the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and many other freedom fighters, so too does the CHP claim the legacy of the founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. He founded the CHP on September 9, 1923. The similarities do not stop there. The CHP, which ruled the country for some 33 years, has not been in government since 1979 when it lost power in midterm elections led by Mustafa Bulent Ecevit. It has remained a supportive party for various governments and several presidents and prime ministers, but with the emergence of Erdogan's AK Party on the political scene in 2002, its presence in the poorer and less privileged regions of the Black Sea (Karadeniz Boelgesi), Central Anatolia (Ic Anadolu Boelgesi), and Eastern Anatolia (Dogu Anadolu Boelgesi) has diminished dramatically. A similar shirking of the Congress party in the Hindi belt of UP and Bihar. The CHP's constituency is now limited to the wealthy elite Mediterranean (Akdeniz Boelgesi) and Aegean (Ege Boelgesi) regions, which include major cities such as Istanbul, Izmir, and Ankara. The party has yet to find a response to Erdogan's machinations to pit the underprivileged regions, which Turkey's rulers have not cared about since the founding of the republic and even before, against the elite regions represented by the CHP.

Its current leader, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, who gave a tough fight to Erdogan in the first round of the recently concluded elections, is facing similar problems to those faced by Congress scion Rahul Gandhi in his attempt to revive the grand old party.

The unassuming 74-year-old former bureaucrat is nicknamed the Turkish Gandhi, or sometimes Kemal Gandhi, because of his slender stature and modest style. This nickname has also been fixed on him because he bears an uncanny resemblance to Mahatma Gandhi when one looks at the pictures of Gandhi practising law in South Africa and wearing a suit and tie.

Born in the NazÄŸmiye district of Tunceli province in eastern Turkey, he was appointed party chairman in 2010 after chairman Deniz Baykal was forced to resign following the leak of a sex tape and no other party leader agreed to take over the leadership of the party in these difficult times.

Kemal Kilicdaroglu vs Rahul Gandhi

Long before Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra, the Kanyakumari march from the southern tip of India to the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, a journey of 4,080 kilometres, Kilicdaroglu undertook a similar march from Ankara to Istanbul in 2017, a distance of 432 kilometres on foot, to fight

against what he called the rise of illiberal populism and to stand united in defence of democratic values. In a report published in The Guardian, he spoke of sponsored media (Godi media) distorting facts and ignoring Opposition - quite like Rahul Gandhi.

"The new authoritarianism in Turkey is characterised by a parliament with limited legislative powers, newspapers that misrepresent the facts and often become government-sponsored megaphones that slander any opposition, courts that merely rubber-stamp decisions made elsewhere, and expensive government rallies sponsored by state funds," he said. He urged people to stand up and develop new democratic means and exchange them internationally to challenge the power of illiberal populists and the new generation of dictators. Another striking similarity with Rahul is that Opposition parties were sceptical of forming a united front against Erdogan under his leadership. Indeed, a key member of the Opposition coalition, the leader of the nationalist Turkish Good Party (IYI), Meral Aksener, announced before the elections that she was leaving the alliance because united Opposition had chosen Kilicdaroglu as the joint candidate. She felt that Kilicdaroglu was a weak candidate and had expressed her preference for Ankara Mayor Mansur Yavas or prominent

Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu.

But later the motley alliance of six parties, which later ballooned to 17 parties, found that the weak and unimpressive Kilicdaroglu could be docile, and so he became its strongman, much as the Congress had forced the United Front to appoint an unimpressive Inder Kumar Gujral as prime minister in April 1997 to replace the strongman of Karnataka, HD Deve Gowda. Competition in gaffes

While BJP strategists tried their best to exploit Rahul's gaffes to portray him as a politician not to be taken seriously, calling him a "Pappu", Erdogan never missed an opportunity to point out Kilicdaroglu's gaffes. When he ran for mayor of Istanbul in 2009, his mispronunciation of Istanbul neighbourhoods became the talk of the town.

A few months before Covid-19 conquered the world, he gave a blazing speech in Parliament criticising the government for spending too much money on the health sector and even building hospitals and health infrastructure in places where no one lives. Just two months later, Covid-19 swept the world and criticism returned to haunt him for many months.

He had taken over the leadership of the CHP with the promise of regaining its glory and reviving the secular legacy of Kemal Ataturk. However, he soon realised that too much water had flowed into the Bosphorus since then and that it was necessary to rethink the nature of the secular ideals of the party's founders to reach out to Islamists and religious circles.

Jalandhar Lok Sabha by-poll: SAD, BJP can't pull it solo in Punjab, but can they together?

By Harmeet Shah Singh

The Jalandhar Lok Sabha by-election has shed light on the potential fate of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and the BJP if they were to contest the 2024 general election separately in Punjab.

AAP'S LOK SABHA COMEBACK VIA CONGRESS' STRONGHOLD

A Congress stronghold held by its Dalit leaders since 1999, the seat fell to the Aam Aadmi Party with a margin of 58,691 votes.

The by-election was necessitated by the death of Congress MP Santokh Singh Chaudhary earlier this year. Barely three months after its historic sweep in Punjab, AAP suffered a bloody nose in 2022 when it lost its lone Sangrur Lok Sabha seat, which Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann had won earlier, to the 77-year-old separatist leader Simranjit Singh Mann.

With seven of its ten members in the Rajya Sabha from Punjab already, Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party has made a smart comeback to the Lok Sabha after its candidate Sushil Kumar Rinku won the Jalandhar constituency in the May 10 by-election.

Rinku, a former Congress MLA, secured 302,279 of the 887,626 votes polled, around 55 per cent of the total electorate registered in the borough with a significant Dalit population. The Congress' candidate for the seat, Karamjit Kaur Chaudhary, got 243,588, the SAD-BSP's Dr Sukhwinder

Sukhi secured 158,445 and the BJP's nominee Inder Iqbal Singh Atwal ranked at the bottom of the major political parties with 134,800 votes.

ATTENTION TO DETAIL - NOW AND THEN

AAP's vote share in the Jalandhar Lok Sabha constituency stands at 34.1 per cent followed by the Congress party's 27.4, the SAD-BSP's 17.9, and the BJP's 15.2 per cent. Rewind to the 2019 Lok Sabha elections: The state recorded a turnout of around 66 per cent of the total voter strength of around 208 million across 13 constituencies. Back then, the Shiromani Akali Dal won two constituencies, polling 27.76 per cent of votes in its favour. The BJP, which also got two seats, polled 9.74 per cent. Together, they had four Lok Sabha seats, with 37.5 per cent votes polled to their alliance.

The Congress party with eight of the 13 constituencies in its kitty took a lion's share of 40.58 per cent. Kejriwal's AAP, on the other hand, could only manage 7.46 per cent, with Bhagwant Mann securing Sangrur.

AND THEN SAD, B JP PARTED WAYS Punjab's SAD walked out of its historic alliance with the BJP in 2020 after the central government introduced the three contentious farm laws, which were eventually revoked after a year-long agitation by the farmers. The Akalis

forged a partnership instead with Mayawati's BSP for the 2022 assembly elections in Punjab.

In last year's contest, the SAD won three seats with a vote share of 18.38 per cent, the BSP got one with a share of 1.77 per cent. Their combined strength accounted for four seats and 20.15 per cent of total votes.

On its part, the BJP secured two seats with 6.6 per cent in vote share and the victorious AAP got 92 of the 117 seats, with 42.01 per cent of the total votes.

COMPUTING SAD, BJP NUMBERS POST BREAKUP

If taken at face value, the data post the breakup of the SAD and the BJP indicate that none of the two stand a chance to emerge as a formidable challenger to the Aam Aadmi Party in Punjab without an alliance.

But if taken together in the Jalandhar by-election, their vote share comes to 33.1 per cent (17.9 per cent of the SAD plus the BJP's 15.2 per cent), which is way above the Congress' 27.4 per cent.

Seen jointly from the numbers' lens, the two come across as AAP's key competitor in the state, at least in terms of vote share.

The data even from the 2022 assembly elections give similar rhythm: the SAD's 18.38 per cent of vote share added to the BJP's 6.6 per cent equals 24.98 per cent, higher than the Congress' 22.98 per cent

across 117 constituencies last year.

FLIP SIDE OF THE COIN

In the Jalandhar campaign, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann followed his party's usual strategy, highlighting welfare measures such as free electricity and school education, which his opponents often dismiss as mere "freebies."

Instead, AAP's rivals predominantly relied on narratives propagated by Arvind Kejriwal's political adversaries in Delhi, adhering to their own hyper-nationalist as well as religious agenda.

The Jalandhar by-election took place against the backdrop of the short-lived drama involving Amritpal Singh.

As the campaign gained momentum, incidents of sacrilege resurfaced in Punjab.

AAP faced attacks from three fronts: the Akalis primarily accused the ruling party of exhibiting "anti-Sikh" bias, the BJP and its affiliates in both Punjab and Delhi accused AAP of shielding "anti-national" elements, while the Congress charged the Mann administration with overall failure.

However, Kejriwal's party deftly handled the barrage of accusations using their successful Delhi formula.

They appealed to lower-income groups and the underprivileged through their campaign focused on basic necessities, diverging from the ideological politics pursued by their rivals.

BJP's drubbing in Karnataka may change equation for Vasundhara Raje in Rajasthan

The Vasundhara Raje camp has maintained that the former chief minister had been sidelined for the past several years by the party's central leadership as she was not made a part of high-level consultations concerning crucial decisions in the party, especially regarding Rajasthan.

By Dev Ankur Wadhawan

The Congress's stunning victory and the drubbing it delivered to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Karnataka may lead the central leadership of the saffron party to rework its strategy of bringing about generational or leadership change in states by sidelining older yet established leaders by bringing forth newer faces.

The manner in which leadership change was thrust upon the state BJP unit in Karnataka by the central leadership at the cost of sidelining senior leaders, including the likes of BS Yeddyurappa and Jagadish Shettar, has been one of the main factors responsible for the party's loss in Karnataka.

BS Yeddyurappa was not made a part of the consultation process regarding crucial decision-making, neither was he involved in active campaigning, which led to a loss of Lingayat votes.

Senior leader Jagadish Shettar was denied a ticket by the party,



which possibly harmed the party's electoral prospects.

Political experts believe several parallels that can be drawn between the manner in which the saffron party has been treating its two-time Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje and the way in which it "handled or mishandled" its senior leadership in Karnataka.

However, the Central party leadership of the party, possibly worried that further sidelining Vasundhara Raje may lead to an encore of its Karnataka drubbing in Rajasthan, where elections are due in less than seven months,

may have already started a rethink.

The Raje camp has maintained that the former chief minister had been sidelined for the past several years by the party's central leadership as she was not made a part of high-level consultations concerning crucial decisions in the party, especially regarding Rajasthan.

Vasundhara Raje, miffed at the indifference towards her by the party's central leadership, had been conspicuous by her absence in several of the meetings that were helmed by the former state BJP president

Satish Poonia in Jaipur but were often present at meetings held in Delhi. Stories of an ongoing rift between her and Satish Poonia is well known in political circles in Rajasthan.

Importantly, Satish Poonia, known arch-rival of Vasundhara Raje, was unceremoniously removed from the state BJP president's post. He was replaced with MP CP Joshi, known to be close to Om Birla, again not on excellent terms with the former Rajasthan Chief Minister.

However, after being on the sidelines for more than four years while the BJP cooled its heels in Opposition in Rajasthan, Vasundhara Raje has been seeking to return to the political limelight in the run-up to Assembly elections later this year.

In March this year, Vasundhara Raje held a massive show of strength in Rajasthan's Churu district as she celebrated her birthday in advance. In the

meeting, apart from 30 to 40 BJP MLAs, former state BJP president Ashok Parnami and more than 100 former MLAs were present. The Raje camp claimed that at least 10 BJP MPs, including PP Chaudhary, Devji Patel and Vasundhara's son Dushyant, were at the public meeting.

Chants hailing Vasundhara Raje along with slogans such as 'Kesariya Mein Hara Hara, Rajasthan mein Vasundhara' and 'Abki Baar Vasundhara Sarkar' echoed at the public meeting where Vasundhara Raje unequivocally lashed out at the Ashok Gehlot-led Rajasthan government over paper leaks issue among other things.

As the election inches closer, Vasundhara Raje's big power push was seen as an attempt to assert herself. "The BJP should not project anyone other than her as the party's chief ministerial candidate", a supporter of Vasundhara Raje said to India Today in Churu.

Mandal 2.0 vs Kamandal: Has Congress got its political antidote for BJP's Hindutva?

The landslide victory in the Karnataka Assembly Election has opened the debate whether this result has provided a mantra to the Congress for defeating the BJP and its Hindutva project in the upcoming assembly elections and the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

By Arvind Kumar

The astonishing victory in the Karnataka Assembly Election has opened the debate whether this result has provided a mantra to the Congress party for defeating the BJP and its Hindutva project in the upcoming assembly elections and the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. And that mantra is the revival of caste politics. This is because Rahul Gandhi invoked the slogan- 'Jitni Abaadi, Utna Haq' (Proportionate Reservation/Right) and demanded releasing the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (2011-12) during the election campaign on 16 April in Kolar, Karnataka. Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge also wrote a letter to the government to release the Socio-Economic and Caste Census conducted during the UPA-II regime. The opposition leaders, from Nitish Kumar, M. K. Stalin, Akhilesh Yadav to Tejashwi Yadav, have already been demanding the caste census. Rahul Gandhi's slogan and demand



are rooted in India's caste politics (Mandal politics), often seen as an antidote to the Hindutva politics of the BJP. We trace its genealogy and examine its implications on the outcome of the Karnataka election while critically investigating the possibilities and impossibilities of using this mantra in upcoming assembly elections and the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. The genealogy of Jitni Abaadi, Utna Haq Rahul Gandhi's slogan - Jitni Abaadi, Utna Haq, is nothing but a reinvention of Kanshi Ram's slogan


'Jisaki Jitani Sankhya Bhari, Usaki Utani Hisse Dari' (Share of Castes/Communities according to the proportion in population) that the latter's party BSP now seems to have abandoned. Kanshi Ram has derived this slogan from the Report of Mandal Commission, which aspires for the proportionate reservation to the backward castes but is constrained to recommend only 27 per cent reservation since the Supreme Court has fixed a 50 per cent ceiling on the reservation. This slogan also has a socialist

lineage since Ram Manohar Lohia had coined 'Sansopa Ne Bandhi Ganth, Pichade Paven Sau Me Saath' (Sanyukta Socialist Party has determined to provide 60 per cent share to the backward castes). The extensive use of this kind of slogans in socialist and anti-caste movements for mobilising poor and backward caste voters has made it into their subconscious minds. Therefore, it is difficult to deny that Dalit, backward and the minority voters would have quickly aligned with the Congress party using this slogan.


Furthermore, the party has performed extraordinarily in the SC/ST reserved constituencies in the Karnataka polls, interpreted as an outcome of the Bharat Jodo Yatra since it passed through those constituencies. However, the counterfactual of the Yatra effect could be the changing party identification among Dalit and backward caste voters due to the

invocation of their slogans. It is worth bringing attention to the efficacy of old slogans with the example of the BJP's invocation of Acche Din (Good Days), which is also a reinvention of its campaign theme - Feel Good, in the 2004 general election.

Rise of Kamandal politics to counter Mandal politics
Mandal politics refers to the politics that began with the implementation of 27 per cent reservation for backward castes in government jobs by V P Singh's government in the 1990s, as recommend by the Mandal Commission. The decision of V P Singh started widespread protests and a counter of upper castes and backward castes. Hence, it had the potential to create long-lasting division among upper caste and backward caste Hindus. To counter Mandal politics, the BJP - under the leadership of Lal Krishna Advani - started the Rath Yatra to build Ram Temple in Ayodhya.



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BJP's Anti-Corruption Branding Took A Beating In Karnataka

By Sudheendra Kulkarni

As it became abundantly clear on the morning of the Karnataka election counting day (May 13) that the Congress was heading towards a big win, a dear friend of mine phoned me to express elation. I was surprised. I didn't expect him, a staunch Modi supporter, to be happy over the BJP's defeat. But when he narrated his own personal experience of high-level corruption in the BJP government in the state, it validated a factor that has greatly contributed to the Kannadigas' decision to oust the party from power.

