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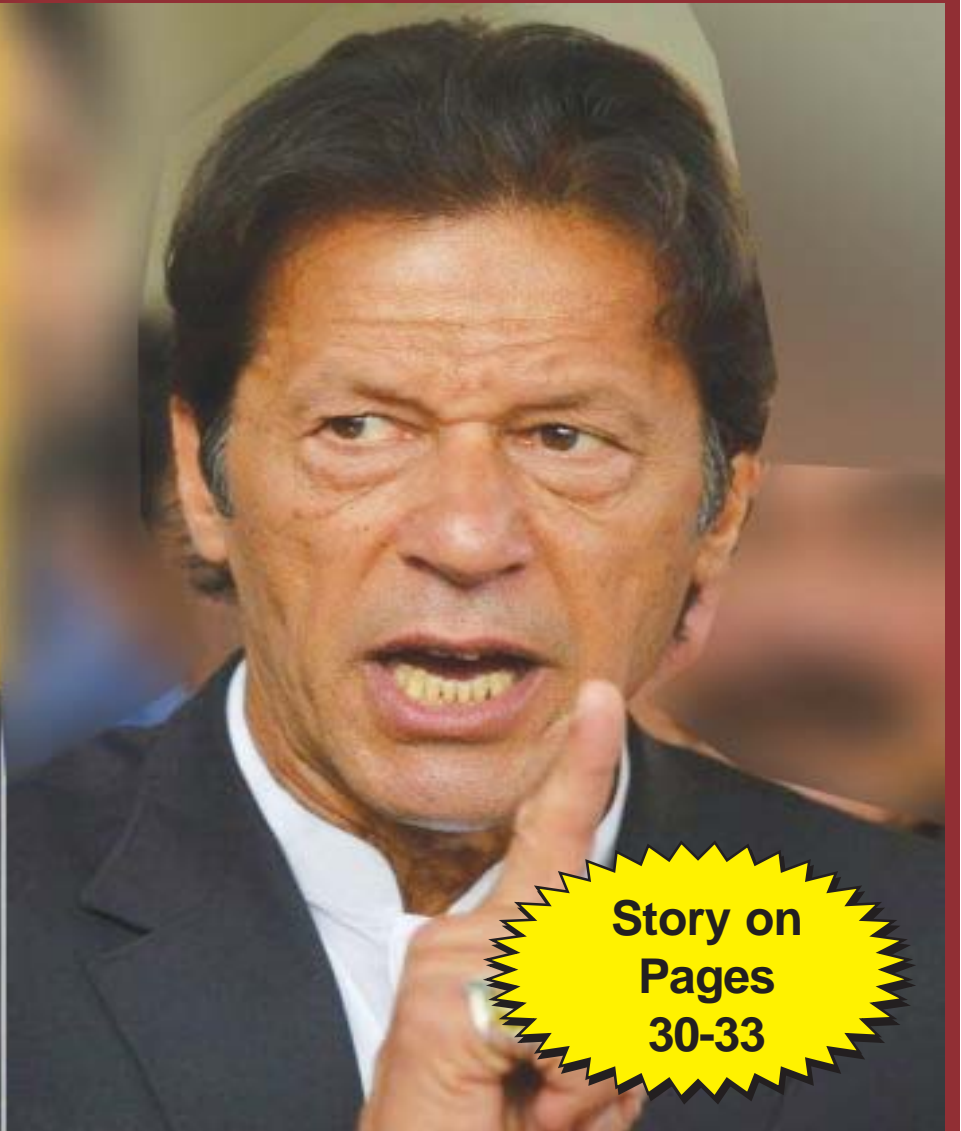
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Hope for Indo-Pak peace, with caution

Pakistan offers conditional peace, India says onus on Islamabad to end terror. The winds of a tentative peace are once again blowing in India and Pakistan. The two neighbours have renewed their commitment to a nearly two-decade-old ceasefire, which had existed in name only since 2013, but had started to fray from 2007-08. Will peace at the LoC pave the way for a wider process between India and Pakistan?



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India's Role in the Global Efforts to Combat the Current Pandemic



By Manu Shah

Recently Dr. Vivek Kavadi, (Chief Radiation Oncology Officer, US Oncology) moderated a distinguished panel of doctors featuring Dr. Peter Hotez (Dean, National School of Tropical Medicine) and Dr. James McDeavitt (Dean of Clinical Affairs, Baylor College of Medicine) in a webinar hosted by IACCGH.

The discussion focused on "COVID-19: Vaccination and Potential Return to Normalcy - If and When" and tracked the outcome of the vaccine rollout underway across the country. Consul General of India in Houston Aseem Mahajan

participated as a special guest. Welcoming the attendees, Executive Director Jagdip Ahluwalia highlighted the chamber's mission of providing relevant and timely information to its members and partnering organizations while President Tarush Anand spoke of the chamber's ongoing efforts to strengthen the bridge between the medical community and mainstream business as well as between Houston and India. Describing vaccines as "one of the highest expressions of science in pursuit of humanitarian goals," Chief Radiation Oncology Officer, US Oncology Dr. Vivek Kavadi

noted that since the first dialogue with leaders from the Baylor School of Medicine in April 2020, over 28 million people had contracted the virus in the US and more than half a million Americans had tragically died. Lives and businesses had been upended but the breakthrough on the vaccine front has been one reason for cautious optimism. More than 73 million vaccines doses have been administered to date. 15% of the population has received one dose while 7% have received both doses.

Dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine, Baylor College of Medicine Dr. Peter Hotez, whose lab is collaborating with premier Indian pharmaceutical companies on a low cost vaccine, applauded India's tremendous vaccine making capacity and its huge contribution to the world. Tagging it as "India's gift to the world," he observed that the two mRNA vaccines may not impact the world's low and middle income countries but India's vaccines, made in collaboration with universities such as Baylor

College of Medicine and Oxford University, have "rescued the world" and its contributions must not to be underestimated. This, he stated, will be remembered "as a time when India really stepped up in a major way as a global player." Dr. Hotez added that he felt compelled to make this statement because "it's a story that's not really getting out in the world."

He also noted mounting evidence that vaccines not only "interrupt symptomatic illness and keep you out of the hospital" but halt asymptomatic transmission as well. However, a troubling development is that the vaccines work well against the UK B.1.1.7 variant now accelerating across the US but doesn't work quite as well against the variant coming out of South Africa. It is likely that all vaccines will require a booster because the durability of protection for the vaccines is unknown and to create an added immune response that's targeted at the South African variant. The winter storm that hit

Texas and the resulting power grid collapse unfortunately put Texas "at the bottom of the nation in terms of vaccinations." Regarding reopening of schools, the priority, he stated, should be to get teachers and the school staff vaccinated as quickly as possible.

Thanking Dr. Hotez for his unstinting tribute to India's efforts in getting the vaccines out to the world, Consul General Aseem Mahajan observed that India was "running one of the largest vaccination drives in the world." He expressed his pride that India is not only the biggest producer of generic drugs, has the largest number of FDA approved facilities but is the largest vaccine manufacturer in the world producing millions of doses. More importantly, in keeping with its "tradition of sharing with the world," India has exported these vaccines to many countries. He also noted the upswing in the medical partnerships emerging between the US and India in this pandemic.

US To Reconsider Objections To H-1B Visas During Donald Trump Regime

(Insider Bureau)- The Biden administration on Friday said it is willing to reconsider the objections or adverse decisions to foreign workers on visas like H-1B due to the three policy memos by the previous Trump administration which now have been rescinded. The move is expected to come to the rescue of a large number of Indian IT professionals who were having a tough time during the previous Trump administration due to various policies and memorandums on non-immigrant work visas, in particular H-1B. US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) on Friday announced "it may reopen and/or reconsider adverse decisions" on Form I-129, Petition for a Nonimmigrant Worker, made based on three rescinded policy memos. USCIS said it will generally use its discretion to accept a motion to reopen filed more than 30 days after the decision, if filed before the end of the validity period requested on the petition or labour condition application, whichever is earlier, and the decision was based on one or more policies in the three rescinded H-1B memoranda.

On June 17, 2020, USCIS issued Policy Memorandum 602-0114, which officially rescinded two prior policy memoranda. First titled "Determining Employer-Employee Relationship for Adjudication of H-1B Petitions, Including Third-Party Site Placements," that was issued on January 8, 2010; and second "Contracts and Itineraries Requirements for H-1B Petitions Involving Third-Party Worksites," issued on February 22, 2018. On February 3, 2021, USCIS issued Policy Memorandum 602-0142.1, which officially rescinded PM-602-0142, "Rescission of the December 22, 2000 "Guidance memo on H1B computer related positions", issued on March 31, 2017. Both Policy Memorandum 602-0114 and Policy Memorandum 602-0142.1 state that they apply to "any pending or new [H-1B Petitions], including motions on and appeals of revocations and denials of H-1B classification." USCIS said a petitioner may request that it reopen and/or reconsider adverse decisions based on the three rescinded policy memos by properly filing Form I-290B, Notice of Appeal or Motion, accompanied by the appropriate fee.



1 in 7 children faces hunger.

There's more than enough food in America for every child who struggles with hunger. Help get kids the food they need by supporting Feeding America, the nationwide network of food banks. Together, we can solve hunger™. Join us at [FeedingAmerica.org](https://www.FeedingAmerica.org)



City Providing a Total of \$ 160,000 in Grant Awards to Neighborhood non-profits helping small businesses recover from Covid-19

(SAI Bureau)- New York - NYC Department of Small Business Services (SBS) Commissioner Jonnel Doris today announced that the City will award six nonprofit community-based development organizations (CBDOs) a total of \$160,000 through the Strategic Impact COVID-19 Commercial District Support Grant.

"We are thrilled to award additional funding to our neighborhood non-profits to revitalize our most impacted commercial corridors," said Jonnel Doris, Commissioner of the Department of Small Business Services. "We look forward to the continued work

these organizations will do to support small businesses in a post-COVID-19 economy."

The Strategic Impact Grant was designed to help execute local COVID-19 recovery support for small businesses and strengthen NYC's commercial corridors. In January, the City awarded \$750,000 to 25 phase-one

recipients. To encourage application submissions from additional neighborhoods, SBS opened a second phase of the grant program in January 2021.

Grant recipients are nonprofit CBDOs that serve one or more of the targeted 38 neighborhoods, selected by the City's Racial Inclusion and Equity (RIE) taskforce. Recipients also include organizations providing technical assistance to CBDOs across the city. The following six organizations are receiving the grant:

Bronx

"Kingsbridge-Riverdale-Van Cortlandt Development Corporation (Kingsbridge, Jerome Park)

Brooklyn

"Bridge Street Development Corp (Bedford-Stuyvesant)

Manhattan

"Morningside Heights Community Coalition (Morningside Heights)

Queens

"Urban Upbound (Queensbridge) Queens Chamber of Commerce (Corona, Briarwood) Staten Island

"Staten Island Chamber of Commerce (St. George, Stapleton) The Association for Neighborhood & Housing Development (ANHD)



will continue to use the Citywide Strategic Impact Grant to provide technical assistance and implementation support to CBDOs that are awarded Single Neighborhood Strategic Impact grants in the neighborhoods listed above.

"We are excited to partner with SBS in their critical efforts to

extend relief to the small businesses that provide essential goods and services, as well as employment, in the neighborhoods most impacted by the economic devastation of COVID-19," said Barika Williams, Executive Director of Association for

Neighborhood & Housing Development (ANHD). "By expanding the capacities of community-based organizations working in commercial corridors, the Strategic Impact Grant will enable small businesses to access the resources that can protect them from potential displacement and permanent closure,"

Applications for a third phase will open on March 15 and close in April. It will

target the following neighborhoods:

Bronx: Eastchester-Edenwald-Baychester, Williamsbridge-Olinville

" Brooklyn: Midwood, Flatbush " Queens: Jackson Heights, Queens Village, Woodhaven, Richmond Hill, South Ozone Park, Kew Gardens

For more information on the Strategic Impact Grant, visit nyc.gov/strategicimpactgrant. About the NYC Department of Small Business Services (SBS)

SBS helps unlock economic potential and create economic security for all New Yorkers by

connecting New Yorkers to good jobs, creating stronger businesses, and building vibrant neighborhoods across the five boroughs. For more information on all SBS services, go to nyc.gov/sbs, call 311, and follow us on

Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

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Steps to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 if you are sick

FOLLOW THE STEPS BELOW: If you are sick with COVID-19 or think you might have it, follow the steps below to help protect other people in your home and community.

Stay home except to get medical care

- Stay home:** People who are mildly ill with COVID-19 are able to recover at home. Do not leave, except to get medical care. Do not visit public areas.

- Stay in touch with your doctor.** Call before you get medical care. Be sure to get care if you feel worse or you think it is an emergency.

- Avoid public transportation:** Avoid using public transportation, ride-sharing, or taxis.

Separate yourself from other people in your home, this is known as home isolation

- Stay away from others:** As much as possible, you should stay in a specific "sick room" and away from other people in your home. Use a separate bathroom, if available.

- Limit contact with pets & animals:** You should restrict contact with pets and other animals, just like you would around other people.

- Although there have not been reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with COVID-19, it is still recommended that people with the virus limit contact with animals until more information is known.
- When possible, have another member of your household care for your animals while you are sick with COVID-19. If you must care for your pet or be around animals while you are sick, wash your hands before and after you interact with them. See COVID-19 and Animals for more information.

Call ahead before visiting your doctor

- Call ahead:** If you have a medical appointment, call your doctor's office or emergency department, and tell them you have or may have COVID-19. This will help the office protect themselves and other patients.

Wear a facemask if you are sick

- If you are sick:** You should wear a facemask when you are around other people and before you enter a healthcare provider's office.

- If you are caring for others:** If the person who is sick is not able to wear a facemask (for example, because it causes trouble breathing), then people who live in the home should stay in a different room. When caregivers enter the room of the sick person, they should wear a facemask. Visitors, other than caregivers, are not recommended.

Cover your coughs and sneezes

- Cover:** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Dispose:** Throw used tissues in a lined trash can.

- Wash hands:** Immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Clean your hands often

- Wash hands:** Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. This is especially important after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food.

- Hand sanitizer:** If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry.

- Soap and water:** Soap and water are the best option, especially if hands are visibly dirty.

- Avoid touching:** Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

Avoid sharing personal household items

- Do not share:** Do not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding with other people in your home.