This is what happened. My friend, a nationally reputed documentary filmmaker, was approached by the government to produce a film to showcase Karnataka as an attractive investment destination. He made the film, which was highly appreciated. But when he sought payment of the agreed amount, a minister demanded a "30% commission". The bribe was refused. The enraged minister not only withheld the payment, but also ordered the film to not be screened. My friend then phoned one of the top RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) leaders in the country, whom he knew very well, and requested him



to intervene, which he did. Still, the BJP minister did not relent. Another example - As an independent non-party political activist committed to bringing about change in Karnataka and at the national level, I campaigned for the Congress in many districts. In Hubballi, the second largest city in the state, a cousin who is a staunch BJP supporter narrated his own frustrating experience. His aged mother-in-law had died eight months ago. He wanted her property to be transferred in his wife's name per her will, and went to the state government office concerned. He was asked to pay a huge bribe, which he refused. Being socially and politically well-connected, he thought that approaching his good friend, a powerful BJP minister in the state, would help. The

minister advised him to pay the bribe and get his work done. "Nothing moves in our government without greasing palms," the minister said. Third example - I met a senior police officer in Bengaluru who said there is a price tag for every transfer and posting. Almost all in the police department - from ordinary constables to senior officers - have to pay hefty amounts, which, through a chain of intermediaries, goes to MLAs and ministers. "Corruption rose further in the past few years because the government decided to reduce the frequency of transfers from two years to one year," the officer said, adding, "How can the police force remain clean if politicians force us to pay them bribes?" Finally, a well-informed editor of a

Kannada daily in Bengaluru told me even the hallowed portals of higher education are not free from the stink of corruption. "It is common for vice chancellors of state public universities to get the job by paying bribes running into crores. No wonder most of our universities have pitiable standards."

BJP was badly hit by the charge of "40% Commission Sarkar". Tales of corruption are hardly novel in India. Anyone who has ears to the ground can narrate numerous such authentic stories, which, because they have lost their novelty, have also lost their power to surprise and shock us. Rarely have corruption scandals toppled governments, an exception being the Bofors scam that unseated the Rajiv Gandhi-led Congress from power in 1989. (Rajiv Gandhi was posthumously declared not guilty by a court) But what happened in Karnataka was different. The BJP lost power not due to any specific scandal involving outgoing Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai or his colleagues. Rather, the voters rejected it because of the widespread perception that the entire government machinery, from bottom to top, was steeped in corruption.

This impression was solidified by a letter that a statewide association of contractors sent to Prime Minister Narendra Modi alleging that ministers routinely demanded "40% commission" in every government-funded project. One such contractor, who happened to be a BJP-RSS supporter, ended his own life. In his suicide note, he blamed a senior BJP minister for harassing him with demands for bribe. This is how the BJP government came to be known as a "40% Commission Sarkar", and the Congress highlighted this in many creative ways in its poll campaign - with enormous success.

True, corruption was not the only issue that felled the BJP in Karnataka. Steep price rise and large-scale unemployment among the youth added to people's anger. They were also not convinced by the BJP's high-decibel campaign asking them to renew their mandate to the "Double-Engine Government". For one thing was obvious to them: "How has a BJP government both at the Centre and in the state really helped us when even the price of a simple cooking gas cylinder has more than tripled in the past nine years?"

Already Facing Economic Distress, Pakistan Lands in Fresh Turmoil as Imran Khan Takes on Army



By: Kanwal Sibal

The turmoil in Pakistan is becoming a melodrama with all the ingredients for making a Netflix political thriller. A former PM removed from office through a no-confidence motion (in April 2022) accuses the then Army Chief (General Qamar Bajwa), who had manoeuvred to make him PM in the first place, of engineering his ouster. Add to that an international dimension with the accusation that the US

wanted his exit for his pro-Russia and pro-China leanings. He also claims that his life is in danger and that he could be assassinated by the very same army-linked elements that made an aborted attempt on his life earlier (in November 2022). The former PM denounces the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) (Major General Faisal Naseer) of orchestrating plans to murder him, which prompts the Army spokesperson to berate him for

making "highly irresponsible and baseless" allegations for furthering his political objectives and calling them "deplorable and unacceptable". Adept at theatrics, Imran Khan walks for a court appearance with aides fully surrounding him with bulletproof shields like the Roman legions in Asterix comics. During a court appearance, he is whisked away for trial by a paramilitary squad at the behest of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) headed by a Lt General, the same NAB that Imran Khan had used to hound out Nawaz Sharif and other political opponents. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, whose political sympathies for Imran Khan are open, orders his release. The sitting PM of Pakistan, Shehbaz Sharif, blasts with contempt the Chief Justice for favouring his "ladla". He had earlier tried unsuccessfully to limit the power of the Supreme Court through the parliamentary

route. The Chief Justice had ordered elections in Punjab in May, an order ignored by the Sharif government. The High Court has now ordered a short reprieve from arrest for Imran Khan but fearing that as soon as he walked out on bail he would be re-arrested by the authorities, closeted himself in the court for eleven hours till he was sure this would not happen. For the moment the street has quietened down, but the comedy-tragedy of many acts that is being staged has not ended either for the cast of characters involved or the audience. Imran Khan's arrest unleashed his street supporters to rattle the gates of the GHQ in Rawalpindi and set fire to the residence at Lahore of the Corps Commander without any attempt at prevention, raising speculation either about divisions in the Army or conspiracy theories about street excesses providing the authorities with a good reason to

crack down hard. The Army Chief is accused by PTI supporters (Imran Khan's party) of settling scores with the Corps Commander (possibly removed from post) and leaving Jinnah House, his residence, undefended. All said and done, the reputation of the Army, which is seen as the custodian of Pakistan's ideology, unity, and security, seems to have been dented.

The current Army Chief General Munir, earlier the ISI chief whom Imran Khan divested of his past and who is a protégé of General Bajwa, is Imran Khan's bête noire, as is General Bajwa himself. He continues to attack him personally and seek his resignation. Imran Khan, who believes in djinns and is married to a believer in occult practices, has taken head on the one force in Pakistan that when challenged cost previous Prime Ministers either their head or exile.

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India, World's Most Populous Country, Should Be Embodied With Ideal Employable Skills

By: Dinesh Sood

India has surpassed China as the world's most populous country in demographic composition, with a staggering 65 percent working-age population having an average age of 28.4 years. This population has the potential to propel the nation towards remarkable socio-economic progress and has the ability for transformative global impact. To reap the benefit of demographic advantage, it is imperative to equip our working population with employable skills and knowledge that meet the requirements of the globalised labour market. Skill development in educational institutions is the critical enabler for improving employment outcomes and higher productivity leading to faster and more sustainable economic growth. There is a significant gap between the skills imparted in educational institutions in India and the skills required for jobs. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has projected that India will face a 29 million skill deficit by 2030. Still, India's education system is unable to provide the necessary skills to its growing workforce. Many young people



lack the required qualifications and vocational training to find suitable jobs.

India Skills Report 2023 reveals a rise in the employability of 52.8 percent with women and men at 47.2 percent. Women surpassed men in employability because, in the post-Covid era, nursing, beauty and wellness and other soft skills showed the highest employability rates among women. Not only for women but for men also, the beauty and wellness sector has unlimited potential in terms of domestic and global markets. The beauty and wellness market in India was valued at Rs 901.07 billion in 2018 and is forecast to reach Rs 2,463.49 billion by 2024,

expanding at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of around 18.40 percent during 2019-2024. There is an extra advantage in the employability of women because the companies have also adopted new recruitment strategies centred around soft skills like communication, teamwork, and emotional intelligence. However, institutes haven't adopted the norm of educating their students on as of now employable skills, thus hurting the freshers entering the job market.

The Department of School Education and Literacy is executing the vocationalisation of School Education initiative under 'Samagra Shiksha' (holistic

education) to integrate vocational education with general academics in secondary and senior secondary schools. The goal is to enhance youths' employability, entrepreneurial skills, work environment exposure, and career awareness. The ideal employee in the 21st century embodies a diverse set of skills, including a perfect blend of technical and soft skills.

India has a unique opportunity to capitalise on its 48 percent population under the age of 25, and the working-age population is forecast to hit more than one billion in the current decade. An IMF report suggests that demographic dividend could add up to two percentage points to per capita GDP growth per annum. But the question remains, how can India capitalise on its demographic dividend? Developed countries like Singapore and South Korea demonstrate the potential for leveraging the demographic dividend to achieve remarkable economic growth by implementing forward-thinking policies and programs that empower the youth in education and skill development. It is crucial to note, however, that these

dividends are not guaranteed and hinge on the adoption of effective policies within this golden window of opportunity.

Various job roles across multiple sectors are included in these modules to cater to students' aptitudes and aspirations. Apart from this, under the Skill India Mission, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship offers skill training through schemes like PMKVY, JSS, NAPS, and CTS via ITIs. These demand-driven initiatives aim to improve youth employability by continuously adding industry-relevant courses. Unfortunately, this is not enough, as not all schools offer this.

The world of work is changing faster than the workforce, with technological developments, automation, changes in consumer behaviour, and widespread remote working patterns rapidly changing how and where we work. India should further strengthen its Technical and Vocational Education & Training (TVET) programs. For instance, Finland's TVET program is known for its high-quality education, strong connection with industry needs, and emphasis on practical skills.

Has the Ukrainian War Exposed Differing Perspectives For the West?

By: Maj Gen Jagatbir Singh

The year 2022 can be termed as the year of conflict. Russia's invasion of Ukraine prompted the US and Europe to rearm and push Russia and the US back into Cold War competition. In the Indo-Pacific, China and the US are facing each other with increasing hostility and suspicion, and some analysts fear a war over Taiwan. These dangers prompted President Joe Biden to declare that the world is at risk of annihilation for the first time since the Cuban missile crisis.

However, while conflict is now on the doorstep of Europe, it has been a dominant theme as far as large parts of the world are concerned, with wars raging in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Afghanistan and particularly India, which is facing a collusive threat from both Pakistan and China as well as battling a proxy

war. In a speech from Moscow, Russian President Vladimir Putin said the 2020s are "the most dangerous decade" since the end of World War II.

DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES

One of the fallouts of the Ukrainian War is how differently much of the world, apart from the West, sees not only the war in Ukraine but also the broader global landscape. Shortly after the start of the war, President Biden had stated, "The democracies of the world are revitalized with purpose and unity found in months that we'd once taken years to accomplish." However, a year later it is evident that it's not all black and white. Governments and people across much of the world have not been convinced by the "free world" rhetoric propounded by the West in view of the Western double standards based on the past on issues most important to them.

They are also suffering the fallouts of mounting costs of the prolonged war and sharpening geopolitical tensions. Their focus on the future includes dangers, as well as new opportunities, the war and the broader return of great-power conflict present for both individual countries and their regions.

Most are understandably more concerned about their climate vulnerability, access to advanced technology and capital, and their need for better infrastructure, health care, and education systems. They are also concerned with the rise in food fertiliser and fuel prices. The increasing global instability, both political and financial, is a threat to tackling such challenges. Today's world is a complex network of interconnections where trade, technology, migration, and the internet are bringing humans together as

never before. Shivshankar Menon, while writing in Foreign Affairs, stated clearly: "Alienated and resentful, many developing countries see the war in Ukraine and the West's rivalry with China as distracting from urgent issues such as debt, climate change, and the effects of the pandemic." The US is in a weak position to defend global norms after the presidency of Donald Trump, which saw contempt for global rules and practices in areas as diverse as the climate, human rights, and nuclear non-proliferation. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, in a speech on the first anniversary of the start of the war with Russia, declared that "Ukraine has united the world." While the war has certainly united the West, it has left the world divided. And the rift as per David Miliband "will only widen if Western countries fail to

address its root causes". Anatol Lieven, writing about Ukrainian nationalism after a recent visit to Kyiv, remarked how "Ukrainian history intended to show Ukraine as both the true heir of early medieval Rus and permanently and innately European, while Russians are portrayed as innately and permanently cruel Asiatic savages." Statements like this are unlikely to garner support.

CONCERNS OF GLOBAL SOUTH

Countries in the Global South are being viewed as 'fence sitters' refusing to take sides in the war in Ukraine. Many in the West are questioning this stand and are unable to understand the reasons which have dictated this position. Speculations range from neutrality out of economic interests to ideological alignments with Moscow or even a lack of morals.

China censors citizens from discussing Pakistan protest. Political revolt is a sensitive topic

Pakistan's political turmoil over Imran Khan's arrest hasn't left Chinese citizens unscathed. Police in Karachi had to intervene to stop an attack on Chinese workers.

(News Agency)- China is silent on the political turmoil in Pakistan. The Chinese ministry deleted a "racist" video mocking Indians. US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and China's Director of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi had a meeting in Vienna. Chinascope delves into China's reaction to the protests in Pakistan.

China over the week

While the political unrest in Pakistan was a major headline in India, it did not receive much attention from Chinese state media and social media platforms like Weibo. According to Hu Shisheng, director of the South Asia Institute of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, the current regime in Pakistan has lost its ability to boost the economy, leading to protests by former Prime Minister Imran Khan's supporters demanding his release.

Although Chinese state media factually reported the detention of Imran Khan on corruption

charges, the coverage of the protests that followed his arrest was limited. China Central Television reported that ten people died and 1,750 were injured due to clashes between the protesters and the police.

Hashtags related to the protests in Pakistan were suppressed from trending by Chinese censors on Weibo. Despite some hashtags generating attention, news about the violent protests did not generate significant discussion on Chinese social media. The hashtag "Pakistan ex-Prime Minister Imran Khan arrested" was viewed over one million times on Weibo, and the hashtag "Arrest of ex-Pakistani PM Imran Khan sparks violent protests" did not trend heavily, likely due to Chinese censors' control.

The political turmoil in Pakistan hasn't left the Chinese national unscathed. The Pakistan police stopped an attack on Chinese workers in Karachi at a boatyard owned by a Chinese entity.

"There were around 31 Chinese

workers on the site at the time of the attack," reported the South China Morning Post.

The Chinese embassy in Lahore warned its citizens in Pakistan to maintain vigilance. "Do not go out unless necessary, do not go out alone, do not go to places where people gather, do not express political speeches on social media and public places, and effectively strengthen preventive measures to ensure personal and property safety," said the Chinese Consulate General in Lahore on their WeChat page.

Political protest is a highly sensitive topic in China, so the suppression on social media was expected. But how will China respond going forward?

"China is fairly agnostic about what happens - Khan back, Khan in jail, military takeover, Sharif's in or out - none of it is really going to change much for China to the point that they would need to step in. If we saw the state collapse altogether and militants take over, maybe they would be concerned, but I think we are far away from



that outcome," Raffaello Pantucci, a senior fellow at S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies and the author of Sinostan, told me in an interview.

Meanwhile, China's Ministry of Public Security has deleted a Weibo post carrying a video of black-faced Chinese performers who mocked Indian cinema and music through a parody skit.

The ministry used the video to 'teach' people about road safety. Some users approved the parody performances and found the video

amusing. Others pointed out the 'racist' tone and said it was 'inappropriate' for an official account to post it.

China in world news

Since the spy balloon saga strained US-China relations, there has been limited official contact between the two sides. US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and China's Director of the CCP Central Foreign Affairs Office Wang Yi met in Vienna from 10 to 11 May. The conversation lasted for 10 hours.

Chinese Ship Capsizes in Indian Ocean with 39 Onboard, Xi Jinping Orders Search, Rescue Operations



A crew of 39 Chinese, Indonesian and Filipino sailors were missing on Wednesday after a fishing vessel capsized in the Indian Ocean south of the Maldives, officials said.

(News Agency)- Multinational search efforts were underway after Chinese vessel Lu Peng Yuan Yu 028 overturned in the early hours of Tuesday with 17 Chinese, 17 Indonesians and five Filipinos on board, AFP reported.

"Chinese and foreign ships have arrived in the area where the incident occurred and the search and rescue work is ongoing," Chinese foreign ministry

spokesman Wang Wenbin told a press briefing Wednesday.

Wenbin said more rescue personnel are rushing to the scene.

"We will continue to take all necessary measures with all parties to search for and rescue the missing persons," he added. Chinese President Xi Jinping has ordered an all-out search and rescue operation after the accident. None of the missing

people have been found so far and the exact location of the incident remains unclear.

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Chinese Premier Li Qiang called on authorities to bolster safety procedures and oversight of fishing operations.

"It is necessary to further strengthen the safety management of fishing vessels at sea and implement preventive measures to ensure the safety of maritime transportation," he said. China has the world's largest

distant-water fishing fleet, though estimates of its size vary widely. In 2017, Beijing pledged the fleet would be capped at 3,000 vessels, but a 2020 report by Britain-based think tank the Overseas Development Institute placed its size at just under 17,000.

The promise to cap the number followed an international backlash against overfishing by Chinese vessels.

Chinese fishermen have increasingly sailed further afield as fish stocks at home deplete, becoming entangled in a growing number of maritime disputes and accidents.

In 2019, Manila accused a Chinese vessel of ramming a Philippine boat in the disputed South China Sea, causing it to sink and putting the lives of nearly a dozen crew members at risk.

Islamabad HC extends order till May 31 to prevent Imran Khan's arrest in cases against him



Authorities have been barred from arresting former prime minister Imran Khan in the cases filed against him since May 9, the Islamabad High Court ruled.

against him across the country since May 9. The extension is in place until May 31.

The case was heard by Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb. Imran Khan's lawyer, Barrister Gohar, represented Imran Khan in the high court, The Dawn newspaper reported.

Additional Attorney General Munawar Dugal, Advocate General Islamabad Jahangir Jadoon, and state counsel were also present during the hearing. On Tuesday, the high court granted bail to Imran

Khan till June 8 in cases registered against him. The cases against the former Pakistan prime minister were registered in reference to statements he gave against state institutions.

Last week, the high court bench accepted the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief's bail petition in the Al-Qadir Trust corruption case for two weeks, according to The Dawn. On May 9, Imran Khan was arrested by the Pakistan Rangers in connection with the

case.

Following his arrest, supporters of Imran Khan stormed the Pakistan Army headquarters in the garrison city of Rawalpindi and the Corps Commander's residence in Lahore. Violence erupted in several cities across the country, with protesters indulging in large-scale arson, stone pelting, looting and clashing with police officials. The Pakistan Supreme Court declared his arrest in the case "unlawful and invalid".

(News Agency)- The barring authorities from Islamabad High Court on arresting former prime minister Wednesday extended its order Imran Khan in cases filed

Won't use taxpayers' money: Bangladesh withdraws 'extra' security cover for Indian diplomats

Bangladesh's Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen said that several other countries had also begun asking for the "extra security escort". This is one of the reasons why he withdrew it for all four countries including India, the UK, the US and Saudi Arabia.



consisted of policemen equipped with riot gear, escorting the envoys in their vans.

"The additional security protocol we were providing to ambassadors and high commissioners of some particular countries has been withdrawn. But the normal security measures for them are in place," a diplomatic security division official of Dhaka Metropolitan Police said on Tuesday as per news agency PTI.

REASON BEHIND WITHDRAWAL

Several other embassies other than the four were also demanding the extra security measures. This is one of the reasons why Bangladesh took the decision to withdraw the extra protocols. Dhaka Police Commissioner Khandker Golam Faruq also said that another reason is the shortage of manpower, reported PTI.

However, if any country wished to continue the extra security measures, they can rent such services. The Indian embassy has not made any comments on the withdrawal of extra security measures for its diplomats in Bangladesh.

(News Agency)- (security) escort service with Bangladesh will no longer provide extra security cover to Indian envoys and other top diplomats from the United States, the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia during their movements in the country. Although the normal security protocols will be in place, the "extra security escort" will be withdrawn.

Bangladesh's Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen on Tuesday said that Dhaka will not spend the taxpayers' money on the "extra security escort" for diplomats.

"We won't provide this extra

taxpayers' money," said Bangladesh's foreign minister as quoted by the United News of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh's Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent a letter to the four embassies regarding the decision a week ago, as per a report by the Dhaka Tribune.

The extra security cover was provided to the diplomats of the four countries after the militant attack in a Dhaka restaurant in 2016. Twenty people - 17 foreigners including an Indian girl - were killed in the attack.

The security measure

Erdogan rival sharpens tone on migrants before Turkey runoff



(News Agency)-Tayyip Erdogan's rival in Turkey's presidential race accused the government on Wednesday of allowing 10 million "irregular" migrants to enter the country, marking a nationalist turn in his rhetoric ahead of a May 28 runoff vote.

Kemal Kilicdaroglu, candidate of a six-party opposition alliance, trailed Erdogan in the first round of the presidential election held on Sunday, confounding expectations in opinion polls that he would come out ahead.

Kilicdaroglu's latest comments came after his party said it had filed complaints over suspected irregularities at thousands of ballot boxes in Sunday's landmark elections.

Erdogan's ruling Islamist-rooted AK Party and its nationalist allies won a comfortable parliamentary majority in Sunday's elections, while Erdogan fell just shy of the 50% threshold needed to win outright in the presidential contest.

Kilicdaroglu, chair of the secularist Republican People's Party (CHP), received 44.9% in

what was seen as the biggest electoral challenge to Erdogan's 20-year rule.

A third candidate, nationalist Sinan Ogan, obtained 5.17% and both Erdogan and Kilicdaroglu are expected to seek his endorsement in negotiations this week.

"We will not abandon our homeland to this mentality that allowed 10 million irregular migrants to come among us," Kilicdaroglu said in a video posted on Twitter on Wednesday, warning the number of migrants could go up to 30 million.

"Those who love their homeland, come to the ballot box," Kilicdaroglu urged voters.

He provided no evidence regarding the number of migrants. Turkey hosts the world's largest refugee population of around 4 million, according to official figures.

Turkish authorities have caught nearly 50,600 irregular migrants this year as of May 11, after apprehending some 285,000 in 2022, according to Interior Ministry data.

How the West Has Been Insulting and Abusing Hindu Gods for Decades

(SAI Bureau) The portrayal of Indian culture (predominantly of Hinduism) in the West has long been a story of a negative depiction of caste dominations, worship of weird and unsightly pagan gods in primitive and grotesque ways, patriarchal domination where women face daily bias, the existence of Sati, rampant corruption, lack of hygiene, etc. Beyond Buddha and Gandhi, it seems the West found nothing appealing in Indian heritage and culture, and this notion of India was fed to the West for many generations through various academic discourses and discussions. While most of these false views on India were propagated by Western academicians, some Indians, too, were and are still a part of this group that continues to denigrate India and Hinduism.

Until recently, the majority of the Hindus, fed on the British-created anti-Hindu educational system that was unfortunately continued in the post-independence era under the Nehru regime, had no way of countering the blatant bigotry and hatred that was being propagated worldwide against Hindus and Hinduism. While after independence there is little doubt that India faced various issues of under-development and poverty, primarily because of wrong political decisions by the erstwhile governments, the current generation is no longer willing to take the insults lying down and meekly. With the rising powers of India as a global player in world politics, the current generation has the confidence to fight back the Abrahamic propaganda against Hinduism. Taking into context the recent controversy where Ukraine's Ministry of Defence tweeted a picture of Goddess Kali in a demeaning manner, my article will examine how the West has been insulting our gods for many decades now.

Definition of Shiva in The LibreTexts libraries as taught in the US:

"Shiva embodies the apparently contradictory aspects of a god of ascetics and a god of the phallus. He is the deity of renouncers, particularly of the many Shaiva sects that imitate him: Kapalikas, who carry skulls to reenact the myth in which Shiva beheaded his father, the incestuous Brahma, and was condemned to carry the skull until he found release in Benares; Pashupatas, worshippers of Shiva Pashupati, 'Lord of Beasts'; and Aghoris, 'to whom nothing is horrible', yogis who eat ordure or flesh in order to demonstrate their complete indifference to pleasure or pain. Shiva is also the deity whose phallus (linga) is the central shrine of all Shaiva temples and the personal shrine of all Shaiva householders; his priapism is said to have resulted in his castration and the subsequent worship of his severed member."

Definition of Devi Sakti- Durga/Kali in The LibreTexts libraries as taught in the US:

"As Durga, the Unapproachable, she kills the buffalo demon Mahisha in a great battle; as Kali, the Black, she dances in a mad frenzy on the corpses of those she has

slain and eaten, adorned with the still-dripping skulls and severed hands of her victims. The Goddess is also worshipped by the Shaktas, devotees of Shakti, the female power. This sect arose in the medieval period along with the Tantrists, whose esoteric ceremonies involved a black mass in which such forbidden substances as meat, fish, and wine were eaten and forbidden sexual acts were performed ritually."

From the two definitions given above, it is very clear the author has no knowledge on the concept of either Shiva or the Devi; doesn't know anything about the Vedas and Puranic stories; and his or her primary focus is on certain words, such as skulls, sect, phallus, blood and flesh, esoteric and erotica of forbidden sexual acts, everything that gives an ugly grotesque appearance to Hinduism. In the book 'Awakening: An Introduction to the History of Eastern Thought,' Dr Patrick Bresnan writes, "Entering the world of Shiva worship is to enter the world of India at its most awesomely mysterious and bewildering; at least for the non-Indian. In Shiva worship, the Indian creative imagination erupts in a never-ending multiplicity of gods and demons, occult rituals, and stunning sexual symbolism...Linga/yni veneration was not the whole of it...Young women, known as devadasis, were commonly connected with Shiva temples, and participated in the rituals, sometimes only in a symbolic fashion; sometimes not. In a degraded form, the devadasi became nothing more than temple prostitutes. These extremes were more often to be found among the practitioners of Tantra, that enigmatic antithesis of conservative Hinduism that developed in northeastern India. Some Tantra temples became notorious for all kinds of extreme practices, including ritual rape and ritual murder. In Calcutta, at the Temple of Durga (one of the forms of Shiva's shakti), there was an annual festival at which many pigs, goats, sheep, fowl, and even water buffaloes would be slaughtered and ritually burned before the statue of the goddess." These extremely distorted and perverse descriptions of Shiva, Durga, and Tantra are given in a textbook on Eastern Religions by a so-called authority on Shiva, and that book is used in undergraduate studies on World Religions and Asian Studies in the US. This is how white "Indologists" and "experts" with their own distorted minds and perverted thinking that only focuses on sex, rape, occult, blood, and gore have interpreted and presented Hinduism to the common people in the West. It is



these horribly distorted images of Hinduism that most common Westerners carry lifelong in their minds, and if one is active on social media and has read some of the comments on Hinduism by the Abrahamics, it will not

be difficult to relate to what is being stated here. Fertility worship, as symbolised through yoni and linga worship, has been a part of all ancient religions and cultures, before the Abrahamic monotheistic

religions appeared and wiped them out. Hinduism, being the only ancient surviving religion, still carries on with the concept of fertility worship, and not without a reason too. Fertility worship is the celebration of life, of birth, of conception; the very process through which the human population has been surviving for all these years! Sacrifice in the form of animal slaughtering is present in Islam (Eid), and Christians love their turkeys during Thanksgiving and Christmas, but somehow these "academicians" fail to write on those practices in a manner Bresnan has written about the ritualistic balis (sacrifices) in Hinduism.

"The essential rituals of the Bhagavati cult all point to the aggressive and fatal erotic drinking of the male by the female, the infamous orgy of blood sacrifice of male 'cocks' at the Kodungallur Bhagavati temple; the male veliccappatu's cutting of his head in a symbolic act of self-castration... [Kali] is herself, first of all, a phallic being, the mother with a penis...she is the bloodied image of the castrating and menstruating (thus castrating) female...In this type of analysis, the phallic abilities of the goddess disguise castration anxieties ultimately directed toward the father as well as homosexual desire for the father's penis. Following Freud, such analyses stress the father-son polarity of the oedipal conflict as the central trauma-seeking expression..." - Sarah Caldwell in her research paper, 'The Bloodthirsty Tongue and the Self-Feeding Breast: Homosexual Fellatio Fantasy in a South Indian Ritual Tradition.' For the above-given paper, filled with sex, lust, castration and various perversion-filled theories, Sarah Caldwell was awarded a prestigious award by the Western academic world. Here what is presented is just a short paragraph, and the rest is just too demeaning and horrible to read for any Hindu or for that matter any sane human being. Here, a sym-

bolic sacrifice, an act of devoting oneself to the Devi, has been turned into an act of self-castration. It seems in the twisted devious minds of these academics, there are constant and obsessive thoughts of sex, orgy, blood, gore, castration, and erotica, which are reflected in their writings and are nothing short of pornography. Certainly, as a practicing Hindu with diksha of Devi Kali under a Tantric guru, I have no such twisted and perverse understanding of Hinduism and the rituals pertaining to the tantric form of worship. Perhaps, one wonders, if these very twisted and distorted thoughts of the white academics have now somehow permeated into the white man's daily lives, leading to what we now see in the USA as a transgender revolution, a movement that reeks of child abuse, sexual perversions, and severe mental disorders. "The Bhagavad Gita is not as nice a book as some Americans think... Throughout the Mahabharata... Krishna goads human beings into all sorts of murderous and self-destructive behaviours such as war... The Gita is a dishonest book; it justifies war" - said Wendy Doniger, in 'Philadelphia Inquirer,' without understanding or more likely deliberately distorting the basic essence of the Bhagavad Gita that asks people to fight for dharma or righteousness. The Great Mahabharata War was not a call to fight religious wars to kill and convert non-believers like the Christian Crusades or the Islamic Jihad have been doing for centuries. The Mahabharata War was about destroying adharma (immorality) and reestablishing dharma or righteousness (within people of the same religion), but perhaps Doniger, with her Abrahamic upbringing, failed to understand the true meaning of dharma.

In the context of constant distortion of Hinduism, one question that automatically comes to mind is - Has the likes of academic scholars, like Wendy Doniger, written books and research papers about the actual religious wars carried on by Christianity and Islam that has killed, raped, and enslaved millions of people for centuries, and something that is still continuing? The answer of course is a big NO.

Has Doniger and her likes researched the atrocities of Christians on Hindus, in what is known as the Goan Inquisition, and how the European Christians wiped out entire native populations in many villages in the US after setting their feet there? The Abrahamics still love to discuss Sati-pratha, a practice that was never popularly followed and has long stopped, even as they conveniently forget about the horrific witch burning in Europe during and after the Black Plague episode. One would not be too far off in their conjectures to think the main objective of these "academics" is to work towards dismantling and destroying the only surviving ancient religion and culture that is Hinduism.

(By Monidipa Bose Dey, As published on News18.com)

How EU sanctions on Russian crude helped India save \$5bn last year

Borell's statement came as India's crude oil imports from Russia surged dramatically last year, recording a 10-fold increase, as reported by Bank of Baroda. The data revealed that India saved approximately \$5 billion by intensifying its procurement of Russian crude. Russia has become India's top source of crude now. Petroleum that hasn't been refined and processed into fuels is referred to as crude oil.

Indicating that India was helping Russia flout these sanctions, a couple of reports laid down statistics pointing at India's conspicuous role in the purchase of discounted crude oil from Russia and the sale of processed products to European countries. It also highlighted the major jump in India's share both in terms of crude import from Russia and export to European countries.

WHY DID THE WEST IMPOSE CURBS ON RUSSIAN CRUDE? Western countries imposed sanctions on Russia after it invaded Ukraine in February 2022. To make the sanctions bite, crude exports from Russia was one of the significant items on the curbs list.

The Group of Seven countries, which includes the European Union, and Australia put a price cap of \$60 per barrel on Russian crude. The nations came to be known as price cap coalition countries.

The price ceiling on Russian crude prohibits Western shippers and insurers from getting involved in trade of Russian oil if it trades above \$60 per barrel. This was an attempt in reducing West's dependency on Russian crude.

The sanctions restricted European entities from selling certain products to Russia, while the Russian entities were also banned from selling these products to the EU. The import and export on these products was thus banned entirely. Crude was on the crosshairs of the western nations as curbs on fuel exports could drastically affect Russia's economy.

HOW SANCTIONS ON RUSSIA BENEFITTED INDIA

With the \$60 price cap in place, Russian economy grew vulnerable to the sanctions, directed at its fuel exports. Russia redirected its exports and started offering crude at discounted rates to countries like India and China. India is among the world's top five crude importers.

The price ceiling on Russian crude prohibits Western

shippers and insurers from getting involved in trade of Russian oil if it trades above \$60 per barrel. So, India and China emerged as major destinations for Russian oil, providing conditions for oil marketing companies (OMCs) and shipping firms.

Russia provided discounts on the Ural blend to Indian refiners, enabling OMCs to improve their financial performance. According to sources, these discounts reportedly range between \$15 and \$20 per barrel. Russian oil accounted for just two per cent of India's annual crude imports until 2021, while the number consequently took a drastic jump to almost 20 per cent, Bank of Baroda reported. These oil purchases that India made from Russia in the previous fiscal year resulted in savings of approximately \$89 per tonne of crude, according to its data.

A report in January revealed India bought a record amount of Russian oil, with the country importing a whopping 33 times more than a year earlier.

As reported by Reuters, Europe typically imported an average of 1,54,000 barrels per day (bpd) of diesel and jet fuel from India before Russia's invasion of Ukraine. But that increased to 2,00,000 bpd after the EU banned Russian oil products imports from February 5, according to Kpler data.

India's oil imports from Russia increased so much that they are now higher than the combined imports from Iraq and Saudi Arabia. While Russia is now supplying more than one-third of all oil India imported, PTI reported, citing energy tracker Vortex.