CS 194129-A 03/26/2020

cdc.gov/COVID19

Expect Gulf Nations To Help In Return Of Indians To Work: S Jaishankar

The government has led the way for an economic recovery at home, and similar untiring efforts are being made to help renew livelihoods of Indians abroad, the minister said.

(Insider Bureau)- External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Monday said India is fully cognizant of the employment concerns of people working abroad and expects governments in the Gulf to be helpful in facilitating the early return of those compelled to return home due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a statement in the Lok Sabha on "Recent Developments Pertaining to the Welfare Abroad of Indians, NRIs and PIOs", the minister said the focus of the government's efforts in the last few months has now shifted to Indians going back to their usual places of work, study and domicile. To that end, air transport bubble arrangements have been concluded with 27 countries so far. "The Government is fully cognizant of

the employment concerns that our people abroad have in the context of the COVID pandemic. Especially in the Gulf, there has been tremendous economic and social disruption that has impacted them. We have softened it somewhat but real challenges are there to be addressed. Let me assure the House that we take this as a priority," he said. The government has led the way for an economic recovery at home, and similar untiring efforts are being made to help renew livelihoods of Indians abroad, the minister said. "The air travel arrangements are a necessary enabling measure. But beyond that, we have been active in urging our partner governments to look sympathetically at the employment of our citizens as they chart their own recovery pathway. The Gulf has been the

focal point of our endeavours, though this is a global effort on our part," Mr Jaishankar said.

In recent months, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has engaged the leaders of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar and Oman, while Mr Jaishankar has travelled to UAE, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman to discuss the governments there the welfare of people there. "I have recently hosted the UAE Foreign Minister in India and expect to do so with that of Kuwait very soon," the minister said.

"From our recent interactions, we have reason to expect that partner governments in the Gulf would be helpful in facilitating the early return of many who were compelled to go back because of the pandemic," Mr Jaishankar added. He said the support extended from India for the stay and travel of Indian



citizens was warmly acknowledged by the community and the governments alike. "The provision of medical supplies and food items from India as an exceptional gesture to the Gulf during this period clearly had powerful resonance. So did the arrival of health professionals and medical staff, especially the dedicated medical team India sent to Kuwait," the minister said. The minister said ambassadors and senior officials have been in regular touch with most community organisations and get their

feedback on both the health situation and economic recovery. "We are aware that there are problems of compensation, re-employment and re-skilling that need solutions. And these are today the core of our agenda with our partner governments." The welfare of students studying abroad has also been of particular concern and embassies across the world have been given instructions to reach out to them, monitor their situation and assist their return, where required, Mr Jaishankar said.

3 Indian-Origin Brothers Found Guilty Of Murder In Ongoing Dispute In UK

Kamal Sohal, 23, Sukhminder Sohal, 25, and Michael Sohal, 28, were found guilty of the murder of Osvaldo de Carvalho in Acton area of west London in September 2019 following a trial at Croydon Crown Court in south London on February 16.

(Insider Bureau)-Three Indian-origin brothers are among four men found guilty of stabbing to death a 22-year-old man in an ongoing dispute in London by a UK court.

Kamal Sohal, 23, Sukhminder Sohal, 25, and Michael Sohal, 28, were found guilty of the murder of Osvaldo de Carvalho in Acton area of west London in September 2019 following a trial at Croydon Crown Court in south London on February 16.

While their conviction took place last month, there were reporting restrictions imposed on the case as two other accused were yet to stand trial.

On Friday, Antoine George, 24, was found guilty of manslaughter in the case and a fifth accused, Karim Azab, 25, was found not guilty of murder.

"This is a particularly tragic case with Osvaldo's family having to live with the pain of his loss. We know there had been previous hostility between these two groups and sadly that culminated in the events that unfolded that

evening," said Detective Chief Inspector Vicky Tunstall, who led the investigation for the Metropolitan Police Specialist Crime South Command.

"The Sohal brothers had no qualms about arming themselves and - in Kamal's case - running down a busy main road waving the weapon around in full view of all those around. They then subjected Osvaldo - who had no chance of defending himself - to a brutal and sustained attack. Osvaldo's family, I hope, can find some comfort to their pain, knowing that these people have now been convicted," she said.

The court heard the convicted men and Osvaldo had been involved in an ongoing dispute when Sukhminder and Michael met Osvaldo and two of his friends on September 24, 2019. They went on to call their brother, Kamal, for support and reinforcement.

On receiving this call, Kamal grabbed a large hunting knife which he "brazenly brandished"

as he ran along the Uxbridge Road in west London to the scene from his home nearby. George, who had also been in the house, went with Kamal to the scene of the dispute.

After his arrival and following a brief chase the three men in the victim's group ran from the scene; the two friends heading one way, and Osvaldo running a different way.

"Witnesses described him being chased by a group of men, some armed with knives. They caught up with Osvaldo, surrounded him and stabbed him, and then ran off leaving Osvaldo lying on the ground dying. The three brothers left the scene and returned to Kamal's address," the Met Police said. Later, George is said to have left the area in a car which had been parked on the driveway outside Kamal's flat. A post-mortem examination revealed that Osvaldo had suffered multiple stab wounds, including a deep wound to his left leg which would have been caused by



significant force. But the fatal wound was a stab wound to his back which was so deep it nearly passed through his body. The Met Police found that in a bid to cover their tracks, later that evening Michael and Sukhminder had set fire to clothes they had been wearing at the time of the stabbing. During the police investigation, it was found that on the day of the murder, George and Sukhminder Sohal went to a shop in Hounslow, south-west

London, that sold knives and purchased the weapons used and transported them to Kamal's flat. But the court heard that those weapons were never recovered.

It was with the assistance of witnesses and piecing together CCTV that officers were able to trace and arrest the suspects, who were subsequently charged with murder, the Met Police said. All four convicted of the killing will be sentenced at Croydon Crown Court at a later date.

"Appalled": Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella, US Lawmakers On Acts Of Hate Against Asian Americans

More than 3,000 incidents of abuse against Asian Americans were reported between March and December 2020, according to Asian American advocacy groups.

(Insider Bureau)-Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella and several US lawmakers have said that they are appalled by the ongoing acts of hate against Asian Americans and condemned hate, racial discrimination and violence in all forms.

More than 3,000 incidents of abuse against Asian Americans were reported between March and December 2020, according to Asian American advocacy groups. There were only 216 reported cases in 2019, according to FBI statistics.

"I am appalled by the ongoing acts of hate against Asian Americans and the Asian community globally. Racism, hate and violence have no place in our society. I am united with

the Asian and Asian American community in standing against this injustice," Mr Nadella said in a tweet, a day after US President Joe Biden said that the "vicious" hate crimes against Asian Americans in the country amidst the pandemic was "un-American" and it must stop.

Denouncing "violent" attacks on the Asian Americans, Biden in his first prime-time address to the nation since assuming office in January, said that members of the community were harassed, blamed and scapegoated.

In a statement, Microsoft said that it condemns hate, racial discrimination, and violence in all forms. Meanwhile, prominent lawmakers have joined hands to

introduce a legislation to address the rise of hate crimes and violence against Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Congressman Donald M. Payne, expressed concern over an increase in racist attacks against Asian Americans during the COVID-19 global pandemic. "I want to condemn the abuse and assault that has happened to Asian Americans during his pandemic in the strongest words possible," Payne said.

"Hate and violence have no place in America at all. These attacks must stop because they are cowardly attempts to scapegoat and blame Americans for a pandemic that started



thousands of miles away. Thankfully, we have a president who supports diversity and will protect all Americans in his language and his actions. It is time for us to come together as a country and that includes all Americans," he said. Senator Dianne Feinstein said that over the past few weeks, nominees for the top three leadership positions at the Justice Department have appeared

before the Senate Judiciary Committee, as has the director of the FBI. "At each hearing the topic of hate crimes came up, in large part due to steep increases in attacks against Asian Americans," she said. "The increase appears to be based on a fabricated connection between the Asian-American community and the COVID pandemic, a conspiracy theory with no basis in fact that is pure racism."

Biden Recognized Incredible Contribution Of Indian American Community: Spokesperson



White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki was responding to a question on the remarks by Joe Biden last week when he said that Indian Americans are taking over the country.

(Insider Bureau)-US President Joe Biden recognised the incredible contribution of the Indian American community when last week during an interaction with NASA scientists involved in the Mars mission he said that people of Indian descent were taking over the country, his spokesperson said Thursday.

"I'll first say that the president was just recognising and honouring and valuing our --this was his intention -- the incredible contribution of Indian-Americans to science," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki told reporters at her daily news conference. She was responding to a question on the remarks by

Biden last week when he said that Indian Americans are taking over the country. "Indian-of-descent Americans (sic) are taking over the country. You (Swati Mohan), my vice president (Kamala Harris), my speech writer (Vinay Reddy)," Biden said in a virtual interaction with NASA scientists who were involved in the historic landing of Perseverance at Mars. Indian American scientist Swati Mohan leads the guidance, navigation, and control operations of NASA's Mars 2020 mission.

"He (Biden) was speaking to an Indian American woman who is, of course, a scientist and an important part of the NASA team.

And he also was, of course, recognizing the incredible contribution of his own vice president," Psaki said. "He just believes that it was a reflection of his belief that Indian-Americans could make a great contribution to the fabric of society, whether it's science or education or the government. And that was what he was trying to convey," the White House Press Secretary said. Biden, who was sworn in as the 46th president of the United States on January 20, has created history by appointing at least 58 Indian Americans to key positions in his administration. This does not include Vice President Kamala Harris, which

is an elected position, and Neera Tanden, who a day earlier withdrew her nomination from the position of Director of White House Office of Management and Budget. Nearly half of them are women and a sizable number of them are working in the White House. So far, the Obama-Biden administration (2009-2017) has the distinction of appointing the largest number of Indian-Americans in any administration, but the previous Donald Trump administration was not far behind as it appointed the first ever Indian-American with a cabinet rank and inside the National Security Council.

BJP leaders raise Indian student's Oxford University racism row, vow action when required

(Insider Bureau)- Union minister S Jaishankar and BJP MP Ashwini Vaishnaw raised the issue of Indian student at Oxford University Rashmi Samant quitting as the student union leader over the racism scandal surrounding her past social media posts. The BJP leaders said the matter is being monitored closely, and will be taken up with the UK when required. "As the land of Mahatma Gandhi, we can never ever turn our eyes away from

racism. Particularly so when it is in a country where we have such a large diaspora. We have strong ties with the UK. We'll take up such matters with great candour when required," Jaishankar said in Rajya Sabha on Monday on the Oxford University row.

Jaishankar further added, "We will monitor these developments very closely. We will raise it when required and we will always champion the fight against racism and other forms of

intolerance." Rashmi Samat, a 22-year-old Indian student from Udupi, became the students' union president at the Oxford University in a historic feat. However, reports said she was forced to quit after faced severe backlash over some past social media posts on Holocaust and other issues. She was called out for being racist with her anti-Semitic posts. BJP MP Ashwini Vaishnaw said in Rajya Sabha, "There appears to be a continuation of attitudes

and prejudices from the colonial areas, especially in the UK. The recent case of Rashmi Samant, a student from Karnataka is a classic case in point. "She overcame all the challenges to become the first Indian woman president of Oxford University student's Union. What treatment was meted out to her? Shouldn't this diversity be celebrated, instead she was cyberbullied to the point that she had to resign," said Ashwini Vaishnaw.

Alarming surge in Covid-19 cases leaves Punjab govt worried

Punjab has the highest Case Fatality Rate (CFR) for Covid-19 in the country. The current CFR in Punjab is 3.1 which is twice the national average of 1.4.

(News Agencies)-Punjab reported an alarming spike in fresh cases of Covid-19 triggering a second wave worry for the authorities as the active caseload skyrocketed on Tuesday to 11,942.

What is more disconcerting about coronavirus pandemic in Punjab is that the state has the highest Case Fatality Rate (CFR) for Covid-19 in the country. The current CFR in Punjab is 3.1 which is twice the national average of 1.4.

The Punjab government has announced a slew of measures to contain the further spread of the disease. It has imposed night curfew in eight Covid-19 pandemic-hit districts — Ludhiana, Patiala, Mohali, Fatehgarh Sahib, Jalandhar, Navanshahar, Kapurthala and Hoshiarpur. The

night curfew would be in force from 11 pm to 5 am.

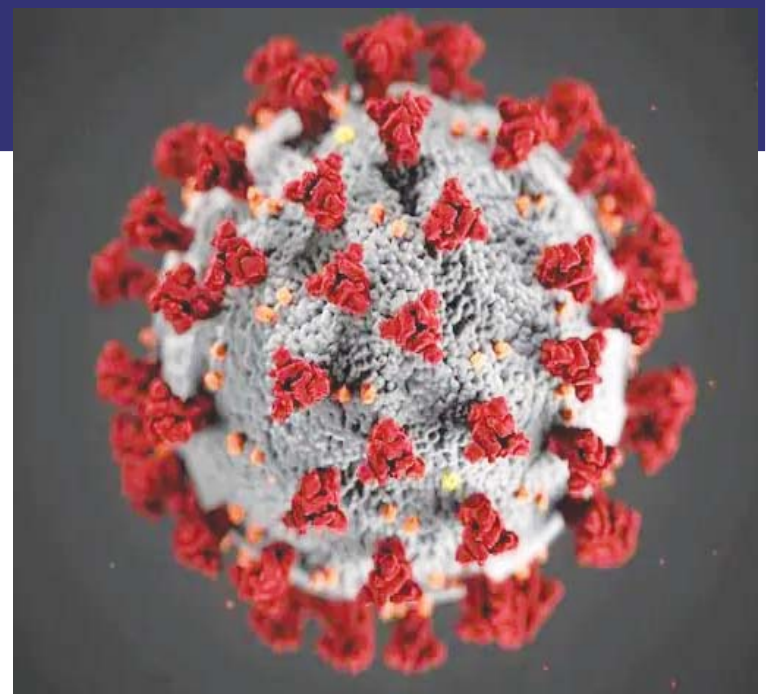
The authorities have also limited indoor gatherings to 100 people and outdoor gathering to 200 people. The state school examination board has postponed Class X and XII exams by a month due to surge in Covid-19 cases.

Patiala-based Thapar University has turned into a Covid-19 hotspot after 38 students tested positive. On Tuesday, more students tested positive from the university.