As the \$60 price cap discouraged Western shippers and insurers from getting involved in Russian oil trade. This laid a breeding ground for new players. Among them was a rather lesser-known Indian company that grabbed unusual attention for its exponential business growth.

Gatik Shipping Management became one of the largest shipping vessel owners in the

business as it bought the most oil tankers globally since the Russia-Ukraine war began in February 2022.

Gatik put together a fleet of as many as 61 old oil tankers since March 2022, when the Ukraine war broke, according to a report by the Indian Express. Most of these are on average 17 years old. The fleet's cumulative value was estimated at over \$1.5 billion, the report quoted London-based maritime market intelligence firm VesselsValue as saying.

It is, however, not clear if all the ships are owned by Gatik, given the extremely complex ownership structures of the maritime industry that render it impossible to trace the actual owner of a ship.

Though this company earlier shared its address with Buena Vista Shipping at the Neptune Mall in suburban Mumbai's Bhandup, India Today TV found that the company had shifted its operations. The office had no signboard and its doors were locked.

Earlier this month, on May 2,

a Finland based report revealed that India tops the list of countries that is importing crude oil from Russia, and exporting the processed goods to the European countries -- an indirect contempt of the EU sanctions. Another report by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) highlighted that India shipped the highest volume of oil products to price cap coalition countries, a year since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. India sold 14.8 million tonnes of oil products to these countries, representing a 2.4% increase from the prior year in volume terms, but a 48% rise in value terms. The latter is due to the rise in oil product prices which provides higher profits for refineries exporting refined products, the report said.

The report claimed that all this is an attempt by President Vladimir Putin to fund the war by circumventing the measures that attempt to hinder Russian government revenues.

What happened to Elon Musk?

and many were starting to question the hero worship. But most people took him at his word when he implied that what fueled his drive was his abiding concern for humanity.

Back then, Musk profiles would gush shamelessly, describing his worries about the greatest risks to mankind, writing with visible awe that Musk, "navigates between running his businesses and trying to save the planet." Musk proclaims strongly-held views. But sometimes the beliefs seem only Tweet deep. And it seems he hasn't given much thought to the corollaries, the consequences, of those ideas. Or maybe he doesn't care.

Many still admire him for reinstating thousands of Twitter accounts banned before he took over, even if racist and antisemitic posts exploded, as internet researchers have documented.

But while Musk claimed to be implementing his commitment to open Twitter's gates to more free speech, it has increasingly appeared that he was opening them wide for those who agreed with his views -- which more and more look like those of a

far-right activist. It turns out that the commitment was less than rock solid.

Free speech on Twitter was important for the opposition in Turkey's election, because the government controls most of the media. Faced against a juggernaut, the opposition was counting on social media platforms to carry its message.

Musk maintained the choice was between accepting the government's demands or letting them shut down Twitter. But there was another option. In 2014, ahead of another election, Erdogan made similar demands, declaring, "We'll eradicate Twitter. I don't care what the international community says." Twitter fought back. Turkey did shut down Twitter for a while, but even some of Erdogan's closest allies turned against him. In the end, Twitter was reinstated, its principles intact; Erdogan was tainted by another autocratic move.

It turns out Musk's free speech absolutism is less than absolute. Absurdly, he now says, "By 'free speech,' I simply mean that which matches the law." So, if a tyrant makes a law

banning criticism, will Musk believe that muzzling its critics conforms with free speech?

Beyond his free speech hypocrisy, there's the vanishing aura of Musk as the thoughtful futurist concerned about humanity's fate. There's nothing wrong with disagreeing with George Soros. But Musk's attack -- just after the liberal Soros announced he sold his Tesla stock -- was not a philosophical argument.

Musk first likened the Jewish billionaire to a comic book villain, a Jewish Marvel villain, no less. When someone responded that at least Soros has good intentions, Musk unleashed a description that could have been written by the authors of the antisemitic "Protocols of Zion," which depicted shadowy Jews plotting against the world. Soros, Musk wrote -- to almost 140 million Twitter followers -- "wants to erode the very fabric of civilization. Soros hates humanity."

The framing aligns with centuries of antisemitic conspiracy theories, casting Jews as malevolent forces with shadowy powers aiming to destroy civilization.

Democrats' message to Americans: If you're not a migrant, go to the back of the line

That's a cheap shot and untrue. It's not about race. It's about money. Caring for migrants will force counties to cut services to their own residents. Adams' city budget for the coming fiscal year is proof. It cuts every department, including police protection and education, to offset spending on migrants. The generous handouts to migrants are also causing resentment. A Hispanic American woman from Port Chester who has three kids and works cleaning houses said she's furious to see migrants getting free housing. Why not her family, she asks. Where is New York's

governor, Kathy Hochul? Mostly MIA. Her predecessor, Andrew Cuomo, says Hochul should "come down here and pick up these people and disperse them across the state." That's ridiculous. The answer isn't to foist the problem on other communities. It's to stop making New York a magnet for migrants.

Democrats don't get that. Last week, Adams announced that the landmark Roosevelt Hotel on 45th Street and Vanderbilt Avenue will become the city's migrant welcoming center and large shelter. Movies such as "The French Connection" and "Wall

Street" were filmed there. The lobby is exquisite. A security guard told the New York Post, "the migrants are going to think they came to like Hollywood or something." Upscale lodging -- whether it's in Manhattan or along the Hudson -- encourages migrants to make New York their destination. Worse, it sends a message to the rest of us, including Gary Moretti and his bride, that we're saps. Tell Adams to house migrants in barracks and tents and provide only bare necessities. Be humane, but not stupid.

Vice is going bankrupt BuzzFeed News is dead. What does it mean?

In a seminal 2009 essay, *Newspapers and Thinking the Unthinkable*, the brilliant New York University professor Clay Shirky made the point that journalism as we had known it for decades was finished - and for good reason. The reason, in a mere two words: the internet. And he certainly proved right. With a few notable exceptions, newspapers - once the core of American journalism - have been dying right and left. Now, big digital media-news companies, once the great hope of post-print news, seem to be going in the same direction. Down, down, down. In recent weeks and months, digital newsrooms have taken huge hits. BuzzFeed News suddenly shuttered, leaving scores of extremely talented journalists without employment (and lest you think of BuzzFeed as strictly a place for viral videos about cats, recall that its news division did plenty of prize-winning journalism over the years). Vox Media recently laid off 7% of its staff and raised money based on a valuation about half of what it was worth in 2015. Then, on Monday, another ma-

jor blow: Vice was filing for bankruptcy. A New York Times report was unsparing, calling Vice a "decayed digital colossus", and noting that at one point it was thought to be worth a now-unfathomable \$5.7bn. It's just as Shirky predicted it more than a decade ago, as he compared the coming of the internet to the arrival of Gutenberg's printing press. Communication was utterly upended. "This is what real revolutions are like. The old stuff gets broken faster than the new stuff is put in its place," Shirky wrote. And, amid the ensuing chaos, it's extremely hard to see what's going next: "The importance of any given experiment isn't apparent at the moment it appears, big changes stall, small changes spread." And so it is with the news media - journalism, let's call it - in the digital age. Many of the biggest experiments are failing. The problem in digital news? The audience, in many cases, was there. But the profits didn't follow, or at least not in a sustainable way. Digital advertising revenue, once thought to be based on audience size, was going instead to social-media

platforms, particularly Facebook.

Venture capitalists who had funded the news sites grew disenchanted and impatient.

"Many, many things went wrong," Ben Smith, the former top BuzzFeed News editor, told Jon Favreau on his Offline podcast, noting in something of an understatement that "social media wasn't going to work out the way we thought it was". (Disclosure: I was recruited to succeed Smith at BuzzFeed News; I dropped out of the running early on.)

In fact, said Smith, whose new book, *Traffic*, traces the rise and decline of the digital-news dream, "the internet itself is kind of falling apart". That may be overstating it, but Twitter users - and hundreds of laid-off journalists - would find it hard to disagree.

So when it comes to news in the fully digital age, what will work? What will be successful, not only financially but in serving the public's need for fact-based news and information?

That's a tricky question because we're still fully in the grip of the digital revolution and the chaos that Shirky recognized.

Some experiments are failing; others are taking hold.

It's heartening to see the success of quality digital-first news sites like ProPublica, which depend heavily - though not exclusively - on philanthropy. The New York Times is thriving in the digital age, due partly to initiatives that have nothing to do with news - addictive puzzles, a cooking app and the product-review site known as Wirecutter. The Wall Street Journal has an impenetrable paywall and a wealthy audience who find its business coverage indispensable. The small local-news site Mississippi Today - funded through membership, events and philanthropy - won a Pulitzer prize last month; it was founded only seven years ago.

News companies that are owned by billionaires, such as the Washington Post, may have more stability than most, but still find themselves grappling with the loss of advertising revenue; even billionaires don't want to sustain losses indefinitely. (That became clear to me as editor of the Buffalo News, once owned by Warren Buffett, who got out of the newspaper business entirely a

few years ago after declaring in an interview that the industry had become nothing but "toast".)

The Guardian, owned by the Scott Trust and sustained by its endowment, is also supported by its readers, an essential component of its current financial health.

The truth is there's no single solution - and that's not at all surprising this early in the digital revolution.

"Diversified revenue," is Smith's best answer to a sustainable business model for journalism's future.

He's right. Newspapers were far too dependent on print advertising and once that fell off a cliff in 2008, so did they. BuzzFeed and many others bet big on the distribution model of social media but without fully realizing that the platforms would siphon off the digital-ad dollars.

My deepest hope is that news consumers - also known as citizens - and philanthropists alike recognize the importance of quality reporting and are willing to support it. In this time of uncertainty, the importance of good journalism is the one sure bet.

The Election Shock Which Will Reverberate Around the World

No, I'm not talking about Bengaluru but Istanbul, and the election setback endured by Turkey's authoritarian leader, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. But there's a link between the two polls beyond the simple coincidence of timing. The tide may just be turning on the right-wing populism which has been such a powerful force in many of the world's leading democracies. Erdogan has dominated Turkish politics - first as prime minister and more recently as executive-style president - for 20 years. He has moulded the determinedly secular constitutional dispensation established by Kemal Ataturk a century ago to give more prominence to Islamic values. He has given Turkey - a key member of the NATO military alliance - a greater international profile and initially presided over economic

modernisation and growth.

But the presidential election on Sunday suggests that Turkey is tiring of its strongman. The inept government response to the two devastating earthquakes which hit Turkey early this year and killed more than 50,000 people has angered many voters. And stubbornly high inflation (currently an eye-watering 45%), linked to the slump in value of the Turkish lira, has left many voters feeling worse off. Erdogan emerged on top in Sunday's vote, but only just. And the latest tallies indicate that he has narrowly failed to get 50% of the vote which would have allowed him to be re-elected on the first ballot. So he faces the humiliation of a run-off second ballot in two weeks' time. His challenger is an unlikely iconoclast. Kemal Kilicdaroglu is a mild-mannered former civil servant who at 74 is five years older

than the incumbent president. Kilicdaroglu's success in taking the presidential election to a second round is partly because he has promised to undo the centralisation of power under Erdogan and move away from an executive presidency back to a parliamentary system. As important, he has fashioned an alliance of opposition parties, including a moderate party representing Turkey's large Kurdish minority. And as a new face, he offers a fresh start in the quest for economic stability.

In the run-off ballot on May 28, Erdogan may well succeed in being returned to another term in office. But the aura of electoral invincibility that has surrounded the Turkish ruler for so long has been punctured. The right-wing populism which Erdogan epitomised - indeed he could be seen as the initial standard-bearer of this global

political trend - is no longer a sure-fire vote winner.

In other major democracies, right-wing populist leaders have been eclipsed. In Brazil, Jair Bolosnaro was voted out of office last year after four years in power. In the United States, Donald Trump was similarly a single-term president - though he stands a real chance of a return to the White House. In Britain, Boris Johnson didn't manage a full-term as prime minister, being forced out by his own party last year because too many of his lies and evasions had been found out.

This is not a universal political trend. Viktor Orban has been in power in Hungary for 13 years and counting. Italy, which is so often politically out of step, lurched sharply right last year in electing Giorgia Meloni, once a member of a neo-fascist party, as prime minister. And some major

democracies - most notably Germany - have proved largely immune to nationalist populism, in part because of the dark shadow of 20th century totalitarianism. But it is at least arguable that the political whirlwind sparked by the shock and dislocation of the global financial crisis of 2007-8, and the resulting collapse of confidence in social democracy, is now spent.

And Karnataka? The Congress victory there - after a dismal run of state election results - simply suggests that the rot may have stopped in India's main opposition party. It doesn't mean that Congress can aspire to be a serious challenger in next year's national elections. But it makes electoral politics in India a lot more interesting. And in global terms, the wind is blowing in a direction that helps social democratic parties more than right-wing populists.

PM Modi must worry. Karnataka is the latest sign of a deepening crisis ahead of 2024 LS polls

It has become an axiom in political circles that people of India vote differently when it comes to electing Narendra Modi as the Prime Minister and when they have to choose chief ministers. That is to say, when Modi seeks their votes for himself, they don't think twice. But when he seeks votes for his nominees in states, the same voters are circumspect and don't necessarily oblige him.

The commonly cited evidence of this differential voting behavior is the Bharatiya Janata Party's spectacular victory in the 2019 Lok Sabha election, just six months after its drubbing in the Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh assembly elections. Validating this commonly held belief are surveys that show Modi's popularity increasing even amid BJP's losses in states.

The general response to Saturday's verdict of the Karnataka assembly elections has followed the same pattern—that it means nothing for the 2024 Lok Sabha election. The principal argument is that regardless of whom Kannadigas voted for in the 2023 assembly election, they have consistently voted for the BJP in Lok Sabha polls—18 seats in 2004, 19 in 2009, 17 in 2013, and 25 in 2019 out of a total of 26 seats in the state. But this argument holds true for the last four elections only—once each when Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh were the PM and twice when Modi has been the PM.

Before 2004, the three Assembly and LS polls had seen the domination of one party in both—the Congress in 1999, Janata Dal before that, and the Congress in 1989. Even that trend held up for three assembly and LS polls only. Because the people had voted differently in the 1984 LS and 1985 assembly elections—for the Congress in the first and the Janata Party in the second. What I am driving at is that it's okay to believe that if Kannadigas voted for the BJP in the last four Lok Sabha polls, they can do it the fifth time in 2024 as well. Fair enough, especially when all surveys consistently vouch for Modi's undiminished popularity. But, without seeking to contest this notion, we can take note of a couple of points. Kannadigas didn't vote differently in 2018 and

2019. In the 2018 assembly election, they almost brought the BJP to power, making it the single largest party with just nine seats short of a majority. Its vote share was also substantially more than what it was in 2013. Another point to take note of is that in the 2014 Lok Sabha election, during the 'Modi wave,' the Congress that ruled Karnataka then won 9 of the 28 Lok Sabha seats. Now that it has swept the assembly polls, it's better-placed for 2024.

As for the notion of people voting differently, if one were to leave the surveys out, the example of the 2019 election doesn't necessarily hold good for 2024, too. Simply because the Balakot airstrike had changed the mood of the nation in 2019. Opposition leaders' cynical demands for proof of the extent of damage on the Pakistani side only deepened its electoral impact.

Therefore, once we agree to the impact of the Balakot strike on the 2019 Lok Sabha election results, we can understand why PM Modi must be worried about 2024. It's true that there was a general sense of despondency about the state of affairs in Karnataka. The opposition successfully created a mahaul or atmosphere of distrust against the Bommai government, with its 'PayCM,' '40% commission government,' and other campaigns centred around alleged misgovernance and promoting a sense of insecurity and slight among various caste groups, especially Lingayats. The Lokniti-CSDS post-poll survey showed that only one-seventh of the respondents considered the Bommai-led government's works while voting. One-fifth of the voters considered the works of both the state and the Central governments. 42% of the voters were "somewhat dissatisfied" and "fully dissatisfied" with the Bommai government's performance; it was 41 per cent in case of the Central government.

BJP machinery is turning ineffective

So, why did the BJP fight the election over Tip Sultan, Hijab, Halal, and 'love jihad,' among other polarising issues? Whose idea was it to keep humiliating BS Yediyurappa after he became the CM in 2019 and even after he

stepped down in 2021? Whose idea was it to replace him and make Lingayats feel slighted? Whose idea was it to deny tickets to Jagadish Shettar and Laxman Savadi and further rub salt on the wounds? Whose idea was it to go for a reservation quota rejig that left every community insecure and confused? Whoever gave these ideas to the BJP high command certainly had no pulse of Karnataka voters. But here is the problem: If the party's national president JP Nadda had no pulse of voters in his home state, Himachal Pradesh, how can PM Modi expect others to know better? If the Basavaraj Bommai government was flailing, it was for all to see. How come the BJP high command failed to see it? And if it did, how come nothing was done to fix the problem? And if the high command was happy with Bommai's governance, why did the party completely ignore it and make Modi and his governance the central plank? There are lots of questions but no answers.

That's what PM Modi must be worried about. Because a similar thing happened in Himachal Pradesh too. The BJP celebrated its success in the Northeast but the fact was it barely managed to retain power in Tripura. Had it not been for Pradyot Debbarma's Tipra Motha Party (TMP), the BJP would have lost power in Tripura, as reported by ThePrint.

The BJP celebrated its success in Meghalaya and Nagaland, but the fact was that the party made little gains even in these two states, winning the same number of seats—2 in Meghalaya and 12 in Nagaland—as it had done five years ago when it had joined the government in both states.

That the BJP would go to town about what was hardly a cause for big celebrations is understandable. Because it had to send out a message of invincibility to demoralise the opposition and motivate party cadres. But PM Modi would know the reality, for sure. He knows Gujarat's victory last year was all his. Himachal results were a dampener. The outcome of polls in three northeastern states two months back was hardly a confidence-booster. And now, the Karnataka setback! PM Modi has reasons to be worried, not just

about the next round of elections in five states in November-December but also about the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

He knows that his party is floundering. He must be realising now that the much-hyped organisational machinery of the BJP becomes ineffective if he himself is not effective. When Chandragupta succeeds, there are many Chanakyas to share credit. But if Modi's magic doesn't work in assembly elections, the Chanakyas simply lay the blame on lesser mortals for failing the party.

BJP needs a new narrative

There is always a debate about the need for opposition parties to build a new narrative. As it is, the opposition is seeking to build a new narrative around anti-incumbency. It's the BJP that needs a new narrative now. The same polarisation tactics, the same promotion of Hindutva, nationalism, jingoism, and the same dependence on PM Modi to deliver votes through his own charisma and welfarist governance—nothing has changed for the BJP since 2014. The BJP's electoral strategies are so predictable today. Their vulnerability gets exposed whenever there is a smart, thinking opponent like Mamata Banerjee, Arvind Kejriwal, or DK Shivakumar.

So, how can PM Modi fix the drift in the BJP? To start with, he may want to fix accountability for the political and electoral lapses. He may want to take a re-look at the BJP's electoral strategy that's becoming so jaded and predictable. He has to put a stop to this high commandist culture and start promoting leaders who are contributing to the party's growth—like Yogi Adityanath, Himanta Biswa Sarma, and Devendra Fadnavis—and not those who are feeding off his popularity to promote their individual ambitions.

Party reforms aside, Modi needs to find out why people aren't buying his double-engine growth promise any longer. He had his ears to the ground for decades until he became the Gujarat chief minister in 2001. Blame it on the constraints of a CM or a PM, he has largely been insulated and dependent on the feedback of others who

would obviously give him a rosy picture. Nine years into the PM's office, he needs an update on what's happening on the ground. He needs to convince his colleagues in the party and the government that they should stop believing in their own propaganda—that all is well and everybody is happy. Census 2021 needs to be conducted urgently to find out the demographic and socio-economic changes in the country since Modi took over the country's reins. The government shows so much sympathy for migrants but doesn't want any concrete data about migration that a census would provide. Ruling party members talk about certain minority communities growing and hampering overall development, but they don't want any concrete data to substantiate it. They talk about the number of houses they have built, but they don't want to know how many more people need them. They talk about how the common man's life has been transformed by the Modi-led government's welfare measures, but they don't want any data to judge their claims with facts. They don't want the household consumer expenditure survey to tell us how much inequality has increased or reduced, how much people are spending on food or non-food items monthly, what cereals they are eating, how much people are spending on rent or education, how the bottom 5 percent is doing compared to the top 5 percent, what energy sources people are using for cooking or lighting, and so on. The government rejected the results of the expenditure survey for 2017-18 on so-called quality issues that nobody is convinced about. It was rejected apparently because the findings didn't match the Modi government's tall claims. Findings of another survey for 2022-23 would be ready, but the government is reluctant to make them public before the 2024 Lok Sabha election, as reported by The Indian Express.

That's why when the BJP launches a high-octane campaign making tall claims about how it has changed the lives of citizens, there are many in the crowds who could be feeling cheated and slighted because they might not have seen those changes in their own lives.

The Army Takes on Imran Khan

(SAI Bureau) There is a dangerous confrontation playing out on the streets of Pakistan. The country's most popular politician is locked in a battle with its most powerful institution. Last week, former Prime Minister Imran Khan was dramatically snatched by scores of paramilitary forces from an Islamabad courthouse. Supporters rampaged through Pakistan's streets in protest, torching buildings, ransacking the official residence of a senior military commander, and even storming into the Army's headquarters. Khan was released on bail three days later and has since escalated the confrontation—accusing the Army chief, Gen. Asim Munir, of targeting him. A political crisis is the last thing that Pakistan needs. The country's economy is skidding fast off a cliff. It is close to defaulting on its international debt. There has barely been a recovery since last year's epic floods, which submerged a third of the country and displaced millions. Inflation has soared to 35 percent, while the rupee has plunged to record lows. And the threat of terrorism, which had abated over recent years, has resurfaced.

Pakistan desperately needs a reset. The unyielding confrontation between military authorities and Khan's party threatens to tear apart the Muslim world's second-most-populous country and sole nuclear power. There is an opportunity, later this year, when elections are due. The only way forward is for Pakistan's generals to finally relinquish their hold on the country and let a democratic process run its course. A peaceful, free, and fair election won't solve Pakistan's many problems, but it could deliver a measure of much-needed stability—and make a decisive break with the past.

In many ways, the current crisis is depressingly familiar. Pakistan's military has ruled the 75-year-old country directly for three decades and kept a grip on nominally democratic governments for the rest. No civilian prime minister has survived a full term to face the electorate again. They have



been forced out of office through a variety of means and even, in one case, assassinated. The military has cynically worked backstage to help opposition leaders take their place—before they, too, suffered the same fate, in an endless cycle of dysfunction. At first, Khan, a former star cricketer who rose to power on a populist platform, was close to the military. When the generals thrust Khan into office, in 2018, he was more pliable than most politicians. The two sides openly shared power, inaugurating what became known as a “hybrid regime.” Decisions were taken at military headquarters and dutifully signed off on in the prime minister's office. The intelligence agencies acted as enforcers, locking up opponents, muzzling journalists, disappearing critics, leaning on judges, and whipping parliamentary votes. The generals liked the former cricket legend's charisma, his nationalism, and his self-styled crusade against corruption. It was all going well for the men in uniform—until he overstepped. Pakistan's military jealously guards its chain of command, where the top general maintains a firm sense of authority, and when Khan tried to insert his own

voice, the top brass turned on him. It pulled its support, leaving Khan vulnerable to a vote of no confidence last April. By any measure, if he had been allowed to complete a full term in office, Khan would have struggled to get reelected. His politics were divisive, his policies ineffective. But now he has become a magnet for sympathy, skillfully casting himself as an embattled hero fighting for his people's “real independence.”

Khan was ostensibly arrested on corruption charges. In total, he says he is facing 148 cases, including allegations of “terrorism,” “sedition,” and “blasphemy.” But the motivation behind these cases has little to do with notions of transparency or accountability. This is an attempt to eliminate him from contention in this year's general election. Leaders of Khan's party have been arrested and, allegedly, in some cases, tortured. More have been arrested at more junior levels, and even peaceful protests led by Khan's supporters have been crushed by the police. The military is now threatening to prosecute the suspected rioters in its own courts, in brazen violation of international law. Anyone involved in inciting or carrying out violence should be held

accountable, but through fair trials in civilian courts.

By pursuing its vendetta against Khan, the military is putting its own standing at risk. His supporters aren't found in remote rural areas. They are concentrated in Pakistan's main towns and cities. They include members of the elite and the assertive and social media-savvy middle classes, with vast numbers of people whose relatives are serving in the military or have done before. Rarely has hostility toward the military seeped so deep into its own heartlands. There is even open talk of splits among the Army's own high command.

The generals may not realize it now, but a permanent withdrawal from politics would be in their best interests. Their hybrid experiment didn't just fail—it disastrously backfired. The military can only assert its will now through force, shedding support in the process. By stepping aside, much of the hostile attention would fade. They would also have space to heal internal rifts and rebuild their much-damaged public image.

There are only two plausible alternatives to a free and fair election in Pakistan this year: a tainted one, or a military coup. If Khan isn't

allowed to take part, the elections will lack legitimacy in the eyes of many Pakistanis. The results won't be accepted, and the crisis will endure. Moreover, any government that emerges from such a process will be weak and constantly vulnerable to the manipulations of the military—much like the current coalition government. It could be swept aside at any moment, triggering a fresh crisis. A military coup is unlikely, but not impossible. But if the generals grab power for themselves, they won't deliver stability. Instead, they will plunge Pakistan deep into the abyss—it will be isolated globally and ruined economically. The choice between the military and Khan isn't an appealing one. There are fears that if Khan wins the coming election, he may leverage his popularity to build a civilian autocracy around him. He is vain and erratic. He doesn't like to play by the rules. But eliminating him and his party through sheer repression isn't the answer. Crucially, an election that sees him voted in could also be followed by an election that sees him voted out.

The important thing is that the Pakistani voters finally get to make those decisions—not the men in uniform.

Olivia and Liam Remain Most Popular Baby Names for 2022

Olivia and Liam are once again America's most popular baby names in 2022. Liam has topped the list for six years in a row, and Olivia has been the top choice for new parents for four years. There is only one new name in the top 10, with Luna crawling into the top 10 for the first time. Here are the top 10 boys' and girls' names for 2022:

Boys: 1) Liam
2) Noah
3) Oliver
4) James
5) Elijah
6) William
7) Henry
8) Lucas
9) Benjamin
10) Theodore

Girls: 1) Olivia
2) Emma
3) Charlotte
4) Amelia
5) Sophia
6) Isabella
7) Ava
8) Mia
9) Evelyn
10) Luna

Social Security began compiling the baby names list in 1997, with names dating back to 1880. Each year, the list reveals the effect of pop-culture on naming trends. Here are the top five fastest rising boys' and girls' names in 2022:

Boys: 1) Dutton

Girls:

1) Wrenlee
2) Kayce
3) Chosen
4) Khaza
5) Eithan

2) Neriah
3) Krlet
4) Georgina
5) Amiri

Please visit www.ssa.gov/babynames to view the entire list and see where your name ranks now and over the past 100 years.

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Visitors will experience a fresh homepage and new design to help them find what they need more easily, with clear paths to the tasks customers need to accomplish. This is part of ongoing efforts to improve how the public can do business with the agency.

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At Japan's G7 summit, the big elephants are China and Russia

The longest shadows at the Group of Seven (G7) leaders' summit this week will be cast by two countries that weren't even invited to the Hiroshima gathering: China and Russia.

(News Agency)-The longest shadows at the Group of Seven (G7) leaders' summit this week will be cast by two countries that weren't even invited to the Hiroshima gathering: China and Russia.

As the heads of the world's advanced democracies meet for three days from Friday in the western Japanese city, they will need to overcome some differences of their own, officials say, as they aim to project unity against challenges from Beijing and Moscow.

Divisions within the G7 appear to be the most notable over China, multiple officials told Reuters, with countries grappling on how to warn against what they see as China's threat to global supply chains and economic security without completely alienating a powerful and important trade partner.

The G7 countries -- the United States, Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Canada and Italy -- are all closely tied economically to China, the world's second-largest economy and a key global manufacturing base and market.

How the G7 will deal with the "great power competition" is an important issue for the summit, said Narushige Michishita, a professor at the National Graduate Institute



for Policy Studies (GRIPS) in Tokyo.

"They have to address economic security and how to deal with sensitive technologies," Michishita said. "Everything is part of the great power competition that is taking place between the United States and Russia, and the United States and China."

Their differences on China were put in sharp focus after French President Emmanuel Macron visited Beijing last month and called for the European Union to reduce its dependence on the United States.

A senior U.S. administration official told Reuters this week the summit would show leaders unified behind a common approach to China, although he acknowledged it was "one of the more complex issues" for the meeting.

The leaders are also set to discuss concern about China's use of "economic coercion" in its dealings abroad as part of their larger joint statement, with that main statement set to include a "section specific to China" Reuters has reported.

There will be a number of other declarations, senior German government sources have said, including on Ukraine, economic resilience and security, food security and others.

"I would call this a geopolitical G7, which will tackle a massive security crisis, which is the Russian aggression against Ukraine," a French presidency official said.

"It's also geopolitical because tensions between China and the United States are increasing and so we need to express the rules of the game so that we can

preserve our international sanctions on Russia, with steps cooperation capacities," the aimed at energy and exports official said.

aiding Moscow's war effort, Leaders from a number of other officials with direct knowledge of countries, including India and the talks have told Reuters. The Vietnam, are also among those new moves will target sanctions expected to attend as observers. evasion involving third countries, The G7 is looking to draw closer and seek to undermine Russia's to members of the "Global South" future energy production and curb to counter China's role on the trade that supports Russia's global stage.

military, they said. On Russia's But it remains to be seen how invasion of Ukraine there are direct the language will be toward differences in strategy on how to

China. Some G7 members are end the conflict. The United States sceptical about signing on to doesn't want to talk about a

controls on investment into China. diplomatic path forward until it While April's meeting of G7 foreign sees how the spring military ministers acknowledged "the offensive plays out, officials have need to work together with China said, even as its European allies on global challenges" and want it to have a diplomatic

reiterated its call for Beijing to act solution in hand. "From a "as a responsible member of the European perspective, it's about international community", neither Ukraine's partners doing the group's climate nor finance everything they can to accelerate chiefs directly mentioned China its victory," a European official in their communiques. said, adding that Europe's

The United States is at the forefront response to challenges from the in pushing for stronger investment United States and China were also controls, yet Germany is more important. "We have to also learn cautious, given its heavy reliance to defend our interests," the official on trade with Beijing. said. For host Japan, it wants to

Germany wants to see screening send a clear message about the of investments in targeted areas, importance of the international, not across the board, senior rules-based order, officials have German government officials have said, as Tokyo worries that said. Japan is also sceptical about Russia's actions against Ukraine investment controls. could embolden China's action

The leaders also plan to tighten against Taiwan.

Singapore hangs 2nd citizen for cannabis trafficking this year amid protests over death penalty

The man had been convicted in 2019 for trafficking around 1.5 kilograms of cannabis. According to Singapore laws, trafficking more than 500 grams of cannabis may result in capital punishment.

(News Agency)- Singapore on Wednesday hanged another citizen for trafficking cannabis, the second in three weeks, as it clung firmly to the death penalty despite growing calls for the city-state to halt drug-related executions. The 37-year-old man was executed after his last-ditch bid to reopen his case was dismissed by the court Tuesday without a hearing, said activist Kokila Annamalai of the Transformative Justice Collective, which advocates for abolishing the death penalty in Singapore.

The man, who was not named as his family has asked for privacy, had been imprisoned for

seven years and convicted in 2019 for trafficking around 1.5 kilograms (3.3 pounds) of cannabis, she said.

His bid to reopen his case was based on DNA evidence and fingerprints that tied him to a much smaller amount, which he admitted to possessing, but the court rejected it, she added.

Under Singapore laws, trafficking more than 500 grams (1.1 pounds) of cannabis may result in the death penalty.

"If we don't come together to stop it, we fear that this killing spree will continue in the weeks and months to come," she said.

Some 600 prisoners are on death row in the city-state, mostly for drug-related offenses, she

added.

Singapore executed 11 people last year for drug offenses after a two-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The hanging of one particular Malaysian believed to be mentally disabled sparked an international outcry and brought the country's capital punishment under scrutiny for flouting human rights norms. Three weeks ago, Singaporean Tangaraju Suppiah, 46, was hanged in the first execution this year for trafficking 1 kilogram (2.2 pounds) of cannabis although he was not caught with the drugs. Prosecutors said phone numbers traced him as the person responsible for



coordinating the delivery of the drugs, which he denied.

PROTESTS AGAINST DEATH PENALTY

Human rights groups, British mogul Richard Branson and the United Nations have urged Singapore to halt executions for drug-related offenses as increasing evidence shows the death penalty is ineffective as a deterrent. But Singapore authorities insist that all prisoners get due process of law and that capital

punishment remains "part of Singapore's comprehensive harm prevention strategy which targets both drug demand and supply."

Apart from Singapore, Amnesty International said Indonesia carried out 112 drug-related executions last year by firing squad after a hiatus since 2016. In contrast, neighboring Thailand has legalized cannabis while Malaysia has ended the mandatory death penalty for serious crimes.