While the Amritsar district administration has made it mandatory to carry a Covid-19 negative report to enter any venue, Ludhiana district administration has made vaccination compulsory for people involved in essential services.

Bankers, journalists, judicial officers and employees of schools and food grain agencies besides the NGOs have been listed as the priority group.

According to the Punjab Health Department officials, only half the department staff was immunised and the rest were avoiding vaccination due to variety of reasons. Till date, 2.06 lakh healthcare staff in the state have registered for Covid-19 vaccination programme. However, only 1.08 lakh got vaccinated and 54,000 received their second shot of vaccine. Punjab has received 19.15 lakh doses of Covishield and 1.37 lakh doses of Covaxin, so far. Hospital staffers, who have refused to take vaccine, have been asked to get a mandatory RTPCR test done weekly before joining duty.



Punjab Health Minister Balbiri Singh Sidhu said high CFR is entirely due to public negligence. So far, 6,100 people have lost their lives due to Covid-19 in Punjab. Recent studies have shown that 77.90 per cent of people who succumbed to the virus had serious

symptoms and 80 per cent of them were senior citizens. Although the state government has restricted the movement of common people, but no curbs have been imposed on the rallies being organised by the politicians and farmer unions.

Tamil Nadu polls: Independent candidate files nomination papers wearing 5 kg gold jewellery



(News Agencies)-From political leaders doing push-ups to campaigning in a wheelchair and even the 'pawri' trend, the current election season in India has brought to us quite a few uncommon sights. Adding to the list of such unusual sightings was an Independent candidate in Tamil Nadu who came to file his nomination on Tuesday wearing layers of heavy gold jewellery. Hari Nadar, an Independent candidate, filed his nomination papers to contest from Alangulam assembly constituency within Tirunelveli district.

The candidate's entry into the local EC office wearing 5 kg gold ornaments to file his nomination

was a head-turner. Hari Nadar is the Panangattu Padai Katchi coordinator.

Filing his nomination papers, Hari Nadar declared that he owns 11.2 kg gold.

Several political parties have announced their candidate lists in the run-up to the Tamil Nadu assembly elections. However, some candidates have shown up in creative ways to file their nomination papers. Before Hari Nadar's gold display, a candidate filed his nomination in Chennai wearing a full PPE suit.

The Tamil Nadu assembly election 2021 will be held in a single phase on April 6. The counting of votes will take place on May 2.

SAD chief Sukhbir Singh Badal tests positive for Covid-19, had held massive rally yesterday

SAD chief Sukhbir Singh Badal has tested positive for Covid-19. He had held a massive rally in Punjab's Tarn Taran on Monday.



(News Agencies)-Shrimoni Akali Dal chief Sukhbir Singh Badal has tested positive for Covid-19. The leader informed the public about his health status on Twitter and asked those who recently came in his contact to isolate themselves. "I would like to inform everyone that I have tested Covid positive. My health is fine & as per protocol I have isolated myself. I request those who came in contact with me during the last

few days to isolate themselves & get tested for Covid - 19," Sukhbir Singh Badal said in a tweet on Tuesday.

The SAD chief has been holding a series of rallies across Punjab for the last few days. On Monday also, he held a massive rally in Tarn Taran where he addressed thousands of people.

According to the Union health ministry, Punjab is among the five states worst-affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in India

currently. The Centre says Maharashtra, Punjab, Karnataka, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu continue to report a surge in daily Covid-19 cases. These five states account for 78.41 per cent of the new cases reported from across India.

On Monday, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said negligence towards Covid-appropriate behaviour is the main reason behind the surge in new cases of infection.

Amarinder Singh to meet Navjot Singh over lunch again; sets rumour mills rolling

Punjab CM Amarinder Singh is likely to meet Navjot Singh Sidhu over lunch setting off rumours that the latter might be given an important role ahead of the 2022 state polls.

(News Agencies)- Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh is expected to meet former minister Navjot Singh Sidhu over lunch on Wednesday, amid speculations that the cricketer-turned-politician might be given an important role ahead of the 2022 state polls, official sources said.

This will be the second luncheon meeting between the leaders. The first such meeting had taken place in November last year, seen as the first step to break the ice between the two sides. Singh had then said that he and Sidhu would continue to have cordial meetings.

Another meeting between the two leaders assumes significance as the Congress central leadership has been trying to rehabilitate Sidhu who had resigned as minister after he was divested of the Local Bodies portfolio in 2019.

Congress leader and Punjab affairs in-charge Harish Rawat has been pushing for an important position for Sidhu.

Rawat had met Sidhu on March 10. After the meeting, Sidhu had said, "Was summoned by Harish Rawat ji. Had a cordial meeting."

For the past several weeks, party circles have been abuzz

with the speculation that Sidhu could be re-inducted into the state cabinet with some key portfolios. There have also been talks of the possibility of appointing him as party state unit president.

Notably, both leaders had not been on best of terms. The tension between Singh and Sidhu had come out in the open in May 2019 when the CM blamed the former cricketer for "inept handling" of the Local Government Department, claiming it had resulted in "poor performance" of the Congress in urban areas in the 2019 Lok Sabha



polls. Sidhu was stripped of key portfolios in a cabinet reshuffle, after which he resigned from the state cabinet.

Bombay HC refuses termination of pregnancy of 13-year-old rape survivor



(News Agencies)-The Bombay High Court on Monday refused to permit the termination of a 13-year-old rape survivor's pregnancy. This came after a panel of doctors from JJ hospital told the HC that the 13-year-old's 33-week pregnancy was at an advanced stage and that the teen's life was at risk irrespective of terminating the pregnancy or continuing it to term.

"Termination of pregnancy at this stage will result in a preterm viable baby requiring intensive care management and the mother will

be required to be present with the baby in the hospital," the report by a panel of doctors said. The report added, "Hence it is advisable to continue the pregnancy and to terminate the pregnancy at term as the outcome of the baby will be better then."

The father of the 13-year-old had filed a plea in the court stating that his daughter was physically incapable of delivering a child as he sought the permission of the HC to terminate her pregnancy. In his petition, the teen's father

The HC declined to give permission for medical termination of the 33-week pregnancy of a minor girl after a panel of doctors told the court that it will result in the birth of a preterm child and added that the girl's life was at equal risk.

said an acquaintance offered 'religious cure' for his son's epilepsy. Thereafter, the acquaintance started visiting their home and even stalked the minor girl. Seven months ago, when he found her alone, he raped her after threatening her, the father said in his plea.

The minor girl was raped twice

and threatened not to speak about it. Her family too mistook her bloated stomach for flatulence.

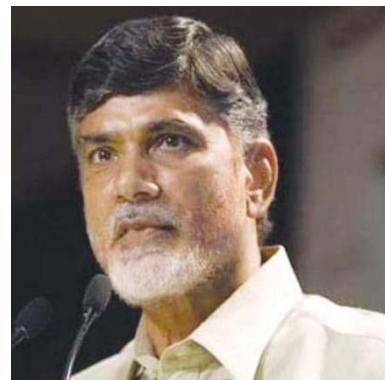
On February 23, an FIR was registered against the accused and the girl was detected 30 weeks pregnant. During the hearing, advocate Ashley Cusher, representing the father, requested the

court to record that the DNA sample of the foetus be preserved to ascertain the role of the accused that could be used during the trial in case anything happens to the minor during delivery. The bench said it would like to know about the progress of the pregnancy and the condition of the minor after two weeks.

Chandrababu Naidu served notice to join probe in Amaravati land scam case

(News Agencies)- Former Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu has been served notice by the state Crime Investigation Department (CID) to join the probe in the Amaravati land scam case.

A team of the investigation agency on Tuesday reached Chandrababu Naidu's Hyderabad residence and served



him notice to join the probe.

An FIR was registered by the CID under 120b, 166, 167, and 217 in the Amaravati land scam case over the irregularities alleged in the acquisition of lands in Amaravati and illegal land transfers.

Chandrababu Naidu has been asked to attend the investigation on March 23.

Stray dog carries infant's corpse outside govt hospital in Odisha's Bhadrak

In a purported video, a stray dog was seen carrying the corpse of a newborn baby outside a government hospital in Odisha.

(News Agencies)-A dog was seen carrying the corpse of a newborn baby outside a government hospital in Odisha.

The incident reportedly took place inside Bhadrak district headquarters campus on Monday.

In a purported video, some stray dogs could be seen running with

the infant's body, while people present at the spot were trying to chase them.

After some time, the dogs dumped the corpse after being chased by people.

"We had visited the hospital for a check up when we saw a dog carrying the infant's body. We

started yelling and chasing the dog. After running behind the dog for few metres, it gave up, threw the body and ran away," said a witness. "Later, we found the infant was dead and it was dumped in open space by the hospital authorities. The dog had found the corpse there," the witness said.



No social gatherings, masks mandatory: Maharashtra re-imposes Covid-19 restrictions till March 31

The Maharashtra government on Monday issued an order imposing restrictions amid a sharp rise in Covid-19 cases in different parts of the state.

The state of Maharashtra on Monday reported 15,051 new cases of Covid-19 along with another 10,671 recoveries and 48 more Covid-related deaths. As per the state government's health department, Maharashtra has 1,30,547 active cases, a recovery rate of 92.07 per cent

and a case fatality rate of 2.27 per cent.

SOP for offices

All offices in Maharashtra have been asked to operate with 50 per cent of attendance till March 31.

While advising work from home, the state government has also cautioned offices against violation of the new guidelines.

SOP for cinema halls, hotels, restaurants According to the order issued on Monday, all

cinema halls, hotels and restaurants are to operate at 50 per cent capacity. In addition, the establishments have been directed to restrict the entry of anyone found not wearing a face mask. Management of shopping malls has also been asked to ensure that theatres and restaurants or any other establishments on the premises adhere to the new guidelines. Failure to do so will result in the closure of the mall along with



penalties. **SOP for gatherings, weddings, funerals**

The Maharashtra government has further disallowed all social, cultural, political and religious gatherings. Violation of the guidelines will attract penalties for the owner of the premises along with the closure of the property in question.

For weddings, the state has allowed only 50 guests.

At the same time, only 20 persons will be allowed to attend the last rites.

SOP for home isolation

Anyone in home isolation will have to inform local authorities along with the contact information of their doctor. For those in home isolation, the

government has asked them to put up a board on the door for 14 days since the beginning to indicate the presence of a Covid-19 patient. In addition, the home quarantine stamp will be affixed on the Covid-positive patient and family members will be advised to restrict their movements and strictly adhere to the use of face masks.

SOP for places of worship

The management trusts of all religious places have also been directed to decide and declare the maximum number of visitors per hour depending upon the availability of space for movement and gathering with proper social distancing.

SC sends notice to Centre on move allowing Ayurveda doctors to perform surgeries

(News Agencies)-The Supreme Court today sent a notice to Centre on a plea by Indian Medical Association (IMA) against a Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM) order allowing post-graduate practitioners in specified streams of



Ayurveda to be trained to perform surgeries. The court issued notices to the Ministry of Ayush, CCIM and National Medical Commission seeking their replies

on the petition. The Indian Medical Association moved the apex court seeking to set aside or quash the amendment to

regulations to the postgraduate Ayurveda Surgery by CCIM and declare that the council does not have the powers to include modern medicine in syllabus.

A Central Council of Indian Medicine notification had listed 39 general surgery procedures and around 19 procedures involving the eye, ear, nose and throat by amending the Indian Medicine Central Council (Post Graduate Ayurveda Education) Regulations, 2016.

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Farmers' protest: No permanent structures to be built at protest sites, farm leaders clarify

(News Agencies)- Punjab farmer unions on Friday announced that no permanent structure would be constructed at protest sites at Singhu and Tikri border in Delhi.

However, makeshift camps and shelters in tractors would continue to stay on these



borders, announced farm leader Darshan Pal.

The decision was made on March 12 during a meeting mainly attended by 32 Punjab farmer union leaders, sources said.

The development comes after various reports suggested that farmers, agitating against the

three contentious farm laws since nearly four months now, are building brick houses at the protest site to stay put even during Delhi's red-hot summer. Thousands of farmers, mainly from Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, have been camping at the Delhi border points -- Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur -- since November, demanding the revocation of Centre's new farm laws and a legal guarantee on the minimum support price (MSP) for their crops.

Meanwhile, several farmer union leaders visited poll-bound West Bengal to campaign, urging voters not to vote for "anti-farmer BJP". Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) On Sunday delegation addressed Mahapanchayats in West Bengal's Singur and Asansol.

No country could survive Biden's border policies

We just got back from El Salvador, and before we left Central America, we took a COVID test - the one where the nurse rams the Q-tip up your nose and tries to find your frontal lobe until your eyes water. You've probably experienced it. It's pretty unpleasant, but you're trying to be responsible, so you endure it.

Of course, like everyone entering the United States by plane, we had no choice. The airline demanded it. We couldn't come home until we took the test. That's because, as they often tell us, our authorities are totally committed to keeping us safe from this deadly virus. So that's the protocol if you're coming from El Salvador to America legally.

You take the test. But what if you're coming illegally? What if you rode the top of a freight train from El Salvador up through Mexico and just jumped the border when you got here? We interviewed an active MS-13 member, a convicted murderer, who said he did exactly that. So, the question is, do people like him -- the ones who break our laws to get here -- have to submit to mandatory COVID testing once they're apprehended by American authorities?

The answer is, in fact, no. They don't. Under this administration, they don't have to, and they don't. Illegal aliens are exempt from the public health measures that have been imposed by force on the rest of us by the U.S. government. Illegal aliens come and go as they please. No one seems to care if they spread deadly viruses to the rest of the American population. It's hard to believe this is actually happening, but it is. We verified it today, when DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas admitted in congressional testimony that the Biden administration is releasing foreign nationals into American neighborhoods without even bothering to check if they're infected with COVID. Given the authoritarian lockdowns the rest of us have lived under for the last year, the ones that have crushed the country, it's hard to understand this policy as anything but an act of violence and hostility toward our country. It is an utter betrayal. They don't care about you.

They're saying that clearly as they possibly can. Joe Biden is saying it too. A reporter recently asked Biden if he planned to visit the border to see for himself the disaster unfolding there. "Not at the moment," he replied dismissively, as if he had better things to do. We'd love to know what those things are. That same day, a reporter asked Kamala Harris what she knew about the current immigration crisis, the one her administration caused. More than 100,000 foreign nationals are flooding in every month like the border doesn't exist. Some of them are gang

members. Others appear to be on FBI terror watch lists. More than 13,000 of them are children, unaccompanied minors, now in U.S. custody. It's an enormous, possibly unprecedented, wave of humanity coming into America right now.