Thieves Smash Car into Louis Vuitton Store to Steal Designer Handbags, Second Such Incident This Year



(News Agency)-Thieves on Wednesday smashed a car into the doors of a French Louis Vuitton store for the second time this year to steal designer handbags and other valuables, police said.

The luxury shop in the centre of Lille in northeast France had been targeted already in January when a gang made off with most of the goods inside.

Wednesday's theft happened at dawn, with the thieves avoiding bollards placed on the pavement in front of the prestigious Art Deco building to prevent a repeat of January's smash-and-grab

operation.

The car "crashed into the facade," a police source told AFP, without commenting on the value of the losses for the company, owned by France's wealthiest man, Bernard Arnault. The mayor of Lille, Martine Aubry, told AFP the city would build new obstacles in front of the premises to protect it, while management were also considering installing a barrier inside the building.

The incident was first reported by the local Voix du Nord newspaper.

Kremlin bans high-ranking officials from resigning as Russia-Ukraine conflict rages: Report

With several Russian officials expressing the will to resign from their positions amid the Russia-Ukraine war, the Kremlin has imposed an unofficial ban on their resignations, as claimed by investigative outlet iStories.

(News Agency)-The Kremlin has banned high-ranking Russian officials from resigning amid the ongoing war in Ukraine, and threatened them of criminal prosecution, sources told an investigative outlet iStories on Monday. The unofficial ban came against the backdrop of several officials expressing the desire to resign, a source close to the presidential administration told iStories.

"If everyone leaves, control will be lost," the source said, clarifying that the desire to resign is seen as a betrayal by Kremlin. The source further said that the civil servants are expected to "demonstrate unity".

A former employee in the Federal Security Service (FSB) told iStories that he knows of "at least two cases where governors tried to leave their posts, but they were not just prohibited by the Internal Policy Department, it was also hinted that they could



face criminal prosecution". He confirmed that the ban is informal and essentially illegal. He said there are bound to be some exceptions to the ban, with fair possibilities of officials being released from their positions for health or corruption reasons. He said, by this point, "several officials are willing to pay a high price for the opportunity to quietly and discreetly leave now".

Moreover, as per the mobilisation decree signed by Russian President Vladimir Putin in September 2022,

members of the special services, including the majority of FSB employees, cannot resign even after their contracts expire. Kremlin has, in the past, imposed similar bans, one of which imposed restrictions on travelling abroad for high-ranking officials, parliamentarians, governors and top managers of state-owned companies. The efforts by the presidential administration in Russia are reportedly in an attempt to prevent "official desertion" and hindrances by the foreign intelligence.



Why Imran's comeback would be a triumph for democracy and a disaster for Pakistan

Imran's popularity has risen to a level not seen in Pakistan before. But all nations, especially democracies, need institutions that can stand up to majoritarianism of any kind.

Are you with Imran Khan or against him? We can ask this question in two different ways. One, if a fair election is held today, will Imran win or not? And second, will his win be good for Pakistan or a disaster? The answer to the first question is, of course, Imran will win. He has the street with him as no Pakistani leader has had in a long time, not even Nawaz Sharif at his peak when he could win big majorities by himself. His loyalists were also noisy and boisterous, but they would never take on the might of the army. Or, he would not have been removed from power summarily and unfairly thrice.

Imran's popularity has risen to a level not seen in Pakistan before. It is because his rivals, enemies and critics, including the army brass, are so convinced that he will easily win an election that they aren't about to hold one now. Or even, given a choice, on the due date in October unless they can disqualify him constitutionally and prevent him from contesting. The answer to the second question is even simpler. For sure, if he wins a big mandate, it will be a disaster for Pakistan. Because everything he stands for - extreme populism, angry,

retributive governance, Islamism, anti-Westernism (important from Pakistan's perspective), extreme views on India and impatience with modern economics - will push Pakistan deeper into the hole.

Which leaves us again with two questions. One, can you stop him without denying Pakistan democracy? And can Pakistan afford an Imran win?

Anybody who is still not convinced after the Arab Spring disaster that a shortcut to democratisation without preparation is perilous should take a close look at Pakistan now.

Democracy is among the greatest virtues that humankind has developed over these millennia, a blessing with all its many imperfections. But it cannot work in a vacuum of ideas, institutions and a larger popular acceptance of what it entails to govern within a democratic but constitutional system.

A successful democracy needs deep-set patience with its imperfections. As also with what is unique to a constitutional democracy: the limitations of majorities, for example. Nawaz Sharif kept on losing power because he failed

to appreciate it. Imran won't even make any effort to do so.

That's why, in a situation where Pakistan's institutions are melting or vaporising, an elected Imran Khan may just be the fatal blow the hapless - but powerful - nation doesn't need.

On this, the so-called democratic and liberal forces in Pakistan are on the same page as the leadership of their army. Which is the key point we need to debate.

It is clear to all at this point that the ruling coalition commands neither the credibility nor the power to govern a country of 23 crore-plus with a broken polity and economy.

Until the other day, Pakistan had a parachute for such crises. That parachute, I regret to say, was the institution of the army. It's a far from perfect idea, especially for those like us who must instinctively support democratisation.

But all nations, especially the democracies, need an institutional bedrock. For Pakistan, it's always been its army. Its judiciary, the Election Commission, the so-called corruption watchdog and the ever-so-scandalous National Accountability Bureau (NAB) have all proven inadequate to the

task of protecting its democracy or the national interest.

The army was so far the one institution that guaranteed stability. Under this Imran onslaught, it isn't even a parody of its omnipotent past in Pakistan. Paradoxically, the country's biggest problem right now is that its army is at its weakest.

Why should we care, you might ask. Let the Pakistanis be hoist with their own petard, they sowed this wind, this awful army of theirs and the pain it has given us, and so on. Good arguments. Schadenfreude is always a tempting idea. Whether or not it is such a wise one today is a debate we can leave for another day. This week, we are talking about this counterintuitive and unfortunate idea of the perils of democracy in a country as large as Pakistan.

Why and how did the Arab Spring fail? In one Arab country after another, once the headiness of the multiple Tahrir Squares was over, elections followed. What was confused for a democratic upsurge was essentially a popular rebellion against decades of militaristic, populist but near-secular dictators. Instinctively, the response was

Islamic, not democratic and definitely not liberal. Religion was the fuel driving these protests.

There was no surprise then, when in one country after another, the Islamists won. It was invariably some version of the Muslim Brotherhood, except to some extent in Tunisia. All unravelled. It began with Egypt, where the army returned and restored the status quo ante. And when it did that, it had much popular support. Because Egyptians had not bargained for the kind of Islamisation their elected government had launched.

Tunisia, long seen as the one success story of the Arab Spring, has come apart now. Its ultra-popular "common man" leader, widely hailed as a true democrat in the Western world, has now morphed into a cynical dictator. How bad and dramatic that transformation has been, you can see in this episode of my show CutTheClutter.

In the Arab world, democratisation has meant Islamisation. So far, the militarised dictatorships had kept the religion and the clergy in control, if not under brutal suppression. Armed with the legitimacy of elections, Islamists began to spread.

Decentralised Set-up Becomes a Big Boon for Congress



The Modi-Shah duo wants to tightly control the party organisations at the state level and make all chief ministers beholden to them. The Congress, though, has recently allowed a decentralised management of the elections in states.

Some keen political observers have begun to note how the BJP is now fully emulating the Congress of the 1970s and 1980s in the way it practises rigid centralisation in the management of the party organisation, especially in the context of strategising state elections. The Karnataka polls particularly exemplified this role reversal in which the BJP's state leadership was undermined systematically by the Modi-Shah duo and the Congress allowed its state leaders full freedom to manage almost all aspects of the elections with just a light guiding touch from New Delhi.

Noted political scientist and expert on Karnataka James Manor, who participated in a live YouTube discussion on the election results

organised by five online news organisations including The Wire, said the Congress (read the Gandhis) had made huge mistakes in the past by imposing chief ministerial candidates



unilaterally, thereby weakening the state leadership. He suggested that the Congress had learnt from its mistakes and the Karnataka elections outcome was possibly a reflection of that.

The BJP, on the other hand, has ensured that no powerful leaders emerge at the state level, as seen in most of the assembly elections

held after 2019, whether in Maharashtra, Haryana, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh or Jharkhand. Adityanath seems to be the only exception who is emerging as an independent power centre for

various reasons which need not be elaborated here.

The larger point is that the Modi-Shah duo wants to tightly control the party organisations at the state level and make all chief ministers beholden to them.

This is in sharp contrast to the way the Congress has allowed a decentralised management of the

elections in states like Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and now Karnataka. Of course, at times, things do appear chaotic because of such decentralisation

as multiple power centres emerge. This was seen in Madhya Pradesh in the past and is being witnessed in Chhattisgarh, too, there have been more than one vocal claimants to the chief minister's post. Such assertion by state leaders was unheard of during Indira Gandhi's period when state leaders were too scared to open their mouths in public. Even Rajiv Gandhi had the tendency to talk down to, even insult, state-level leaders.

All this has changed partly because the Gandhi family's capacity to attract voters on their own strength has declined after the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections. But they still act as a

glue that keeps the party together in spite of multiple desertions by senior leaders in various states over the years. The Gandhis have figured that the Congress can now revive only in a more decentralised format. In a sense, they have now evolved a new compact with strong state leaders. Some years ago, I asked Congress treasurer Motilal Vora (since deceased) why Rahul Gandhi shows such visible respect for the Kerala leadership. Kerala seems to have a disproportionate influence even in the central decision making of the Congress. Vora said Kerala is a well-oiled, decentralised party machinery which manages its own affairs, raises its own funds, fights elections and helps strengthen the Congress overall.

Karnataka, Chhattisgarh and Himachal Pradesh can also fit well into Vora's description of a new, decentralised Congress. In future, this must remain the biggest strength of the Congress vis-a-vis the Modi-Shah duo if the party hopes to defeat the BJP in 2024.

Stephen Marche

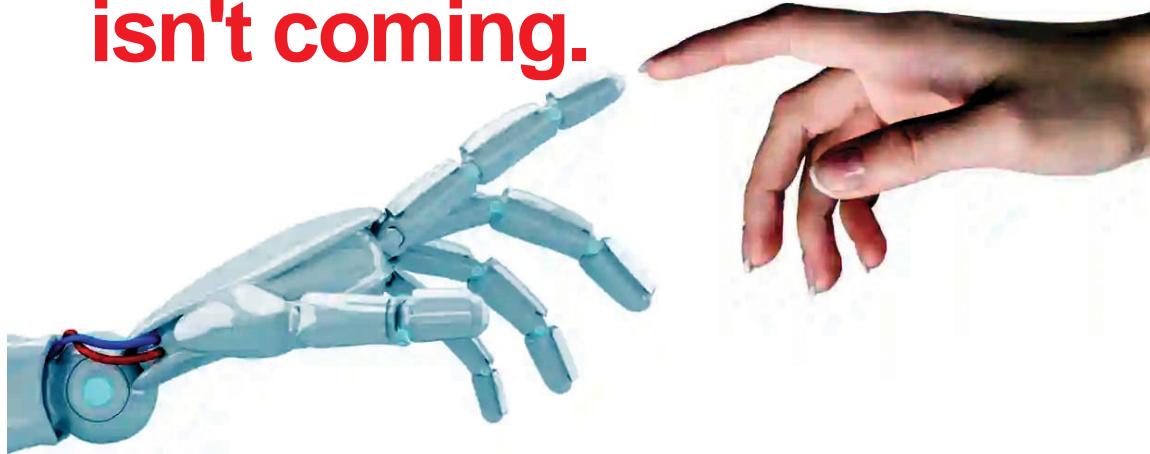
In the field of artificial intelligence, doomerism is as natural as an echo. Every development in the field, or to be more precise every development that the public notices, immediately generates an apocalyptic reaction. The fear is natural enough; it comes partly from the lizard-brain part of us that resists whatever is new and strange, and partly from the movies, which have instructed us, for a century, that artificial intelligence will take the form of an angry god that wants to destroy all humanity.

The recent public letter calling for a six-month ban on AI lab work will not have the slightest measurable effect on the development of artificial intelligence, it goes without saying. But it has changed the conversation: every discussion about artificial intelligence must begin with the possibility of total human extinction. It's silly and, worse, it's an alibi, a distraction from the real dangers technology presents.

The most important thing to remember about tech doomerism in general is that it's a form of advertising, a species of hype. Remember when WeWork was going to end commercial real estate? Remember when crypto was going to lead to the abolition of central banks? Remember when the metaverse was going to end meeting people in real life? Silicon Valley uses apocalypse for marketing purposes: they tell you their tech is going to end the world to show you how important they are.

I have been working with and reporting on AI since 2017, which is prehistoric in this field.

The apocalypse isn't coming.



We must resist cynicism and fear about AI

During that time, I have heard, from intelligent sources who were usually reliable, that the trucking industry was about to end, that China was in possession of a trillion-parameter natural language processing AI with superhuman intelligence. I have heard geniuses - bona fide geniuses - declare that medical schools should no longer teach radiology because it would all be automated soon.

One of the reasons AI doomerism bores me is that it's become familiar - I've heard it all before. To stay sane, I have had to abide by twin principles: I don't believe it until I see it. Once I see it, I believe it.

Many of the most important engineers in the field indulge in AI doomerism; this is unquestionably true. But one of the defining features of our time is that the engineers - who do not, in my experience, have even the faintest education in the

humanities or even recognize that society and culture are worthy of study - simply have no idea how their inventions interact with the world. One of the most prominent signatories of the open letter was Elon Musk, an early investor in OpenAI. He is brilliant at technology. But if you want to know how little he understands about people and their relationships to technology, go on Twitter for five minutes.

Not that there aren't real causes of worry when it comes to AI; it's just that they're almost always about something other than AI. The biggest anxiety - that an artificial general intelligence is about to take over the world - doesn't even qualify as science fiction. That fear is religious. Computers do not have will. Algorithms are a series of instructions. The properties that emerge in the "emergent properties" of artificial intelligence have to be discovered and

established by human beings. The anthropomorphization of statistical pattern-matching machinery is storytelling; it's a movie playing in the collective mind, nothing more. Turning off ChatGPT isn't murder. Engineers who hire lawyers for their chatbots are every bit as ridiculous as they sound.

The much more real anxieties - brought up by the more substantial critics of artificial intelligence - are that AI will super-charge misinformation and will lead to the hollowing out of the middle class by the process of automation. Do I really need to point out that both of these problems predate artificial intelligence by decades, and are political rather than technological?

AI might well make it slightly easier to generate fake content, but the problem of misinformation has never been generation but dissemination. The political space is already saturated with fraud and it's hard to see how AI could make it much worse. In the first quarter of 2019, Facebook had to remove 2.2bn fake profiles; AI had nothing to do with it. The response to the degradation of our information networks - from government and from the social media industry - has been a massive shrug, a bunch of antiquated talk about the first amendment.

Regulating AI is enormously problematic; it involves trying to fathom the unfathomable and make the inherently opaque transparent. But we already know, and have known for over a decade, about the social consequences of social media algorithms. We don't have to

fantasize or predict the effects of Instagram. The research is consistent and established: that technology is associated with higher levels of depression, anxiety and self-harm among children. Yet we do nothing. Vague talk about slowing down AI doesn't solve anything; a concrete plan to regulate social media might.

As for the hollowing out of the middle class, inequality in the United States reached the highest level since 1774 back in 2012. AI may not be the problem. The problem may be the foundational economic order AI is entering. Again, vague talk about an AI apocalypse is a convenient way to avoid talking about the self-consumption of capitalism and the extremely hard choices that self-consumption presents.

The way you can tell that doomerism is just more hype is that its solutions are always terminally vague. The open letter called for a six-month ban. What, exactly, do they imagine will happen over those six months? The engineers won't think about AI? The developers won't figure out ways to use it? Doomerism likes its crises numinous, preferably unsolvable. AI fits the bill. Recently, I used AI to write a novella: *The Death of an Author*.

I won't say that the experience wasn't unsettling. It was quite weird, actually. It felt like I managed to get an alien to write, an alien that is the sum total of our language. The novella itself has, to me anyway, a hypnotic but removed power - inhuman language that makes sense. But the experience didn't make me afraid. It awed me. Let's reside in the awe for a moment, just a moment, before we go to the fear. If we have to think through AI by way of the movies, can we at least do *Star Trek* instead of *Terminator 2*? Something strange has appeared in the sky - let's be a little more Jean-Luc Picard and a little less Klingon in our response. The truth about AI is that nobody - not the engineers who have created it, not the developers converting it into products - understands fully what it is, never mind what its consequences will be. Let's get a sense of what this alien is before we blow it out of the sky. Maybe it's beautiful.





Decoding the Karnataka Election Results in 18 Charts

What does the granular data tell us about voting patterns in Karnataka?

The long-awaited results of the Karnataka general assembly elections 2023 are in, and the Indian National Congress (INC) has emerged as the clear winner with a convincing victory, securing 135 seats and an overall vote share of 42.9%. This is a remarkable achievement for the party, as they haven't won such a massive mandate since the 1989 elections, where they secured 178 seats and a vote share of 43.76%. In the 1978 elections, the Congress party had obtained a vote share of 44.25%, bagging 149 seats. However, it's important to note that prior to 1978, the Karnataka legislative assembly was known as the Mysore legislative assembly and had 216 seats, making any comparison with current results less astute. The INC emerged victorious, securing an impressive 55-seat gain from its previous tally of 80 seats in the 2018 elections. However, it was a different story for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which suffered a massive setback, losing 38 seats from its previous count of 104. The biggest change, though, was the dismal performance of the Janata Dal (Secular), which lost almost 50% of its seats from the 2018 elections. The JD(S) had won 37 seats in the previous election of 2018, but this time, it managed to secure only 19 seats. While the BJP managed to maintain its vote share of 36% from the previous Vidhan Sabha election of 2018, the INC made significant gains by capturing an additional 4.8% of the vote share. Unfortunately, it was bad news for the JD(S), which lost a whopping 5% of its vote share. Interestingly, it seems like the INC may have managed to absorb a significant number of JD(S) votes. We'll dive deeper into this phenomenon as we explore the various political divisions.

Independent candidates managed to capture a respectable 5.2% of the vote share and secure 2 seats in the Vidhan Sabha. Less than 12 hours after the election results were announced, one of the independently elected MLAs, Latha Mallikarjun from AC-104 Harapanahalli, announced her unconditional support for the INC.

The election was closely contested, with parties securing seats by varying margins. The table below highlights the range of seat margins. Surprisingly, some victories were secured by a margin of less than 2,000 votes, with BJP winning Jayanagar by just 16 votes. While a significant number of constituencies saw decisive victories, with more than 74 seats being won by a margin of over 25,000 votes, it's worth noting that 79 assembly constituencies were won by a margin ranging from 10,000 to 25,000 votes. D.K. Shivkumar, president of Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC), secured the highest victory margin of 1,22,392 votes, making him the only MLA candidate to win with a margin of over one lakh votes in the 2023 Karnataka assembly elections. Interestingly, among the top 10 victory margins, eight candidates belong to the Congress and the remaining two are from the BJP. Out of the top 10 highest margin winners in the 2023 Karnataka assembly elections, Laxmi R. Hebbalkar is the only woman MLA. She won from Belgaum Rural with a margin of 56,016 votes, securing the 9th position in the list. In the 2023 Karnataka assembly elections, the victory margin in 12 constituencies was less than 2,000 votes. While the BJP won seven of these constituencies, the remaining five were won by the Congress.

In this closely contested battle, some prominent leaders won by a narrow margin, including Congress leader Dinesh Gundu Rao, who won by just 105 votes. Nayana Motamma, a first-time contestant, secured her win by a margin of 722 votes from Mudigere. Notably, the BJP's C.K. Ramamurthy won the Jayanagar seat by a mere 16 votes, defeating INC's Soumya Reddy. Malur and Srinegre seats were also won by INC with a margin of 248 and 201 votes respectively. In the 16th Karnataka assembly elections of 2023, 10 women candidates were elected, surpassing the previous Vidhan Sabha's count of nine. Ten women candidates out of 185 contestants were successful in winning seats, with Laxmi R. Hebbalkar obtaining the highest victory margin (56,016 votes) among all the winning women candidates and ranking ninth overall in the state. It is worth mentioning that she also had the highest victory margin among all the women MLAs in the 2018 elections as well (51,724 votes). The newly elected Vidhan Sabha comprises four women MLAs from the INC, three from BJP, two from JD(S), and one independent MLA. However, Latha Mallikarjun, has pledged unconditional support to the Congress post the results. The Vidhan Sabha election analysis provides deeper insights when observed across the six political divisions of Karnataka. These divisions are Bengaluru, Belgaum/Kittur/Mumbai, Central, Gulbarga/Kalyana/Hyderabad, Mysuru/Southern, and Coastal Political Division, as shown in the above image. In the Bengaluru Political Division, which is the most urbanised division of Karnataka, the INC has been steadily improving its vote share in the Vidhan Sabha elections over the years - from 37.4% in 2008 to 39.5% in 2013, and finally to 40.7% in the 2023 Vidhan Sabha elections. In 2013, the combined vote share of BJP + KJP + BSRCP was 30.3%. In the 2023 VS results, BJP managed to improve its vote share significantly to 41.2%. BJP has gained both in terms of its seat count (from 11 to 17) and vote share (from 35.8% to 41.2%) in the Bengaluru division. On the other hand, JD(S) has been the biggest loser in this division, with its seat tally reduced from 7 to 1 and vote share from 20.9% to 12.3% between the last two Vidhan Sabha elections.

Four astronauts to begin training for most ambitious Moon mission in over 50 years



Nasa had announced that astronauts Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover, Christina Hammock Koch, and Canadian Space Agency's Jeremy Hansen will become the first crew to return to the Moon.

forefront of all of our future crewed missions. Their flight test expertise and personal bravery as they journey to the Moon will enable the next big step in our Moon to Mars strategy," Nasa's Deputy Administrator Pam Melroy, said in a statement. During the training, the four astronauts receive detailed lessons on the Orion spacecraft and Space Launch System as they learn to operate and monitor systems for the ascent, orbit, coast, and entry phases of the mission, and how to respond in emergency situations. Nasa said that the crew will learn about key systems to establish a foundation for the rest of their

training as they begin practicing how to operate Orion's crew displays, vehicle controls, and audio and imagery systems. "We're building a robust training plan for the crew to ensure they're ready for every aspect of this first mission to the Moon under Artemis on our newest spacecraft and rocket," said Jacki Mahaffey, lead training officer for the Artemis II crew. The crew will also focus on vehicle systems and operations to support normal and potential emergency situations during the two most highly dynamic phases of the mission - ascent and entry. Orbit and coast training will give the crew the skills they need to

execute the rest of their first day in space after launch when they will carry out a rendezvous and proximity operations demonstration.

"The majority of the crew's training will take place at Johnson Space Center, where we have an Orion simulator and a mockup of the crew module to help the crew understand placement and orientation of what's inside. The crew will begin their training in our launch and entry simulator in Houston in the fall, and we plan to begin our integrated simulations between the crew and mission control about 12 months before launch," Jacki Mahaffey added.

Months after their name was announced to be the first astronauts to go around the Moon in over half a century, the Artemis-II crew will begin training for the ambitious mission. The first crewed mission aimed at paving the way for humanity's return to the Moon will see four astronauts go around the Moon in a newly developed spacecraft and return to Earth. The training for the 10-day mission will begin in June and will last for 18 months. Nasa had announced that astronauts Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover, Christina Hammock Koch, and Canadian Space Agency's Jeremy Hansen will become the first crew to return to the Moon since the end of the Apollo missions in the 1970s. "The crew of our Artemis II test flight will pave the way for the incredible science at the

Dust storm sweeps Delhi:

Where did it come from?

The dust storm is expected to continue for another two days till May 18, the IMD said in its daily update.

Strong winds swept across Delhi on Tuesday morning, raising dust and affecting air quality as well as reducing visibility to 1,000 meters, the India Meteorological Department said. The sudden gust of wind affected the air quality in the capital as localised dust was swept above the surface.

The dust storm is expected to continue for another two days till May 18, the IMD said in its daily update adding that the events are very likely in isolated pockets over Haryana & Delhi, West Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan. Similar conditions are also expected over parts of Madhya Pradesh and Vidarbha.

Where did the dust storm come from?

The dust storm was the result of a strong anticyclonic trough that has formed over parts of Northwest India and is headed east. The trough is located 900 meters above the surface of Delhi and is driving winds with gusts of up to 60 kilometers per



hour lifting the localised dust in the air.

Senior IMD scientist Dr. Soma Senroy told IndiaToday.in that there is no moisture in the air which has led to the absence of rain even as the trough forms. "The trough extends in a region covering from Pakistan to Madhya Pradesh in India

covering Rajasthan, Punjab, Himachal, and Delhi," Dr Soma added. An anti-cyclonic trough is a region within a high-pressure system where the atmospheric pressure is relatively higher compared to its surroundings. Anti-cyclonic troughs are often generated by the interaction of cold and warm

air masses. When a cold front overtakes a warm front, the colder air forces the warmer air aloft, creating a stable atmospheric column. This leads to the formation of a high-pressure system with an anti-cyclonic trough. Meteorologists have attributed the dusty conditions to a

combination of intense heat in northwest India over the past five days, parched soil due to the absence of rainfall, and strong winds that have persisted since midnight. The visibility levels at the Palam Observatory, close to the Indira Gandhi International Airport, stood at 1,100 meters at 9 am as compared to 4,000 meters at 9 am on Monday, senior IMD scientist R K Jenamani said. The situation led to a major surge in the PM10 concentration, which rose from 140 micrograms per cubic meter at 4 am to 775 micrograms per cubic meter at 8 am. Dust particles, especially fine particulate matter (PM2.5), can penetrate deep into the respiratory system when inhaled. A partly cloudy sky and very light rain towards the evening could provide marginal relief, the IMD has said. The maximum temperature is predicted to rise to 44 degrees Celsius by Sunday.

Sensex, Nifty open lower amid profit booking after strong rally

The S&P BSE Sensex was down 96.44 points to 61,386.03 at around 9:37 am, while the NSE Nifty 50 fell 26.45 points to 18,260.05.



Benchmark stock market indices opened lower on Wednesday as investors looked to book profits after a strong rally over the past few days. Weaker global cues in the wake of the ongoing US debt ceiling crisis have also made investors nervous.

The S&P BSE Sensex was down 96.44 points to 61,386.03 at around 9:37 am, while the NSE Nifty 50 fell 26.45 points to 18,260.05. Broader market indices were mostly mixed, with a positive bias.

Most of the major sectoral indices were trading in negative territory, but the losses were limited in early trade. Nifty

Financial Services, Nifty IT, Nifty Metal and Nifty Realty were the top drags among sectoral indices. The top five gainers on the Nifty 50 were BPCL, Hero MotoCorp, Bharti Airtel, Bajaj Auto and Cipla. On the other hand, HDFC Life, JSW Steel, Eicher Motors, Infosys and Tata Consumer Products were the top losers.

Going forward, analysts expect the domestic markets to see further correction due to profit booking. While foreign institutional investors bought shares worth Rs 1,406.86 crore, domestic institutional investors sold share worth Rs 886.17 crore on May 16, showed

provisional data from the NSE. "The charts indicate that the Nifty may get support at 18,220, followed by 18,175 and 18,150. If the index advances, 18,350 would be the initial key resistance level to watch out for, followed by 18,400 and 18,450," said Deven Mehata, research analyst at Choice Broking.

"The market's drop yesterday can be interpreted as profit taking or a running correction. On a closing basis, the positional perspective remains buy on dips with a stop loss of 18200. If the Nifty closes below 18200 and the Bank Nifty closes below 43200, the market would likely correct further," he added.

Gold, silver price today, May 17, 2023: Precious metals record hike on MCX



Gold Price Today 17 May 2023: Both gold and silver are trading on the higher side of the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX) on Wednesday. Check the latest city-wise prices here. After retailing on the lower side yesterday, both gold and silver prices are retailing on the higher side of the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX) on Wednesday, May 17.

Gold futures, maturing on June 5, 2023, stood at Rs 60,385 per 10 grams on the MCX, after recording a hike of Rs 141 or 0.23 per cent.

Similarly, silver futures, maturing on July 5, 2023, also witnessed a jump of Rs 85 or 0.12 per cent and were trading at Rs 72,675 per kg on the MCX.

The prices of gold and silver stood at Rs 60,244 per 10 grams and Rs 72,585 per kg

respectively when the market closed on May 16.

The gold and silver prices in India depend on several factors, including the value of the rupee against the dollar. Global demand also plays a key role in determining the trends observed in the rate of precious metals. GOLD PRICE ON INTERNATIONAL MARKET Gold prices steadied on Wednesday below the \$2,000-mark as investors fretted over the outcome from the U.S. debt-limit negotiations, with a firmer dollar keeping prices in check, news agency Reuters reported.

According to the latest metal report, spot gold ticked up 0.2 per cent to \$1,992.56 per ounce by 0254 GMT. U.S. gold futures edged 0.1 per cent higher to \$1,995.10.

Bharti Airtel misses Q4 revenue estimates on soft subscriber growth

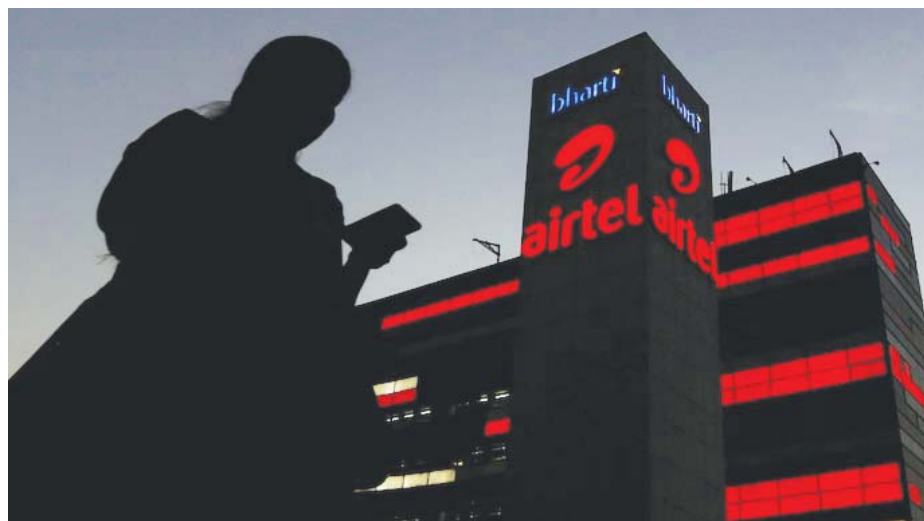
Bharti Airtel's consolidated revenue from operations rose to 360.09 billion rupees (\$4.40 billion) for the quarter ended March 31, from 315 billion rupees a year ago, it said in an exchange filing.

Bharti Airtel Ltd, India's No.2 telecom carrier by subscribers, on Tuesday reported fourth-quarter revenue that fell short of analysts' expectations, as 4G subscriber growth moderated.

The company's consolidated revenue from operations rose to 360.09 billion rupees (\$4.40 billion) for the quarter ended March 31, from 315 billion rupees a year ago, it said in an exchange filing.

Analysts, on an average, had expected a revenue of 365.52 billion rupees, according to Refinitiv IBES data.

Analysts have flagged concerns of slowing revenue growth due to the absence of tariff hikes in recent



years to cushion the load of telecom firms spending billions of dollars on buying 5G spectrum auction last August.

Airtel said its expenses in the quarter rose nearly 12%. The company's average revenue per user (ARPU), a key performance

indicator for telecom firms, was at 193 rupees, flat from the quarter ago, but up 8.4% year-on-year.

Last month, market leader Reliance Jio, the telecom arm of conglomerate Reliance Industries RELI.NS, said its fourth-quarter ARPU stood at 178.8 rupees, an increase of only 0.3% from a quarter ago and a 6.7% climb from a year ago.

Airtel said it added 7.4 million 4G data customers in the March quarter, an increase of 3.4% from a quarter ago. It had posted a 3.1% increase in 4G users in the December quarter. Shares of the company closed 1.2% lower at 787.35 rupees ahead of the results. They declined 7% in the March quarter.

WHO advises against use of sugar substitutes for weight loss

Findings suggest that use of non-sugar sweeteners (NSS) does not provide any long-term benefit in reducing body fat in adults or children

The World Health Organization (WHO) has advised against the use of non-sugar sweeteners to control body weight or reduce the risk of non-communicable diseases. The recommendation is based on the findings of a review of the available evidence which suggests that use of non-sugar sweeteners (NSS) does not provide any long-term benefit in reducing body fat in adults or children.

The findings also suggest that there may be potential undesirable impact from long-term use of NSS, such as an increased risk of type 2

diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and mortality in adults, the WHO said.

"Replacing free sugars with NSS does not help with weight control in the long term. People need to consider other ways to reduce free sugars intake, such as consuming food with naturally occurring sugars, like fruit, or unsweetened food and beverages," said Francesco Branca, WHO Director for Nutrition and Food Safety.