But Kamala Harris didn't seem to have any idea it was happening. "I haven't been briefed on anything today about it," she said. She was too busy promoting critical race theory, and making sure there are boys on your daughter's track team. Has there ever been an administration this reckless and destructive? What's happening on the border tonight will change our country forever. A lot of things won't, but this will, and you should know that. Unlike other disasters, mass illegal immigration is permanent. No one ever really gets sent home. Over the past 30 years, the population of the United States has exploded by nearly 100 million people, mostly due to immigration. Were you even aware that happened? You're not supposed to say a word about it, as every year the United States gets more jammed with people, and at the same time more chaotic and less cohesive - as the open spaces shrink, as nature itself recedes in the face of yet another strip mall or apartment complex or fast food outlet to serve the new people.

This is becoming a crowded country, and crowded countries are ugly, unhappy countries. Why are we letting that happen? That's a rhetorical question of course. No one asked us what we wanted. They just did it. No one asked the countries these immigrants are coming from either.

Something that had never occurred to us until we talked to the president of El Salvador is that country has lost a third of its population over the years through immigration to the United States. El Salvador is a charming country in a lot of ways, but it's still a very poor place. So, when American politicians offer free education and free healthcare, and free all kinds of things to anyone who can just make it across the border, millions of Salvadorans accept their offer. And why wouldn't they accept it? So they migrate in huge groups, and that hurts our country. But it also weakens El Salvador. Here's the president's perspective:

NAYIB BUKELE: "If you don't provide for your people, economic opportunities, if your economy is doing bad, if your security is doing bad, people are going to leave, and you're going to go and try to find a rich country, right? They're not going to leave for Guatemala. They want to go to the United States. So, that makes this country dependent on immigration because you become a net exporter of people."

Tucker Carlson, Courtesy Fox News

Getting vaccinated is a game changer

I am a 49-year-old man in fairly good shape (although I could always stand to lose a few pounds here and there.) My wife is 37, and in far better shape. Either way, according to federal and state guidelines, we are low risk for suffering complications stemming from Covid-19 and we would likely not have been vaccinated for several months based on our age and health profile; nonetheless, last week we were both able to get our shots by showing up at a vaccination center unannounced.

There have been reports of areas around the country not allowing unused vaccines to be given to groups that don't match its state's vaccination eligibility requirements, causing leftover doses to be tossed out. We had heard that there was a particular chain of pharmacies that was administering vaccinations for seniors, first responders and others who qualified that was also allowing walk-ins to take advantage of the spots left by no-shows and unfilled appointments -- so no vaccines would go to waste. Experts have agreed that if there is a choice between throwing away an unused dose and giving it to someone who is not yet eligible, then it's better to do the latter. With no appointment, we rolled the dice and drove out to a rural pharmacy almost an hour from our home near Minneapolis, hanging around until the end of the day to see if there would be any unused doses. And as luck would have it, there were three no-shows, and my wife and I were able to get two of those last three unclaimed shots, which would've expired and had to be tossed. Even better, we both received the recently approved Johnson & Johnson, "one-and-done" Janssen vaccination. The trip out to the rural pharmacy soaked up the better part of an afternoon, but we were done. Whew.

What I didn't anticipate from that afternoon trek into the countryside was how much that one little dose of vaccine would free me from the psychological confinement I had felt ever since the pandemic disrupted daily life. It made me realize that even "younger-ish" Americans like myself and my wife have been carrying around a big mental burden. The quick shot of vaccine enabled me to shed, almost immediately, the fear and apprehension that I had been living with during this year of lockdowns, social distancing, and mask wearing. With that one tiny jab in my left shoulder, I was almost immediately overcome with a sensation that was as foreign to me as it was familiar -- one that has been an integral part of my personality my entire life but that had somehow managed to dissipate if not entirely disappear over the course of the past year: My sense of self-confidence and my ability to confront the world around me without fear. It made me fully realize the toll that the pandemic had taken on my mental health. No longer did I subconsciously attempt to evaluate the risk profile of fellow shoppers while standing six feet apart in the checkout line at Target -- which one of these people might have the coronavirus? No longer was I overcome with the fear that, despite taking all of the recommended precautions, I might inadvertently infect my elderly parents when visiting them at their home.

My wife and I suddenly felt it was safe again to go out to eat -- of course while still following the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's guidelines for fully vaccinated people -- spend money, and do our small part to get the economy humming again.

Arick Wierson, Courtesy CNN



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The second wave is here



Go back to the basic protocols of Covid-19 management, and open up vaccination. Doing so would remove several million people from the chain of infection

On Wednesday and Thursday, India reported 22,855 and 23,297 new Covid-19 infections respectively - setting back-to-back records for the most number of single-day cases in 2021. What started as a bottoming out of the case trajectory in the second half of February has now become a steady stream of rising infections in the past week or so, pushing the pandemic back to a case rate last seen at the end of December. And while Maharashtra may be reporting the most number of cases right now, it's not the only state that has seen a new wave. Out of India's 20 most populous cases, 17 states and Union Territories have seen their trajectories rise significantly after bottoming out - this list includes Punjab, Delhi, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh. The second wave is here. The key question for all governments (states and Centre) is what can be done to fight the pandemic all over again? They would do well to remember the basics about tackling the pandemic. One of India needs to throw open its the most crucial elements that vaccination drive - both by helped control the first wave making more people eligible, as was aggressive testing. well as by approving more Through September to vaccines. Right now, only those November, nearly every state who remain most vulnerable to in the country worked at the the virus are being vaccinated. peak of their testing capacity. To be sure, in the past two Lately though, testing has weeks, there has been dropped significantly - the progress in the rate of testing rate in the last week vaccination. But while this is a in India was 40% below good start, it is time to expand peak capacity levels. the eligibility criteria to Restrictions on large-scale include younger people - congregations and after all, they are the ones gatherings also are key to most mobile, and most likely preventing the spread of the to be the ones spreading the virus. Big congregations - virus. Doing so would remove political, religious, cultural, several million people from farmer protests, weddings, the chain of infection. Throwing election rallies - all face risks more vaccines into the mix will of turning into super-spreading also enhance options, and events. Authorities at all levels ensure that the drive is not need to enforce limits on such limited by any manufacturer's gatherings. production constraints.

The persistence of identity politics

A cursory look at the state of political play in states heading for assembly polls throws up a common thread - the persistence of identity politics, on the axis of religion and caste. In Bengal, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is hoping to ensure a substantial degree of Hindu consolidation, often through micro-caste management and co-option of marginalised groups. The Trinamool Congress is hoping to win over Muslim support, while making a targeted outreach to Hindu sub-groups. In Assam, the salience of identity politics, particularly on the outsider-insider axis, remains deeply entrenched. In Tamil Nadu, even as the ruling National Democratic Alliance combine hopes to win over the support of Hindu sub-castes through social engineering, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam-led alliance is hoping to create its social coalition of backward communities, Dalits and Muslims. In Kerala, it is the balance between Hindus-Muslims-Christians, and the balance within Hindus, that will play a key role in shaping the electoral outcome. To be sure, this is not the whole story of the elections. Issues such as the performance of the state government, welfare schemes, governance promises of an Opposition party, the interplay of urbanisation, mobility, migration and enhanced aspiration of citizens across castes, the role of media and social media, the popularity of local candidates, and the organisational strength of various forces in competition play an important role. But it is remarkable that identity - which is determined by where one is born - remains so central in both the calculus of political parties and of voters.

For politicians, it is much easier to appeal to group identities, when group identities serve as the basis for social organisation, to consolidate their base and polarise. For voters, access to power, often, depends on whether

The state elections show, yet again, how identity is a central axis of mobilisation. This form of politics defeats the idea of treating each voter as an individual citizen and reinforces narrow identities



a member of one's own group or if a party that is broadly sensitive to one's group interests is in power. This leads to a vicious cycle - where both politicians and voters develop incentives in perpetuating this pattern. This form of politics defeats the idea of treating each voter as an individual citizen and reinforces narrow identities.

For the US, the competing priorities on India

Faced with the growing aggressiveness of China, India remains a prospective linchpin in America's regional strategy. Relations between the United States (US) and India, which were in the doldrums during much of the Cold War era, started to take a more cordial turn from the waning days of the second Bill Clinton administration. However, they were placed on a genuinely secure footing following the US-India civilian nuclear agreement of 2008. Since then, there has been a remarkable bipartisan consensus about the significance of India in the US foreign policy calculus. Even Donald Trump, who used strong-arm tactics in trade negotiations, curbed H-1B visas and saw the relationship in transactional terms did not undermine it. Though otherwise mercurial, he nevertheless allowed his administration to adopt a pro-India stance when the Sino-Indian border troubles flared up in Ladakh last year. The Joe Biden administration assumed office with the promise of moving away from the nativist outlook of the Trump administration. Earlier, during the presidential campaign, Biden made it clear that his

administration would return to multilateralism, promote democracy and global human rights and stand up to the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Russia's attempts to support and promote authoritarian regimes across the world. Earlier this month, the White House released a document, the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance, which provides a working blueprint for the administration's new national security strategy. To no one's surprise, it affirms the administration's return to multilateralism, commits it to strengthening long-standing alliances and declares its interest in promoting democracy and protecting human rights. There is little question that the administration will attempt to implement these goals. However, it has already recognised that certain trade-offs are inevitable. To that end, last month, it released an unclassified version of a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) analysis of the killing of the Saudi dissident and The Washington Post columnist,

Jamal Khashoggi. (The Trump administration, in an effort to avoid offending the Saudi monarchy, and with its lack of interest in promoting human rights abroad, kept it under wraps.) The report left little or no doubt that the murder could not have taken place without the imprimatur of the Saudi Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, the de facto ruler of the desert kingdom. In its wake, the US Department of the Treasury placed a series of sanctions on a number of high-level officials in Saudi Arabia. However, the administration chose not to impose any costs on the Crown Prince. Political commentators argued that the administration decided not to publicly upbraid him for fear of unsettling this long-standing relationship. Clearly, as has happened many a time in previous administrations, this one too felt the need to strike a delicate balance between ideals and self-interest. Will the administration feel compelled to strike a similar balance in dealing with India? On the one hand, the report has, albeit quite briefly, alluded to the significance of India in promoting cooperation and advancing its



strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific. Yet, in several places, this document highlighted US concerns about promoting democracy and human rights on a global basis. During the campaign, both Biden and vice-president Kamala Harris expressed their unease about the state of human rights in India in general, and in Kashmir in particular. After assuming office, the administration has raised these concerns again. The issue is one that the administration will not abandon. This is even more likely as there are a number of key Congressional Democrats who are prone to holding it accountable on this particular score. However, it is also evident that the Biden administration

continues to attach considerable strategic significance to the Indo-US relationship. This is reasonable to infer given that Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin, is making his initial trip to India this week. His visit signals a continuity in policy. In the meanwhile, last week, at the virtual Quad conference, the members agreed to boost vaccine distribution and coordinate their policies to counter China's assertiveness. Given these two competing imperatives, how is the Biden administration likely to tackle them? Faced with the growing aggressiveness of China, India remains a prospective linchpin in American regional strategy. Consequently, the US will elicit India's cooperation in guaranteeing security and stability in the region. Yet it cannot allow its stated commitment to protecting human rights and boosting democracy to ring hollow. How then is it likely to weigh in on these demands which are likely to be at odds? The strategic relationship, after years of vicissitudes, is now stable. More to the point, New Delhi, after decades of vacillation, sees considerable value in it despite some lingering reservations. Accordingly, it cannot distance itself from the US. Despite this strategic convergence, the new dispensation in Washington, it will not, as occasion demands, shy away from quietly, but firmly, reminding New Delhi to adhere to its democratic traditions. Negotiating between these two shoals may prove to be taxing for both Washington and New Delhi. Sumit Ganguly is a distinguished professor of political science and holds the Rabindranath Tagore Chair in Indian Cultures and Civilizations at Indiana University.

How Do You Take 1.3 Billion People To The Bank?

In the futurist law now named after him, the late Stanford University computer scientist Roy Amara once declared, "We tend to overestimate the effect of a technology in the short run and underestimate the effect in the long run." India's public digital infrastructure - in many ways, an immense online bureaucracy - is an outlier to this principle. The effort was written-off in the short run, but, less than a decade after it was introduced, it has mobilized technology at the grass-roots, tapping into the country's huge domestic potential. India is now ready to share its experience with the developing world. The system - built on a unique 12-digit identification code for each Indian resident - has significantly improved financial inclusion, access to public documents and services, tax compliance, retail payments and the management of government

subsidies. The key has been the Aadhaar card - the national identity document. Aadhaar was launched in 2009 by the government of then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. To run the program, he roped in Nandan Nilekani, a veteran of Infosys, the country's homegrown technology giant. It was an ambitious attempt to reach and electronically organize the more than 1.3-billion people living in India's sprawling, varied and sometimes inaccessible territory. While questions were raised about privacy issues, Aadhaar was cleared by the Indian Supreme Court for opt-in use in September 2018; a larger bench of judges affirmed the decision in January 2021. Today, most of India has chosen to join the biometric data system: there are 1.26 billion people officially registered in Aadhaar. While it began with the Manmohan

Singh government, Aadhaar became the backbone of the India's public digital infrastructure in 2014 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi combined it with his government's Jan Dhan initiative, a financial inclusion program for India's huge number of unbanked households. These new accounts were linked to both mobile numbers and Aadhaar, creating the Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile, or JAM. Today more than 80% of all Indians have a bank account, up from half that level when the program started. The digital network is now the lynchpin for most of India's social security and cash transfer programs - which had been notorious for corruption and unreliability. Today, the government uses JAM's direct benefit transfers for 317 programs. It made 2.6 billion transactions in the current financial year, getting more than \$46 billion to beneficiaries. The cumulative value of the transfers

since the first programs started in 2013 stands at more than \$195 billion. The four big successes of India's public digital infrastructure have been Unified Payments Interface (UPI), Bharat QR, Bharat Bill Pay System (BBPS) and the RuPay card - which work with all or parts of the digital network's threefold components of banking, secure identity and mobility. UPI allows peer-to-peer and consumer-to-merchant transactions through mobile apps and e-commerce platforms, with JAM providing identification for money transfers. It registers 2-billion transactions a month and, in just about four years, is now in use from the largest departmental stores to roadside trinket shops. Bharat QR allows consumers to scan the graphic codes to transfer money without sharing phone numbers.

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Address political finances, election malpractices

Elections should not be so expensive that only those with financial power can hope to win. Such high-cost elections can never lead to a healthy democracy

Two recent news reports paint an image of India today. The first report was about how Delhi's residents saw a dip of ₹20,000 in their average income during the Covid-19 period. If this is the case in Delhi, one can well imagine the situation in many other states. The other report, from Assam, highlighted how more than ₹18 crore in cash, alcohol, drugs and other banned substances were recovered in the state in just 11 days. So, on the one hand, the world's largest democracy has been left poorer by the pandemic. On the other, the political system, instead of doing anything constructive, is using cash and liquor to woo voters, in a democratic election.

These reports remind me of a dinner I attended when the Janata Dal was in power. The host was a Union minister and many Members of Parliament (MPs) and influential people were in attendance. Before moving into the Lutyens' bungalow he now oc-

cupied, the minister lived in a tony area of Vasant Kunj in Delhi. A self-proclaimed socialist, he was born into riches.

At that party, a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) from Rajasthan blithely told me that liquor and money were necessary lubricants for elections in India. He went on to say that the main demand from voters after the elections was not to build roads, schools or hospitals but for jobs, contracts or a back-door entry for some sinecure or other.

That, said the MLA, is why elected representatives need much more money than their salaries would afford them - to build up a corpus to provide liquor and cash for the next election, not to mention hiring musclemen.

His words were met with much mirth. But I was deeply disturbed. I recalled a popular slogan of that time - "Raja nahi faqir hai, Bharat ki taqdeer hai" (not a king but a beggar, he's the destiny of India). Many in that room were fellow

travellers of the then faqir-raj prime minister, Vishwanath Pratap Singh. Yet, their sentiments were that voters could be bought with cash and liquor.

Since the conversation, three decades ago, a whole new generation has emerged in the country. Statistics may not always be completely accurate, but they give us an indication of which way the wind is blowing. It does not matter which party won the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections, but the figures that the Election Commission made public are shocking.

During the 2014 elections, ₹300 crore in cash and hundreds of kilos worth of drugs was recovered across the country. Action was taken against more than 1.1 million people in this connection. And during the next general election, ₹844 crore in cash, liquor worth ₹304 crore, narcotics worth more than ₹1,200 crore, and jewellery or gifts worth about ₹1,000 crore were recovered. In just five years, this trend has de-



teriorated sharply.

The Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR) found in an investigation that out of 539 members in the Lok Sabha, 475 were multi-millionaires. Of these, 266 have assets of more than ₹5 crore. There has been a steady increase in the number of millionaire MPs in our country. In the 2009 Lok Sabha, 58% of the MPs were crorepatists. In 2014, their number rose to 82% and 88% of the MPs in the current House are multi-millionaires. It does not end here. At least 51% of those elected to the Bihar assembly in 2020 have serious criminal charges against them. The previous assembly had 40% members with criminal charges. At the same time, the people's

incomes have not gone up, and, in many cases, they have come down. In the Covid-19 era, many people have sunk further into poverty while another section has profited significantly. This disparity does not bode well for our democracy.

Elections in a democracy should not be so expensive that only those with financial power can hope to win. Such high-cost elections can never lead to a healthy democracy. The great socialist leader Ram Manohar Lohia, a champion of the poor, came up with the slogan "one note, one vote".

His candidates used to hand around bags at their meetings and appeal for one rupee notes.

What's Government's Beef With Bitcoin, Really?



Contradictory statements and media leaks are making it impossible to get a handle on India's soon-to-be-unveiled cryptocurrency policy. The uncertainty is throwing young blockchain firms and programmers into a paroxysm of anxiety: Should they leave or stay? If they hang back, should they do something else with their lives? On Sunday, the global crypto industry heaved a sigh of relief when Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman categorically ruled out a much-feared blanket ban, promising to allow

a window for people "to do certain experiments" using distributed ledger technologies, Bitcoin and other virtual currencies, she said at an India Today conclave. But before the ink could dry on the congratulatory press releases from entrepreneurs, Reuters cited an official with direct knowledge of the plan as saying that the new law will "criminalize possession, issuance, mining, trading and transferring crypto-assets." That will be nothing short of a second existential crisis in three years. India's crypto evangelists fought a brave legal fight -

a couple of them even went behind bars for a short while - against the monetary authority's 2018 diktat to banks, telling them not to allow anyone dealing in digital assets to operate an account. Last year, the nascent blockchain industry won when the country's highest court set aside the Reserve Bank of India's order. Optimism started to rebuild, and surging Bitcoin prices began to lure millennials. When it comes to transferring Bitcoin and other digital assets, India is of late providing more volume than China on popular peer-to-peer platforms. The risk that India would hit back with a new law to make criminals out of crypto professionals and investors was always present. So practitioners tried to educate policymakers, appealing for sensible regulation starting with definitions for what is a utility token, which digital asset is to be viewed as a security, and which is to be treated as a currency. The trouble is with bureaucrats. They say

they want blockchain, but not cryptocurrencies. It's as silly as wanting airports with duty-free shops but no flights. From the Reuters story, it doesn't appear that the final regulation will be much different from what a draft bill had recommended in 2019. A government panel report, which had provided the backdrop for the draft legislation, said that authorities would be fine with distributed ledger technologies for delivery of any services, or "for creating value," without involving cryptocurrencies "for making or receiving payment." Such a dichotomy will be messy in practice. Take international money transfers, where costs pile up because of payment messages that have to laboriously jump national borders by using correspondent banks. To provide value, the service provider will need to employ virtual payment tokens, something that the Philippines and Bangladesh are already allowing. India, the world's largest

recipient of overseas remittances, won't want to miss out. To see where India might be going with its policy flip-flops, consider something else Sitharaman said at the conclave. A lot of the experiments that fintech firms are doing in blockchain, she said, will be taken up "in a big way" in the offshore financial center in Gift City in Gujarat, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state. A startup meet is planned there, she said. Now, it may be an excellent idea to fill up a ghost town with 20-something programmers since 40-something Mumbai bankers won't go there. Perhaps even the code writers don't have to leave behind the city lights of Bangalore and Hyderabad and head for the boondocks. As long as resident Indian investors are allowed to freely park in Gift City some of the \$250,000 they're permitted to take overseas annually, the offshore center could in theory channel some dollar liquidity to the crypto industry.

Why An Injured Mamata Now Has Bigger Advantage Over BJP

The elections in West Bengal have been turned into a full-fledged war by the BJP. That leaves Mamata Banerjee with no choice but to arm herself with all kinds of tricks. The two incidents which will define these elections are Mamata Banerjee chanting the Chandi Paath from a political platform and campaigning in a wheelchair with her leg in a plaster. The BJP may have to later regret being over-aggressive in targeting her personally.

As a leader, Mamata Banerjee has not been thrust from the top. She has risen from the street, and if today she is a formidable leader in her own right, it is because of her street-fighter spirit.

Originally from the Congress, when she realised that her ambitions were being stifled by the party bosses in the mid-1990s, she rebelled and formed her own party. It was a huge decision - in those days, it was believed that any leader who broke from the party did not survive long, there being only a few exceptions like Sharad Pawar. Before she rebelled, two stalwarts of the Congress, Arjun Singh and N.D. Tiwari, had revolted against the leadership of Narasimha Rao, formed a rival party, and contested the election in the hope that their party would be recognised as the real Congress. This experiment did not last long and both the leaders had to rejoin their parent organization.

But after Mamata Banerjee left the Congress, she never looked back. She passed through turbulent times but did not entertain the idea of going back to the Congress, like Pranab Mukherjee. Mamata fought and fought. She preferred to align with the BJP than to surrender to Sonia Gandhi despite having a cordial relationship with her. Finally, her hard work paid off; in 2011, she emerged victorious, defeating the CPM-led Left Front in West Bengal and formed the government.

The Left at one time was seen as invincible in West Bengal. Mamata Banerjee did the unthinkable. Once, she was attacked by Left goons. That did not deter her. Any other politician would have lost hope but not her. And in Nandigram and Singur, she discovered how to



best the Left. So, if the BJP imagined that she can be scared by a ruthless and incessant attack, they should be blamed for not doing their homework. She is a politician who excels in adversity and revels in a pitched battle.

The BJP has undoubtedly seen phenomenal growth in the state. In the 2014 parliamentary elec-



tions, the BJP had 16% vote share and three Lok Sabha seats. But in five years' time, the BJP bounced back with an unprecedented gain of 24% votes with 18 parliamentary seats vis-à-vis 24 to the Trinamool Congress. These are scary numbers. And one could imagine that the BJP's numbers will further improve.

But the story has a twist. Mamata Banerjee's social base is unscathed by the BJP's growth. The Trinamool Congress has consistently got 42% to 45% votes since the 2011 election when she defeated the Left

Front for the first time. The BJP has gained at the cost of the Left and the Congress. After splitting the Congress, she hijacked its social base too. Most Congress voters moved to Mamata Banerjee. And when 'disillusioned' Left voters joined her band wagon, she demolished the Left Front. Now the Congress and the Left are

overboard. Its hyperbolic, high-decibel, extra-aggressive polarising campaign could prove detrimental.

The apprehension that the Muslim vote could be split between the Trinamool and Left-Congress seems misplaced; in fact, the minority vote is getting further consolidated behind Mamata Banerjee. There is

speculation that more than 85% of Muslims will prefer voting for her, which was not the case earlier. If that happens, it will be tough for the BJP to dislodge her. Even if the BJP were to manage polarising the Hindu vote, it is difficult to imagine that the non-Muslim population, all 70 percent of it, 70% would vote for the BJP.

There is no denying the fact that the BJP-RSS combine has succeeded in garnering a major chunk of Hindu votes, but except in a few North Indian states, this vote share does not cross 50% of the votes polled.

This phenomenon is also Modi-specific. In assembly elections where Modi is not the candidate, the BJP vote share shows a massive dip of 8% to 24%. The data analysis of 12 assembly elections vis-à-vis national elections since 2017 clearly reinforces this pattern. In the recently-held Jharkhand election, the BJP had a catastrophic loss of 24% votes. Similarly, the BJP lost 17% votes in Bihar, 18% in Delhi, and in Maharashtra and Haryana, the figures are 8% and 22% respectively.

In these states, elections were held after the 2019 parliamentary elections in which the BJP procured a historic mandate with 303 seats and a gain of 6% votes in comparison to the 2014 parliamentary elections. It can be argued that the dip in the states is due to the anti-incumbency sentiment of the voters. But this argument does not hold ground in Delhi and Odisha. In Odisha, the vote share gap between parliamentary and assembly elections is 10%. Delhi is a classic case. In 2019, the BJP won all seven seats and the Aam Aadmi Party was pushed to third spot, but in the assembly polls, the AAP won 62 seats with 54% votes. And the BJP, which had 57% votes in 2019, could manage only 39%. This clearly establishes that a large section of voters makes a clear distinction between the BJP and Modi. He carries an extra 8% to 10% votes which is deposited in his personal account and does not transfer to the BJP in the assembly elections.

It is always hazardous to make a political prediction, but if one is guided by this logic, then the BJP's chances in West Bengal are slim. Because by this logic, the BJP will find it difficult to repeat its 2019 performance and could lose an extra 4% to 5% extra votes this time. In fact, West Bengal data also supports this logic. In the 2016 assembly election, the BJP vote share showed a dip of 6% in comparison to 2014. In this context, Mamata Banerjee's new efforts to project herself as a Hindu leader will increase the BJP's headache. And if her plastered leg provokes sympathy votes, the BJP could be in big trouble.

Manage privatisation, with political finesse

This includes reaching out to all political and economic stakeholders - from Opposition parties to trade unions. It includes building a strong intellectual case for privatisation - while reassuring those who fear that they will bear the brunt of the consequences of reforms

A key government initiative this year will be the proposed privatisation of public sector enterprises, while the State will confine itself to the bare minimum presence in strategic sectors. Coupled with the monetisation of assets, as proposed in the budget, this will herald a major change in India's political economy, where, over time, the State will retreat from directly managing companies and assets and confine itself to a broader regulatory and oversight rule. This newspaper sup-

ports the privatisation drive and believes that it is not the State's business to be in business. There was a historical context for the government to invest in public sector enterprises in the initial decades after Independence, but that era is long over. But it is important to recognise that privatisation is not merely an economic decision - it is squarely within the realm of politics. It is tied to questions about the nature and responsibility of the State, the future of employees in units which are meant to

be privatised, and the future economic implications in sectors which move into private hands. And that is why it is crucial to manage this much-needed process of privatisation with political finesse.

This includes reaching out to all political and economic stakeholders - from Opposition parties to trade unions. It includes building a strong intellectual case for privatisation - while reassuring those who fear that they will bear the brunt of the consequences of reforms. And it includes keep-



ing a flexible outlook and be willing to engage in negotiations rather than adopt an absolutist attitude. As the controversy over farm laws shows, economic reforms are deeply contentious now and the role of the private sector

continues to be viewed with suspicion. The government must be transparent and consultative, while the Opposition must be responsible and not engage in mindless obstructionism of sound policy initiatives.

The story of Kathmandu's long quest for deeper engagement with Beijing



In December 1975, as relations between the United States (US) and the People's Republic of China (PRC) began to normalise, Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping had a long conversation with American President Gerald Ford about the state of affairs in South Asia. Sikkim had been annexed by India a few months previously, and Ford asked Deng whether Nepal faced any similar threats from India. Deng replied, 'Nepal itself feels the threat, but at the moment there are no indications that India will make open military actions... I believe that you can do more things with Nepal... We have established good relations with Nepal - we have mutual confidence - but what we can do is quite limited. Perhaps things will get

better when our railroad into Tibet is accomplished.' The Qinghai-Tibet Railway (QTR) opened its line to Lhasa in 2006, almost three decades to the day Deng spoke presciently about China's role in Nepal. But as much as the Lhasa-Kathmandu Highway in the 1960s signalled the PRC's intention to overcome the "magnificent frontier", as Jawaharlal Nehru termed the Himalaya in his famous 1950 speech to the Indian Parliament, the QTR did much more to smoothen the path for China into Nepal. For, immediately Nepali policymakers began to believe a train could eventually make its way from Lhasa to Kathmandu. By 2008, Nepal had requested China to extend the line from Shigatse to the border, which a high-ranking

Chinese official at the time called "a beautiful dream in Nepali hearts". Nonetheless, China's new infrastructure capabilities in the Himalaya had made it clear to Nepal that Beijing could finally be the alternative to Delhi - politically and economically - as Kathmandu had long sought.