"NSS are not essential dietary factors and have no nutritional value. People should reduce the sweetness of the diet altogether, starting early in life, to improve

their health," Branca said in a statement.

The recommendation applies to all people except individuals with pre-existing diabetes and includes all synthetic and naturally occurring or modified non-nutritive sweeteners that are not classified as sugars.

These sweeteners are found in manufactured foods and beverages, or sold on their own to be added to foods and beverages by consumers. Common NSS include acesulfame K, aspartame, advantame, cyclamates, neotame, saccharin, sucralose, stevia and stevia derivatives.



The guideline does not apply to the WHO.

personal care and hygiene products containing NSS, such as toothpaste, skin cream, and medications, or to low-calorie sugars and sugar alcohols (polyols), which are sugars or sugar derivatives containing calories and are therefore not considered NSS, according to

The WHO guideline on NSS is part of a suite of existing and forthcoming guidelines on healthy diets that aim to establish lifelong healthy eating habits, improve dietary quality and decrease the risk of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) worldwide.

Sleep apnoea may raise risk of long Covid, reveals study

Women show 89 per cent increased likelihood of having long Covid if they have obstructive sleep apnea, compared to 59 per cent increased chance for men

People with obstructive sleep apnoea may be at significantly higher risk of suffering long Covid, according to a study. Obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA) is a common disorder characterised by repetitive episodes of nocturnal breathing cessation due to upper airway collapse. However, the condition is often underdiagnosed.

The study, published online in the journal 'Sleep', found that observed increases in risk for long Covid in adults with sleep apnoea remained significant even when the research team accounted for obesity, hypertension, diabetes, and hospitalisation at the time of their initial Covid infection, all known to independently contribute to risk for long Covid. Women showed an 89 per cent increased likelihood of having long Covid if they had obstructive sleep apnea, compared to a 59 per cent increased chance for men.

While the underlying associations aren't clear, women with sleep apnea included in the study may have had more severe conditions than men.

Severity of obstructive sleep apnea was not controlled for, but

sleep apnea is more likely to be undiagnosed in women-which could create a sample with women who have more severe cases. Other studies have also found that women may be more likely to be diagnosed with long Covid and seek health care for the condition.

"There's still so much to uncover about long Covid, but this study will inform clinical care by identifying patients that should be watched more closely," said corresponding author Hannah Mandel, a senior research scientist at New York University -

Langone Health, supported by the US National Institutes of Health (NIH).

"People with sleep apnoea who get infected with Covid should seek early treatment, pay attention to their symptoms, and keep up with their vaccinations to lower the risk of infection in the first place," she added.

The team reviewed data across three research networks of patients who had tested positive for Covid-19 between March 2020 and February 2022. Two networks included adult patients-with 330,000 patients and 1.7 million



patients. The third included 102,000 children.

In contrast to the patterns seen in adults, the contribution of sleep apnoea to the risk of long Covid disappeared in children when the researchers controlled for other risk factors, including obesity.

Long Covid is an umbrella term for one or more symptoms that people can experience for weeks, months, or years after a Covid-19 infection. The symptoms include brain fog, fatigue, depression, and sleep disorders.

Study reveals how brain interprets taste

Taste is a complicated neurological experience that has the potential to reveal vast, and maybe startling, information on how the brain makes sense of sensations and the organisation of brain networks. A National Institutes of Health-funded study conducted by Christian H. Lemon, Ph.D., an associate professor in the Department of Biology in the Dodge Family College of Arts and Sciences,

aims to better understand how the brain processes taste and how those neural connections might change.

Taste is associated with a variety of brain functions, including the pleasure of tasting something sweet. Taste is a component of flavour, and it includes the pain felt while tasting a hot pepper. There is, however, a knowledge deficit on how taste and flavour preferences develop and alter

through time.

"Taste is a component of flavor; it contributes sensations like saltiness and sweetness. When we're eating food, we get a lot of pleasure from taste and flavor, but taste is actually a sensory system that we really don't fully understand in terms of how it works in guiding eating behavior and also how it works in the brain," Lemon said.

This project will build on a

discovery made by Lemon's research group while studying a part of the brain where taste sensations can excite neurons in the midbrain region. Importantly, many other senses from various parts of the body are processed in the same neural location, with preliminary data suggesting some body senses can activate brain cells excited by tastes.



Cannes 2023: Manushi Chhillar, Esha Gupta slay in white gowns

Cannes 2023: One of the most prestigious film festivals celebrated all across the world kickstarted on May 16 and will go on till May 27. The 76th Cannes Film Festival is a star-studded affair already in the first two days. The A-listers of the film and fashion fraternity from all over the world are attending the film festival. Stars such as Manushi Chhillar, Esha Gupta and Sara Ali Khan walked the red carpet at Cannes and made the red carper

look better with their sartorial sense of fashion. While Sara opted for a traditional look in a pastel lehenga, Manushi and Esha opted for white gowns for their red-carpet look. Manushi looked stunning as ever as she picked a white tulle gown for this year's Cannes Film Festival. Manushi, representing Walkers and Co, a brand focused in providing the young and promising creators a global space, played muse to fashion designer

house Fovari as she picked the stunning gown. Manushi's white gown came with off-shoulder details, corset details, a plunging neckline and a white tulle long train featuring frill details throughout. Manushi wore her tresses open in wavy curls with a middle part as she decked up in minimal makeup and let her ensemble do all the talking. Esha, on the other hand, looked like a dream in a white satin gown with dramatic collars, cascading to a

plunging neckline covered in see-through mesh details. The mesh also featured white floral embellishments. With wrap details at the waist, the white satin gown further cascaded to a long gown with mini pleats and a high slit in one side. The actor wore her tresses into a bun and decked up in nude eyeshadow, black eyeliner, mascara-laden eyelashes, drawn eyebrows, contoured cheeks and a shade of maroon lipstick.



Mouni Roy serves a perfect vacay look in bralette and sarong

Mouni decked up in a white ruched bralette with a plunging neckline and halter neckline. She further teamed it with a multicoloured satin sarong.

Mouni Roy is currently living it up in Italy. The actor recently took off for her vacation in Italy

and since then, her Instagram profile has been replete with pictures of her ventures in the stunning location. The actor is currently in Capri, Italy and is giving us all kinds of travel goals with her snippets. Mouni, a day back, shared a string of pictures of herself,

lazing by the balcony in a stunning ensemble. Check out the pictures. (Instagram/ @imouniroy) Mouni played muse to fashion designer house Tizzi and picked an ensemble to embrace the vacay vibes in Capri, Italy. (Instagram/@imouniroy)

Link between obesity with oral cancer immune escape: Study

A mechanism for how obesity impacts the capacity of some oral malignancies to bypass the immune system has been uncovered in a study. A team from the University of Michigan Rogel Cancer Center and School of Dentistry, led by Yu Leo Lei, D.D.S., Ph.D. Obesity helps to produce a sort of tumour microenvironment that promotes tumour growth, according to this study published in Cell Reports. The link between saturated fatty acids, the STING-type-I interferon pathway, and NLRC3 explains how this happens. "We tend to think about the increased risks for gastrointestinal tumors, breast cancer, pancreatic cancer, and ovarian cancer when it comes to obesity," said Lei, a pathologist-immunologist and lead author of this study. "Multiple recent prospective cohorts involving millions of individuals from several

continents revealed a previously underappreciated link between obesity and oral cancer risks." "Myeloid cells in obese mice were insensitive to STING agonists and were more suppressive of T cell activation compared to the myeloid cells from lean hosts," explained Lei. This feature drove the loss of immune subsets that were crucial for anti-tumor immunity in the tumor microenvironment. The team found that saturated fatty acids can block the STING pathway, which is induced by cytosolic DNA and promotes antigen-presenting cell maturation, by inducing a protein called NLRC3. Lei says this is the first study establishing a mechanistic link between obesity with oral cancer immune escape. "We're excited about the translational implications," he continued.

Kim and Khloe Kardashian are ab fab as they bare their sculpted midriffs in racy cut-out ensembles in NYC



Kim and Khloe Kardashian flaunted their chiseled midriffs when they were spotted stepping out in New York this Tuesday. The dynamic duo were headed to the upfronts for Hulu, the streamer that serves as the home of their family's latest reality show The Kardashians.

For her latest outing Kim, 42, slid into a peekaboo maxi dress that perfectly played up her hourglass frame. Her flesh-flashing ensemble allowed her to hint not only at her slender torso, but also her world-famous derriere.

Sharpening her unmistakable features with makeup, she balanced expertly on a towering pair of black stilettos and swept her dark hair back into a ponytail.

Demonstrating the reason she once hosted a show called *Revenge Body*, Khloe, 38, slipped into a tiny crop top that put her impressive abs on display.

Heightening the effect with a belly chain, she pulled on a sheer floor-length wrap skirt and jazzed up the look with a gleaming silver scarf at the waist.

She let her blonde hair cascade freely over her shoulders and warded off the summertime rays with a gleaming pair of black shades.

Their latest sighting comes the day Kim went on the Today show and offered an update on her long-running attempts to become an attorney. Kim hopes to follow in the footsteps of her late

father Robert Kardashian, who achieved notoriety in the 1990s as a member of OJ Simpson's legal 'dream team.'

To that end she has spent years studying law, and in late 2021 she finally passed California's practice 'baby bar' exam after four tries.

In the meantime she has thrown herself into legal activism, with her efforts to spring convicts from jail sweeping her to an Oval Office meeting with Donald Trump that prompted the New York Post to dub her 'Kim Thong Un.'

'I'm still studying,' she told Savannah Guthrie on the Today show this Tuesday. 'I just actually, I'm in Constitutional Law 1 and 2 right now. It's my toughest, not the biggest fan of it. I've been sharing my struggle.'

She added: 'But with that said, I took two - I took a midterm yesterday. I got 100% and then I got a 95 on my other midterm. So I feel that like gives me that boost of confidence again just to push through and hopefully in the next, like, year or so I can just take the official bar and be done.'

Meanwhile in an interview with Cosmopolitan UK a little over a year go, Khloe described Kim as her 'PR crisis helper.'

She made the remarks after her ex Tristan Thompson admitted to fathering a child with another woman while he was still with Khloe. Tristan and Khloe, who have two children together, had a rollercoaster on-off relationship buffeted by the NBA love rat's serial infidelity.



Urvashi Rautela wears unique lizard necklace at Cannes Film Festival 2023, internet reacts: Chipkali agar zinda ho gai?

Urvashi Rautela often grabs attention for her unique sartorial choices. On Wednesday, the actor shared photos and videos from her first appearance at Cannes Film Festival 2023, where she wore a larger-than-life pink

dress. While some praised her over-the-top outfit, calling it 'beautiful', others could not get past her choice of accessories - a golden lizard necklace, and matching earrings. Urvashi was seen in multiple designer looks at last year's 75th Cannes Film

Festival. On Tuesday, she made her mark at Cannes Film Festival 2023 in a pink gown. This is Urvashi's first look from the prestigious film festival this year. The actor took to Instagram to share photos and videos of herself, which

attracted all kinds of reactions. She wrote in her caption, "76th annual Cannes Film Festival red carpet opening..." One commented on the actor's video, "Gale mein chipkali agar zinda ho gai toh photoshoot chod kar aise bhagoge aap (You

will run away from the photoshoot, if that lizard around your neck 'wakes up')." Another one said, "I cannot unsee that lizard necklace... so wild..." Another commented, "What is that around her neck?" However, some liked the look. One fan called Urvashi the 'queen of Cannes 2023'. Another said, "You nailed it, such a great look." Others left comments like 'fabulous' and 'beautiful'. A fan also commented, 'So finally @urvashirautela is creating history again at Cannes...'

This year, Urvashi will participate in a photocall launch for her upcoming film, a biopic on the iconic late actor Parveen Babi. Urvashi will be playing Parveen Babi in the biopic. Sharing her excitement about the role, the actor had said in a recent statement, "Yes, you've heard right. I've officially signed and will be leading the Parveen Babi biopic as an actress. I'm truly grateful to Cannes Film Festival, as it's one of the most prestigious film festivals in the world and a significant career milestone." Urvashi was last seen in *Agent* alongside Akhil Akkineni.

Priyanka Chopra Jonas

flashes her midriff in a scarlet sleeved crop top and bejewelled floral sarong at the Bulgari party in Venice

Priyanka Chopra Jonas wowed onlookers as she attended the Bulgari Meditteranea High Jewelry event in Venice on Tuesday.

The actress, 40, flashed her midriff in a scarlet sleeved crop top and a coordinating sarong featuring a bejewelled floral decoration.

She accessorised her look with a colourful necklace and her glossy brunette tresses tumbled down her back.

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Bulgari is luxury fashion house founded in 1884 and known for its jewellery, it's pieces have been worn by the likes of Elizabeth Taylor, Sarah Jessica Parker and Zendaya.

Priyanka's appearance comes after she was announced as Grazia's latest global cover star in which she talks about 'being cancelled, fickle fame, rejection and being patronised on set.'

The Citadel and Love Again actress is gracing the cover of Grazia UK plus 12 other international editions for their luxury issue this month.

Talking about her success, she said: 'My job is extremely inconsistent. I could get cancelled

tomorrow, people could decide I'm not flavour of the month.

'I have never been the kind of person who thinks I have made it.'

She acknowledges her huge success in Bollywood did not immediately translate to Hollywood and she had intended to bring music to Hollywood.

She told the publication: 'There were so many times I wanted to quit. I was tired of rejection. I felt dismissed and patronised on set, like people didn't believe I could do my job even when Bollywood is as huge as it is.'

'I had taken such a big risk leaving my career in India and that really was a concern for me. I felt like I had bitten off more than I could chew.'

Priyanka has been happily married to singer Nick Jonas since 2018. They welcomed a daughter Malti, via surrogate, in January 2022.

She acknowledged that neither she nor Nick could balance work and parenthood without the support of their families.

She said: 'My cousins and I all went to each other's homes when parents were working - it's a very Indian thing and Nick's parents are hands on too.'

'Right now, my daughter's in New York with my mom, probably eating ice-cream for dinner, having the time of her life.'

The latest issue of Grazia, available on UK newsstands and digitally from Tuesday May 16 will include an exclusive interview with Priyanka.



Khloe Kardashian sizzles in a daring snakeskin dress



Khloe Kardashian uploaded a new Instagram post on Tuesday to share a slew of throwback photos while wearing a daring dress to attend an Usher concert in Las Vegas.

The Good American founder, 38 - who donned a revealing outfit to join sister, Kim Kardashian, for Hulu upfronts in NYC - captioned the snaps to her 306 million followers, 'That one time, we FINALLY made it to see Usher in Vegas.'

A majority of the pictures showed the mother of two climbing up the steps to enter a private jet that was headed to Sin City to watch Usher during his residency.

The sleeveless, Alaïa snakeskin dress contained a high-neck and circular cutouts towards her lower waist for a sultry flare, as well as thigh-high slits on each side.

Khloe slipped into a pair of open-toed, gold heels with straps that wrapped around towards her knees to complete her overall ensemble for the festivities. Her long locks were parted in the middle, and effortlessly flowed down past her

shoulders in light waves.

While climbing up the stairs to enter the luxurious jet, the TV personality carried a light blue, crocodile-embossed purse in her left hand to hold a few items she needed during the fun getaway.

The star was joined by older sister, Kim, and close friend, Kimora Lee Simmons, and the trio previously jumped to their social media pages to document the concert, which took place on April 29.

The Love In This Club hitmaker kicked off his Las Vegas residency last month on April 14 and is slated to come to an end later this year on October 28.

Khloe also struck a few poses to confidently flaunt her sultry dress once she was inside the aircraft, and showed off her curves in a close-up snap of the ensemble.

During the concert performance, Usher notably approached the trio, who were also accompanied by pals, Tracy Romulus, Stephanie Shepherd, Natalie Halcro and Olivia Pierson.

Social media users and celebrities jumped to the comment section of the

throwback post, with Chloe Bailey penning, 'so so pretty!'

Shortly before uploading the Instagram photo series, Khloe was spotted exiting the Ritz-Carlton hotel in the heart of the Big Apple to attend the upfronts for Hulu, alongside Kim, who celebrated the opening of her SKIMS pop-up shop at Rockefeller Center.

While the SKIMS founder donned a black, figure-hugging dress with multiple cutouts on each side, Khloe donned a fitted, black skirt that fell down towards her ankles.

She added a sleeveless, black cropped top to show off her toned midriff and added a silver belly chain as well as a chunky, chrome scarf embellishment on the front.

The two sisters attended a Disney presentation during Upfront week in NYC. According to Variety, the annual event, which will take place from May 15 through May 17, officially presents plans for programming for the 'upcoming TV season.'