In the past few years, there has been an intense scrutiny of China's new presence in Nepal at the cost of Indian influence. Chinese investments have increased in the country, with China now the largest foreign investor. There is also increased people-to-people contact, with a growing number of Nepalis now studying in China and Chinese tourists visiting the country.

Further, China was said to have encouraged the merger of two major communist forces into a unified Nepal Communist Party

China's own limitations in the Himalaya had prevented it from becoming the alternative to India in the country. Until now

(NCP), now disbanded by the Supreme Court. The NCP had established formal relations with the Chinese Communist Party, and had also decided to train its cadres in "Xi Jinping Thought". Such extensive bonhomie was said to have been motivated by what Nepal views as the "unofficial" Indian blockade in 2015, when Kathmandu determined it was essential to break free of India's economic stranglehold over Nepal. Similarly, when the 2020 border dispute broke out, senior Indian officials appeared to suggest that Nepal had protested at the behest of China (without explaining that the roots of the dispute go back much further).

In November 2020, as prime minister KP Oli faced intense opposition within his party, Delhi signalled it was willing to do business by sending several high-ranking dignitaries to Kathmandu, and then inviting the foreign minister to minister-level talks despite Oli disbanding the Parliament. It seemed India had once again taken the lead in Nepal, with China's focus on the NCP blinding it to the turbulence

of domestic Nepali politics.

However, this kind of reading misses the point entirely, focusing merely on short-term outcomes. For, as I suggest in my new book *All Roads Lead North*, a closer reading of history will show Nepal has long desired to break free of the "special relationship" it has with India - which is read alternatively in Kathmandu as an encroachment of Nepal's sovereignty as well as Delhi putting its weight behind Nepali political actors it deems amenable to its interests.

China's own limitations in the Himalaya had prevented it from becoming the alternative to India in the country. Until now. With its new push towards infrastructure, however, and the decision to invest nearly \$30 billion in Tibet in the new five-year-plan (which includes bringing the Tibet train to Gyirong, at the border with Nepal), it seems such limitations are a remnant of the past.

Amish Raj Mulmi is an editor and commentator, and the author of *All Roads Lead North: Nepal's Turn to China*

Time to send a strong message to Britain

Stuck in its colonial mindset, and often disrespectful of Indian sovereignty, London must get its India policy right

Britain's hope after Brexit - to be a Global Britain, Global Broker, as outlined in a Chatham House report - reflects both its diminished status and its imperial nostalgia. Britain is assuming that its membership of the European Union (EU) constrained its global role, which it now can play, and that Britain has enough weight and credibility in the international system to mediate differences among countries and assist in finding solutions to vexed contemporary issues. No doubt Britain is still a major power, but global economic and political power have steadily shifted towards Asia. Britain has limited political, economic or military weight in this area that is dominated by China, Japan, South Korea, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), and, increasingly, India. On regional security issues that are now primary strategic concerns of the United States (US), whether in the South and East China Seas, North Korea, Taiwan,

Indo-Pacific or Quad, Britain is a minor or absent player. China's Hong Kong grab has also exposed the limits of Britain's power. Being a "Global Broker" goes beyond commissions for financial brokerages. Britain has to be seen as politically unbiased. In our region, it still bats for Pakistan because of an unshed historical attachment to that country. Its claimed superior understanding of Afghanistan from its imperial past has contributed to a befuddled US Afghan policy. Britain has always favoured accommodating the Taliban. All this has been at India's expense, including its position on the Kashmir issue. This reality goes beyond government and is reflected in its parliament, media and think-tanks. It allows demonstrations against our high commission in London by a combination of Sikh separatists and Kashmiri elements with the connivance of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Britain's intelligence agencies are well aware of the background of the agitators but, despite our re-

peated official representations, these "peaceful protests" are permitted time and again for vote-bank politics and to maintain some heat on India on its internal affairs. The recent debate in the British parliament on the farm protest shows why Britain's status as "broker" will be suspect in India. Out of the 27 petitions presented for debate, many were more pressing but this petition was given priority. Human rights was chosen to justify the parliamentary discussion on the sensitive ground that this universal issue did not amount to foreign interference in India's internal affairs. The statements of the Members of Parliament (MPs), barring one honourable exception, with large Sikh and Pakistanis in their constituencies, contain glaring factual distortions in which Jeremy Corbyn, a former Labour Party chief, excelled. If individual parliamentarians need to nourish their constituencies even at the cost of their credibility beyond that circle, the British govern-



ment, through its Minister of State for Asia, Nigel Adams, needed to act more responsibly in the interest of ties between India and the United Kingdom (UK). Instead, he welcomed the petition, endorsed the propaganda against the Indian government and did not correct the obvious distortions. He praised the offensive interventions of some MPs, failed to snub a Pakistani-origin MP who made outrageous remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and instead of roundly dismissing it, gave an equivocal response to an MP who spoke about evoking sanctions against India for human rights abuses. He patronisingly lectured India on abiding by its Constitution and international agreements, and

spoke of serious and specific concerns that Britain will raise during Prime Minister Boris Johnson's visit. While paying lip service to the farm protests as Indian's internal affair, Adam's intervention attempted to carve out space for Britain as a "friend" to intrude into our internal matters. This is incongruous with British efforts to establish a new framework of ties with India post-Brexit. The British high commissioner in Delhi was rightly summoned to lodge a protest but that may not be enough to close the matter. Some conclusions have to be drawn about the British mindset towards India that assumes that its provocations can be cost-free.

The rationale and future of Quad

Militarism is in the air in the Indo-Pacific. But it is important to keep the level of competition non-militaristic



United States (US) President Joe Biden is credited with taking the initiative for the summit-level meeting of Quad that took place on March 12. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, too, thanked Biden for taking this initiative in his opening comments at the summit. This is the second high-profile foreign policy initiative taken by Biden in his first 100 days in office. Earlier, he addressed the Munich Security Conference on February 19 where he tried to win back European allies such as Germany, France and the United Kingdom, by proposing a transatlantic alliance to

counter China. However, the mood in the European Union (EU) is not for confrontation with China. Both the German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the French President Emmanuel Macron seemed less enthusiastic about taking on China directly. Biden's next stop was Quad. Here too, his focus was to contain China. But he did not betray the aggression of his predecessor. The last time when the foreign ministers of Quad countries met in Tokyo, they could not even issue a joint statement, primarily because of the strident anti-China rhetoric of then US Secretary of

State, Mike Pompeo. India was particularly reluctant to agreeing with the Obama-time vocabulary of "Free and Open Indo-Pacific - FOIP". It insisted on adding another I - inclusive. India deserves credit that there was not only a joint statement this time, but it even stated that: "We strive for a region that is free, open, inclusive, healthy, anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion." The elephant in the room, China, could not be ignored. India's insistence on an inclusive approach was in keeping with the sentiments of many smaller countries in the region, which may not take an explicit anti-China position. On the other hand, the Americans are clear about their containment policy. Both have met midway. The joint statement highlights maritime challenges in the region and calls for "collaboration, including in maritime security, to meet chal-

lenges to the rules-based maritime order in the East and South China Seas". It is a clear indication of possible future joint action by Quad countries in the region, although India was never forthcoming about it in the past. Quad may not be a full-scale alliance yet, but a new "minilateral" is taking shape. Quad's immediate focus on vaccines and sharing of responsibility was welcomed by India. India is already supplying 60% of the world's vaccines. The initiative will further boost its vaccine manufacturing capacity. This could also pave the way for India to become the manufacturing destination for Quad countries, thus reducing dependence on China. Quad partners such as Japan and Australia were unhappy over India's decision to stay out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. If Quad emerges as an economic powerhouse, it will be

beneficial to the entire region. The region has had several multilateral and minilateral alliances in the past. East Asia Summit (EAS), Asean Security Forum, and the decades-old APEC are some of them. But these forums have become lazy talking shops without any discernible results. If Quad were to not go down that path, it should be willing to take the bull by its horns. The Indo-Pacific is heating up. A new Cold War has already started. Xi Jinping, the supreme leader of China, believes that time and momentum are on his side. He is flexing his military muscle aggressively. The grand display of military might on the streets of Beijing on October 1, 2019, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), was intended to send out a clear message about China's military preparedness.



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Three professional Tax Preparers in Queens charged with Fraud for Filing False Returns that Cheated City and State

Defendants Worked at Two Unrelated Businesses in Flushing and Woodside; The Accused Allegedly Forged Signatures and Outright Lied on Returns to Downplay Tax Liability for Clients

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz, joined by New York State Commissioner of Taxation and Finance Michael R. Schmidt, today announce that Yachun Lin of ETS Tax Services and Nayib Chabur and Maria Isabel Chabur of La Oficina en Astoria have been charged with criminal tax fraud, forgery and other crimes for allegedly knowingly including false information on tax returns that lowered the tax burden for clients while also cheating the City and State out of thousands of dollars. District Attorney Katz said, "We are now in the midst of tax season when thousands of people will seek assistance in filing their tax returns. Tax-payers must always be careful when hiring someone to handle their finances. Unscrupulous action taken by a preparer could lead to serious liabilities for individuals. The three defendants in these two separate cases allegedly used lies and falsehoods to decrease what their clients owed in taxes. But, due to the diligence of investigators with the NY State Department of Tax and Finance and the Queens District Attorney's Crime Against

Revenue Unit these defendants will be held to account for their alleged actions." Commissioner Schmidt said, "Hard-working New Yorkers entrust their tax preparer to operate in their best interest—and with integrity and honesty. Tax preparers who abuse that trust are imperiling their clients, who are ultimately responsible for the returns they sign, and depriving the state of tax revenue for vital services. I thank District Attorney Katz for her efforts on this case and will continue to work with all levels of law enforcement to ensure tax preparers who break the law are held accountable." Lin, 53, of 68th Drive in Flushing, Queens, was arraigned last night before Queens Criminal Court Judge David Kirschner on a complaint charging her with criminal tax fraud in the fifth degree, offering a false instrument for filing in the first degree, attempted grand larceny in the third and fourth degree and forgery in the second degree. Judge Kirschner ordered the defendant to return to Court on April 27, 2021. If convicted, Lin faces up to 18 years in prison. According to the charges, on March 22, 2019, an undercover

investigator met with the defendant at ETS Tax Services on Main Street in Flushing. Identifying himself with the fictitious name Alex Zhukov, the undercover provided Lin with a social security number, a Brooklyn home address and W-2 forms. He told the defendant that he needed tax returns completed for 2017 and 2018. DA Katz said, Lin looked over the man's tax return for 2016 and stated he owed so much money because his employer did not withhold City taxes from his paycheck. The defendant allegedly suggested the man use the address of a friend or family member who lives outside of New York City—stating this would save him \$2,000 per year. The undercover came up with a Westchester County address and defendant Lin allegedly filled out his tax returns using the address she knew was not his residence. She also allegedly forged her client's signature on the return—and left the space for a professional tax preparer's information blank. The bogus information on the tax return, According to the charges, allowed the "client" to hold on to

\$2,156 for 2016 and \$2,319 in 2017. Defendant Maria Isabel Chabur, 49, and her husband Nayib Chabur, 62, both of 69th Street in Woodside, Queens, were also arraigned last night before Queens Criminal Court Judge Kirschner on a complaint charging them with criminal tax fraud in the fifth degree, offering a false instrument for filing in the first degree, attempted petit larceny, conspiracy in the fifth degree and forgery in the second degree. Judge Kirschner ordered the pair to return to Court on April 19, 2021. If convicted, the Chaburs face up to nine years in prison. According to the charges in the Chaburs' case, an undercover investigator on March 27, 2019, entered La Oficina En Astoria on 69th Street in Woodside, Queens, and asked for assistance filing a tax return for 2018. This investigator who called herself Carmen Guzman—also a fictitious name—provided a social security number, W-2 form and a tax return for the previous year. DA Katz said, Defendants Maria Isabel and Nayib Chabur filed a tax return on behalf of Guzman allegedly including a \$5,500 IRA deduction that was not true and not even

discussed with the filer. Chabur is accused of also signing for her "client" and leaving the required space for professional tax preparer signature blank. The alleged scheme only saved Guzman just under \$500. The investigation was conducted by Revenue Crimes Specialist I Eddy Parisien of the Criminal Investigations Division of the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance under the supervision of Revenue Crimes Specialist IV Carlton Richards, and under the overall supervision of Deputy Director of Investigations Michael Spinoso, Deputy Commissioner John Harford and Commissioner Michael R. Schmidt. Assistant District Attorney Marnie Lobel, Unit Chief within the District Attorney's Frauds Bureau, is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Joseph Conley, Bureau Chief, Herman Wun, Deputy Bureau Chief, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney of Investigations Gerard A. Brave. Criminal complaints and indictments are accusations. A defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

ED arrests absconding TMC leader Vinay Mishra's brother In coal smuggling case

Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday arrested Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Vinay Mishra's brother Bikas in connection with the coal smuggling case, officials said.

(News Agencies)-The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday arrested Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Vinay Mishra's brother Bikas in connection with the coal smuggling case, officials said. Bikas Mishra, sources say, was arrested from Delhi after being questioned briefly in relation to the case. Later, a designated court in Delhi sent him to ED custody for the next six days. Vinay Mishra, an alleged close associate of Mamta Banarjee's nephew Abhishek Banarjee, is an absconding accused in the cattle smuggling case.

The CBI has already recorded statements of Abhishek Banarjee's wife and other relatives in the coal smuggling case. Earlier, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) had issued an arrest warrant against Vinay Mishra in connection with the cattle smuggling case. Later, a designated court in Kolkata issued a non-bailable warrant (NBW) against Vinay Mishra. Vinay Mishra has been summoned by the central probe agencies multiple times till date but has failed to join the investigation in the cattle

smuggling across the India-Bangladesh border. The CBI had earlier carried out raids at multiple locations in West Bengal, including the premises of Mishra. A lookout notice has been issued against Vinay Mishra and all the airports, ports and borders have been alerted regarding the same. Sources said that Vinay Mishra's name came up during the investigation of cattle smuggling case involving BSF officials. The case was registered by the CBI on September 21, 2020. On September 23, the CBI carried



out searches across several locations in Kolkata. According to one CBI FIR, the then commandant, 36 Battalion, BSF, three individuals, unknown

public servants and private persons were booked on allegations of illegal trade of cattle along the West Bengal-Bangladesh border.

Fifth Indicated Defendant Apprehended and charged with conspiracy in Million Dollar Luxury Goods heist From JFK Airport in 2020

Crew Allegedly Stole Millions of Dollars in Gucci, Chanel and Prada Merchandise; Defendant Faces Up to 25 Years in Prison if Convicted

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz, joined by the Port Authority Police Chief Security Officer John Bilich, announced today that Oscar Asencio, 32, has been indicted and arraigned in Queens Supreme Court for his role in assisting the crew that allegedly committed two brazen heists, stealing over \$6 million worth of designer merchandise from John F. Kennedy International Airport last year. The defendant is charged with conspiracy and criminal possession of stolen property for possessing, protecting and selling-off nearly half of the millions of dollars' worth of stolen designer gear from the second heist - including Chanel jewelry and handbags, Gucci sneakers, purses, sunglasses and clothing.

District Attorney Katz said, "On the run since October, this defendant is now in custody and facing very serious charges. The defendant is accused of participating in selling off millions of dollars' worth of stolen merchandise taken from JFK Airport. Our airports are supposed to be secure for both people and the goods imported

into our region. One of my top priorities is keeping our airports safe for all travelers, as well as imported merchandise - including the much-needed PPE, vaccines and other medical supplies coming into New York."

Port Authority Chief Security Officer Bilich said, "This multi-agency effort has once again paid dividends and allowed us to continue to protect the public and ensure the safety of those who live and work in the region. We applaud the dedication and commitment of the law enforcement teams at the Port Authority Police Department, FBI and Queens District Attorney's office who have helped bring this case to a successful conclusion."

Asencio, of 21st Street in Astoria, Queens, was arraigned late Tuesday afternoon before Queens Supreme Court Justice Gene Lopez on an indictment charging him with criminal possession of stolen property in the first degree and conspiracy in the fourth degree. Justice Lopez remanded the defendant and set his next date for March

25, 2021. If convicted, Asencio faces up to 25 years in prison. DA Katz said, according to the charges, a crew of men - some of them former airport workers - used their insider knowledge of how shipments are picked up at the airport to gain access to a cargo importer in January and May of 2020. A co-defendant went to the receiving office for the importer and used forged documents to gain access to various shipments of designer goods.

According to the charges, more than \$800,000 in Prada merchandise was stolen in the first heist. In May, more than \$5.3 million in Gucci and Chanel products were taken from the importing business.

The DA said, defendant Asencio allegedly helped protect the merchandise that was stolen in May that was subsequently stashed in a non-operating beauty salon at Guy R. Brewer Boulevard and 147th Avenue in Jamaica, Queens. Surveillance video allegedly shows Asencio at the site carrying bags filled with the stolen property in and out of the

building. The defendant allegedly also helped sell of the stolen items out of the stash house.

All but approximately \$2.5 million worth of merchandise was sold. Police executing a Court-authorized search warrant seized mountains of boxes stuffed with stolen Gucci bags, clothes and other accoutrements. There were more than 1,000 Chanel purses, jewelry, sunglasses and accessories and Prada items found inside the empty building.

The investigation was conducted by Detectives Nicholas Ciancarelli, Anthony Young, Daniel Tancredo, Joseph Pignataro, Phil Tysowski, Sergio Laboy, Francisco Romero, Katie Lewrey, Luis Santibanez and Tonya McKinley, of the Port Authority Police, under the supervision of Detective Sergeant Thomas Eddings, Sergeant Dewan Maharaj, Detective Lieutenant Jose Alba, Inspector Hugh Johnson, and under the overall supervision of Port Authority Criminal Investigation Bureau Chief Matthew Wilson, PAPD Superintendent Edward Cetnar

and Port Authority Police Chief Security Officer John Bilich. Also assisting in the investigation were members of the District Attorney's Office, specifically Assistant District Attorneys Catherine Kane, Chief of Airport Investigations and Deputy Bureau Chief of the Major Economic Crimes Bureau and Elizabeth Speck of the Major Economic Crimes Bureau and Detective Lieutenant Al Schwartz, of the DA's Detective Bureau.

Assistant District Attorney Catherine Kane, Chief of Airport Investigations and Deputy Bureau

Chief of the Major Economic Crimes Bureau, is prosecuting the case with the assistance of Assistant District Attorney Elizabeth Speck, also of the Major Economic Crimes Bureau, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Mary Lowenburg, Bureau Chief of the Major Economic Crimes, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney of Investigations Gerard A. Brave.

Queens Couple Indicted on Sex trafficking and other charges for Transporting woman from Korea and forcing them into prostitution

Defendants Allegedly Arranged Transportation from Korea; Victims Threatened if They Did Not Have Sex for Cash; The Pair Each Face Up to 25 Years in Prison if Convicted

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz today announced that Jung Ja Ornstein, 62, and Eric Ornstein, 49, have been indicted by a Queens County grand jury and arraigned in Queens Supreme Court on sex trafficking charges and other crimes for allegedly bringing two female victims from Korea and coercing them to have sex with strangers for cash.

District Attorney Katz said, "I created the Human Trafficking Bureau in the DA's Office to combat this very problem. These two defendants are accused of purposely bringing two women to Queens from Korea and forcing them into the sex trade industry. The two are in custody and charged accordingly."

Jung Ja and Eric Ornstein, of Flushing, Queens, were both arraigned before Queens Supreme Court Justice Vallone on an 18-count indictment charging them with sex trafficking, promoting prostitution

in the second and third degree and grand larceny in the second, third and fourth degree. Justice Vallone ordered the defendants to return to Court on March 12, 2021. If convicted, they each face up to 25 years in prison.

District Attorney Katz said, according to the charges, in 2015, one of the victims read an advertisement in Korea that stated she could make money in America. The victim called the listed phone number and was told she would be working in a bar/restaurant but must pay back \$10,000 for the transportation and assistance in obtaining a passport. When the woman arrived at JFK International Airport, she was met by defendant Jung Ja Ornstein. This defendant took the victim to an address on Steinway Street in Long Island City and informed her that to pay off her bill she would be engaging in prostitution. Jung Ja Ornstein then allegedly took the woman's passport and gave

it to defendant Eric Ornstein. According to the charges, at that location, the victim had sex with strangers for money. These customers were arranged by defendant Eric Ornstein. Defendant Jung Ja Ornstein allegedly collected the money from the customers, and defendant Eric Ornstein would come to the location regularly to pick up the money from the female defendant.

In March 2017, the defendants informed the victim that they would be relocating and returned the victim's passport and left her alone.

The investigation revealed that in 2001, another victim responded to a similar advertisement in Korea. This woman met with a man and woman in Korea and they assisted her in obtaining a passport and made travel arrangements for her. The victim was also told that she would have to pay back \$10,000 for her travel, but it would be taken out

of her earnings. After arriving in the United States, the victim was taken to a bar in Manhattan where her passport was taken from her and she was forced to work. While working at the bar, the victim was only allowed to keep her tips but she had to pay for her room and board. On tips alone, it was a struggle to also pay the \$10,000 due for her travel. After about a year, this victim's bill was purchased by another female who made the victim work in a massage parlor. Eventually, she was forced to work for the defendants.

The pair took the woman to the Steinway Street location and she, too, was allegedly forced to trade sex for cash. Jung Ja Ornstein again allegedly collected the money from the customers, who were arranged by Eric Ornstein. The victim was only allowed to keep her tips. There were various times when the woman wanted to leave and each time she was allegedly

threatened by the female defendant. Jung Ja Ornstein allegedly told the victim, "You have to work, You owe money. You think I won't find you?" according to the complaint. The victim feared for her safety, as the male would yell and break things when he was angry at the victims for not earning enough money, and was often seen carrying a metal pipe.

Continuing, the DA said, the victim worked for the defendants at several different massage parlors and in 2017, the victim was told that her debt was paid and they returned her passport. Approximately, three years later the defendants found the victim, and informed her that she still had a bill to pay. The victim, who feared for her safety, and that the defendants would reveal that she had been working for the defendants to her family, handed over \$8500 of her savings to the defendants.

ED attaches properties of former Union minister Sushilkumar Shinde's daughter, son-in-law in money laundering case

The Enforcement Directorate has attached the properties owned by former Union minister Sushilkumar Shinde's daughter and son-in-law in a money laundering case.

(News Agencies)- The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has attached two offices owned by the daughter and son-in-law of former Union Home Minister and former Maharashtra Chief Minister Sushilkumar Shinde in a money laundering case.

The offices, located at a building in Mumbai's Andheri, are in name of two companies - namely Jindal Combines Pvt Ltd and Orlando Trading Pvt Ltd - in which Shinde's daughter Priti Shroff and son-in-law Raj Shroff are major shareholders.

The case pertains to a fraudulent loan procured from Yes Bank by the PMC Bank scam prime accused Sarang and Rakesh

Wadhawan who were promoters of Housing Development Infrastructure LTD (HDIL). The case is also known as the Mackstar PMC Bank scam case.

A tweet by the Enforcement Directorate said, "ED attaches commercial properties worth Rs. 35.48 Crore belonging to Raj Shroff and his wife, owners of M/s Jindal Combines Pvt. Ltd & M/s Orlando Trading Pvt. Ltd. under PMLA in Bank Fraud case."

The two commercial premises are located in the Kaledonia building in a prime location of Andheri East which was developed by HDIL and another company, through its joint

venture subsidiary company named Mackstar.

According to sources, both the offices were bought at huge discounts of around 50 per cent of the market value.

One of the offices, said to be purchased in the name of the company Orlando Trading, was bought on March 30, 2016. According to the probe agency, the value of the premise was around Rs 20 crores but the payment of only Rs 10 crores was done. The second office, bought earlier in 2014 in name of the company Jindal Combines, was valued at over Rs 15 crores, but the company only paid around Rs 9.3 crore, the ED said.



Sources said that ED officials had recorded statements of Raj Shroff thrice in the past two months in the case. Shroff, as per sources, had said that the complete payment was not done to Mackstar as the developers had not fulfilled the agreed-upon commitments. Last month, the ED officials attached two office

spaces worth Rs 34.36 crores belonging to the Viva Group, owned by family members of former underworld don Jayendra Thakur alias Bhai Thakur and MLA Hitendra Thakur in the same case.

The attached properties are located in the same Kaledonia Building in Andheri East.

Chhota Rajan sentenced to 10 years in jail in attempted murder case of bookie-turned-builder Ajay Goslia



A special CBI court in Mumbai has sentenced gangster Chhota Rajan to 10 years in jail in the 2013 case of bookie-turned-builder Ajay Gosalia's attempted murder.

(News Agencies)- A special CBI court in Mumbai has sentenced gangster Chhota Rajan to 10 years in jail in the 2013 case of bookie-turned-builder Ajay Gosalia's attempted murder. Chhota Rajan was found guilty by the court on Tuesday

along with other co-accused who were also sentenced to 10 years in prison. Rajan has also been imposed a fine of Rs 5 lakh.

What is the case

According to the prosecution, 52-year-old Ajay Gosalia alias Ganda, a bookie-turned-builder,

was shot at by three people on August 28, 2013, while he was exiting Infiniti Mall in Malad (West). The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) alleged that the firing was ordered by Rajan who had asked his trusted lieutenant Satish Kalia to carry out the attack.

Gosalia had sustained severe injuries but miraculously escaped death as the bullet had hit a large gold pendant.

The probe

An FIR was registered on August 2013 at Bangur Nagar police

station under attempt to murder and other relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Arms Act against unknown people. The case was transferred to DCB CID of Mumbai Police a few days later and the Maharashtra Control of Organised Act (MCOCA) was applied in the case. Chargesheet was filed in November 2013 by the special unit against seven accused.

Three accused -- Prakash Nikam, Satish Kalia and Chhota Rajan -- were wanted in the case.

However, later on, Nikam and Kalia were arrested in the murder case of journalist J Dey and were also chargesheeted by the investigating agency in Gosalia's case. After Rajan's deportation from Bali to India, the case was transferred to the CBI. He was taken into custody by CBI in this case on April 21, 2016. The charges were finally framed by a Mumbai court against eight accused in the case. Rajan has already been sentenced to life in the murder case of journalist J Dey. Live TV

Batla House encounter: 13-yr-old wait & watch over, says slain cop's wife on death penalty to accused

(News Agencies)-The "13-year-old long struggle of wait and watch" for Maya Sharma, wife of slain Delhi Police inspector who was killed in the Batla House encounter, finally came to end on Monday after a Delhi Court awarded death penalty to the accused Ariz Khan in the case. The court awarded death penalty to Ariz Khan for the murder of decorated Delhi Police Inspector Mohan Chand Sharma in connection with the sensational 2008 Batla House encounter case, saying the offence fell under the "rarest of the rare

category" warranting the maximum sentence.

"I want to thank the judiciary. We have got a huge relief after 13 years. Finally, justice has been delivered after our 13 year-long struggle. The court has done justice to us. Until now, we were in a position of wait and watch," the slain inspector's wife, Maya told PTI.

Batla House encounter

Delhi Police's special cell inspector Mohan Chand Sharma received gun shot during the Batla House encounter between the police and alleged terrorists

in south Delhi's Jamia Nagar on September 19, 2008. The encounter had taken place within a week of 2008 Delhi serial blasts that had killed 30 people and left 159 people injured.

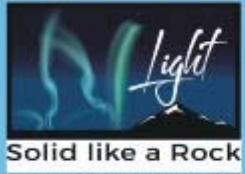
The terrorists were suspected to be the members of terror outfit, Indian Mujahideen.

Sharma had succumbed to the bullet injuries sustained during the gun battle. He was also accorded the highest gallantry award, the Ashok Chakra.

Last year, he was awarded his seventh Police Medal for Gallantry (PMG).



Batla House: Probe and terrorists. In January 2010, conviction Police launched a Shahzad was arrested from manhunt for the escaped Azamgarh in Uttar Pradesh.



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Pakistan receives second batch of 500,000 vaccines from China

(News Agencies)- Pakistan has received a Chinese donation of 500,000 doses of Sinopharm vaccine, bringing the country's total supply to one million shots, Health Minister Dr Faisal Sultan said.

The South Asian nation of 220 million people launched COVID-19 vaccinations for the public on March 10, starting with older people. Health workers started receiving shots in early February.

"These 500,000 doses will ensure smooth continuation of our vaccine drive, currently under way for senior citizens," Sultan said in a tweet on Wednesday. Sinopharm, the only vaccine currently available in the country, requires two doses.



Vaccination uptake has been slow in Pakistan, where authorities have faced a significant amount of vaccine hesitancy among the general public and healthcare workers.

The percentage of COVID-19 tests coming back positive across the country has touched 6.26 percent and crossed 11 percent in Punjab, the largest province.

Pakistan has recorded 615,810 cases of the coronavirus and 13,717 deaths, with 3,495 cases

and 61 deaths reported in the last 24 hours, according to government data on Thursday.

That daily case rise was the highest Pakistan has seen in more than three months, prompting authorities to tighten restrictions on public gatherings and warn of a third wave of the virus.

The country has not secured any vaccine from drug manufacturers and is depending on the GAVI/WHO COVAX initiative for poorer nations and donations.

Pakistan is expecting to get GAVI's first batch of 2.8 million doses of AstraZeneca sometime later this month, officials said.

Besides Sinopharm and AstraZeneca, Pakistan has approved Russia's Sputnik and China's CanSino

Biologics Inc's (CanSinoBIO) vaccines for emergency use. CanSinoBIO has released interim efficacy results from a multi-country trial, which included Pakistan, showing 65.7 percent efficacy in preventing symptomatic coronavirus cases and a 90.98 percent success rate in stopping severe infections. In the Pakistani subset, the efficacy of the CanSinoBIO vaccine at preventing symptomatic cases was 74.8 percent and 100 percent at preventing severe disease.

India and Pakistan suffer resurgence of COVID-19 cases



(News Agencies)- India and Pakistan reported a big jump in new coronavirus infections on Thursday, driven by a resurgence in cases in their richest states. In efforts to curb the spread of COVID-19, Punjab state in India extended a night curfew across nine districts and the New Delhi city government announced an increase of vaccinations to 125,000 doses per day from around 40,000 at present, officials said.

Local authorities in the Indian state of Odisha sought additional vaccine doses and in Gujarat, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's

home state, authorities ordered schools and colleges to be shut across eight administrative divisions until April 10.

Officials in India have blamed the surge in infections mainly on crowding and a reluctance to wear masks. Pakistan says the coronavirus variant first found in Britain may also be a factor.

Maharashtra state, home to India's commercial capital Mumbai, reported 23,179 of the country's 35,871 new cases in the past 24 hours, and the rapid spread in industrial areas raised risks of companies' production being disrupted.

NYC: STOP THE SPREAD OF CORONAVIRUS!

New Yorkers working together can slow the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19) in New York City.



PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS

- Wash your hands with soap and water often.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or sleeve when sneezing or coughing.
- Do not touch your face with unwashed hands.
- Do not shake hands. Instead wave or elbow bump.
- Monitor your health more closely than usual for cold or flu symptoms.



STAY HOME IF SICK

- Stay home and call your doctor if you have symptoms like coughing, shortness of breath, fever, sore throat.
- If you do not feel better in 24-48 hours, seek care from your doctor.
- If you need help getting medical care, call 311.
- NYC will provide care regardless of immigration status or ability to pay.



PROTECT THE MOST VULNERABLE

- If you have chronic conditions like lung disease, heart disease, diabetes, cancer or a weakened immune system, avoid unnecessary gatherings and events.
- If you have family or friends who have one of these conditions, do not visit them if you feel sick.



REDUCE OVERCROWDING

- Consider telecommuting.
- Stagger work hours, starting earlier or later.
- Walk or bike to work, if possible.
- If the train is too packed, wait for the next one.

Text COVID to 692-692 for real-time updates or visit nyc.gov/coronavirus.

Call 311 to report harassment or discrimination.

*Messages and data rates may apply. Check your wireless provider plan for details.

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Biden Must Press Pakistan to End Persecution of Religious Minorities



Telecommunications Authority (PTA) has intensified the government's decades-long violent persecution of religious minorities - particularly that of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community. For the first time, the PTA has filed a lawsuit against two American citizens who belong to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, seeking to shut down a U.S.-based website, trueislam.com. The PTA argues that because Ahmadis built the U.S.-based website, it violates Pakistan's anti-Ahmadi laws. The PTA applied the same convoluted logic to order Google to remove any app built by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community from the tech giant's Play store. Google has, sadly, capitulated to the draconian demands. Sam Brownback, the former U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, has compared Pakistan's persecution of Ahmadi Muslims to the Chinese dictatorship, exclaiming, "[This is] Pakistan following in the China model." A Brief History of Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community was founded in 1889 by a man named Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, who claimed to be the awaited Messiah to reform Muslims, peacefully revive Islam, and reject all forms of religious violence. Despite suffering decades of violent religious persecution, it is well documented that Ahmadi Muslims have maintained their position against all forms of religious violence. Pakistan's persecution of Ahmadis escalated in 1974, when, in an unprecedented vote, the General Assembly amended the country's Constitution to formally declare the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community 'outside the fold of Islam.' Imagine, for a moment, if the United States passed a constitutional amendment declaring Catholics outside the fold of Christianity? Notwithstanding this absurd amendment, in 1984 Pakistan added Ordinance XX to its penal code, criminalizing any Ahmadi Muslim who proclaims to be a Muslim with arrest and fine. By

1986, Pakistan added Section 295-C, mandating up to and including the death penalty for Ahmadi Muslims.

These draconian laws have predictably left Ahmadi Muslims to languish in apartheid conditions. All books, literature, events, speech, and websites belonging to the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Pakistan are criminalized. Pakistan denies Ahmadis free and fair voting and forces Ahmadi Muslims to declare their faith on their passports as a means to prevent them from performing the Hajj pilgrimage. To perform Hajj, a Pakistani citizen must have "Muslim" on their passport for religious affiliation. To obtain a passport with "Muslim" as the religious affiliation, Pakistan requires applicants to complete a form declaring Ahmadi Muslims as "non-Muslim." Since Ahmadis refuse to declare themselves non-Muslim, they are identified as "Ahmadis," and thus denied the ability to perform Hajj. In other words, Pakistan's government has created special ID cards to single out Ahmadis.

(News Agencies)- Last year the U.S. State Department labeled Pakistan a country of particular concern over its increasing persecution of religious minorities.

This label is the State Department's strongest condemnation under the International Religious Freedom Act, and normally mandates sanctions for the designated country. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo intervened, however, with a presidential waiver to avoid such punishment.

The alliance between the two nations has sent \$70 billion in

economic and military aid to Pakistan since Pakistan's founding. If not for the sake of sheer justice, then at least for the sake of protecting American interests, President Joe Biden must hold U.S. ally Pakistan accountable to repeal its discriminatory anti-Ahmadi legislation and actions. While the legislation particularly targets Ahmadi Muslims, it tragically also enables societal discrimination and violence against Pakistan's Christian, Sikh, Hindu, and Shia communities.

Most recently, the Pakistan

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The first signs of global warming are now clearly visible. We urgently need to limit greenhouse gas emissions. Nothing and no-one will be spared from climate change. This warning is therefore to all people, all countries and, in particular, to the Belgian Council of Ministers who, on the weekend of March 20 and 21, will have to decide what action to take regarding essential measures linked to the Kyoto Protocol.



[illegible]

UN team visits remote Bangladesh island where Rohingya relocated

Delegation on three-day visit to Bhasan Char island in Bay of Bengal where Bangladesh moved more than 13,000 refugees.

(News Agencies)-A United Nations delegation is on a three-day visit starting Wednesday to a remote Bay of Bengal island where Bangladesh has moved more than 13,000 Rohingya Muslim refugees since December despite criticism from rights groups.

Bangladesh wants to eventually

transfer 100,000 of the more than a million refugees living in overcrowded border camps to Bhasan Char island, which emerged from the sea only two decades ago and is considered vulnerable to floods.

"This initial three-day visit will bring together experts from UN agencies engaged in the

Rohingya refugee response in Bangladesh," the UN refugee agency told Reuters in an email. "The visit will look at the current situation and facilities on Bhasan Char, appraise the needs of the Rohingya refugees relocated there, as well as discuss with the authorities and others currently working on Bhasan Char."



Bangladesh court orders probe into torture claims by cartoonist

(News Agencies)-A court in Bangladesh has ordered a probe into claims by a formerly jailed cartoonist that he was tortured before police detained him under the country's harsh internet laws, his lawyer said.

Ahmed Kabir Kishore, 45, was arrested in May 2020 under the controversial laws and charged with carrying out anti-state activities and spreading rumours. The high-profile cartoonist was

released on bail two weeks ago after a public outcry over the death in jail in February of a writer, Mushtaq Ahmed, who was arrested under the same laws. Kishore has alleged he and Ahmed were held at the same jail and that the writer was also tortured by unknown men - claims that authorities have flatly denied.

Kishore filed a petition with a Dhaka court on Wednesday,

saying he was beaten with sticks and slapped hard by more than a dozen unknown men who abducted him on May 2 and held him for nearly three days.

He said the men questioned him about cartoons he had drawn mocking a powerful businessman close to the government, and for a series criticising the government's response to the coronavirus pandemic.

The UN earlier said it had not been allowed to conduct a technical and safety assessment of the island and was not involved in the transfer of refugees there. Bangladesh says the relocation is voluntary, but some among a first group to be moved spoke of being coerced.

The Rohingya, a minority group who fled violence in Buddhist-majority Myanmar, are not allowed to move off the island, which is several hours' journey away from the southern port.

Bangladesh has dismissed

safety concerns over the island, citing the building of flood defences as well as housing for 100,000 people, hospitals and cyclone centres.

It also says overcrowding in refugee camps fuels crime, while some Rohingya said frequent violence in the camps had driven them to relocate.

"We hope it will remove any concerns that the UN has about the relocation and they will get involved in the relocation and provide Rohingya people the support they need," a senior official

at the foreign ministry said.

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President Macron plunges a third of French people into new month-long lockdown

(News Agencies)- Paris and several other regions in France have tonight been plunged into a new month-long lockdown after President Macron's hand was forced by a faltering vaccine rollout and the spread of highly contagious coronavirus variants.

Prime Minister Jean Castex said the tougher restrictions followed a clear acceleration in the spread of the coronavirus, with France now in the grip of a third wave. 'The moment has come to go further, with more demanding restrictions where things are most critical,' Castex told a news conference.

The lockdown will be imposed on the 16 hardest hit departments, the prime minister said, including Paris and its surroundings, as

well as parts of the north. It takes effect from midnight on Friday. Schools will stay open and people will be allowed to exercise outdoors within a 10 km (6.2 miles) radius of their homes.

People living in these areas would not be allowed to travel to other parts of France without a compelling reason.

The move comes after France on Wednesday announced its biggest daily rise in Covid cases since its most recent lockdown was lifted in late November last year.

France, like much of Europe, has been left vulnerable to a Covid third wave due to its slow vaccine

roll-out that has left most of the population unprotected.

EU bureaucracy and supply issues have been blamed for much of the shambles, but it has been hampered further France's



© AFP via Getty Images

decision to temporarily halt the use of AstraZeneca vaccines.

The move came amid fears the jab could cause blood clots,

despite EU leaders, the World Health Organization and Europe's own medical regulator saying it is safe.

The European Medicines Agency is due to give its final ruling on the safety of the jab today, and Emmanuel Macron has signalled that he is ready to 'quickly' resume use of the vaccine once the ruling is public.

France recorded 38,501 new cases of the virus Wednesday up

from 29,975 the day before, the country's public health body said. The last lockdown in France began to be eased on November

28 last year, and the largest one-day rise since then was 31,519 cases recorded on February 24. The cabinet held an emergency meeting to discuss the figures on Wednesday night, after which spokesman Gabriel Attal confirmed new measures would be imposed. Attal said the new measures could include some form of lockdown including in the Paris region, but added that schools will not be closed. Prime Minister Jean Castex will announce the exact measures at a press conference on Thursday evening. France has been using weekend lockdowns in other cities in order to bring down Covid rates, and Mr Castex said on Tuesday that the same measures will be considered for Paris if the situation gets worse.

Cuomo's strategy for getting through scandal: Focus on his job



(News Agencies)-In the eyes of those close to Andrew Cuomo, the way through the scandal that threatens to sink the three-term New York governor is to focus on the work that made him popular just a short time ago: combating the coronavirus crisis, getting people vaccinated and ensuring the state budget is ap-

proved.

As multiple allegations of sexual impropriety swirl around Cuomo, he showcased this strategy on Monday in a visit to a mass vaccination site in Long Island, where he did not comment on the accusations but instead focused on fighting the pandemic, the struggle that caused his ap-

proval ratings to skyrocket in 2020.

"He's focused on the budget, he is focused on getting vaccines into arms and he is focused on continuing to reopen the economy and rebuild following this health and economic crisis," said a Cuomo aide when asked about the governor's headspace. "Those are his focuses, and he is working every day to advance the ball on those things."

Those three issues are a convenient distraction for a governor who has fallen to arguably the lowest point of his decades-long political career just months after hitting his highest high. But people close to the Democrat argue that he knows the only way out of this crisis is by focusing on his job and hoping New Yorkers stand by that work.

That is why Cuomo, speaking before cameras on Monday, launched into a lengthy monologue about the coronavirus vaccine, how he plans to get his injection in a predominantly Black church to "make a point" and the importance of the state's forthcoming budget. Cuomo even reminded New Yorkers about the impact of Hurricane Sandy, a 2012 superstorm that led to the deaths of at least 24 people, and how New Yorkers came together after a "dark, dark period for people."

"Sometimes God comes and he knocks you on your rear end for one reason or another. Or life comes and knocks you on your rear end for one reason or another. Circumstances happen. Things happen," he said, waxing philosophical. "The question is

what you do when you get knocked on your rear end."

The subtext here, according to his aide: Cuomo feels like the way for him to get back up is to lead the state.

"That has been a longtime ethos of his," said the aide. "It's something he always felt was important to remember: that sometimes you get knocked down and you have to get back to work."

But Cuomo's strategy got an assist from the state's Democratic Party on Monday, when Chair Jay Jacobs urged members to focus on the critical matters at hand, namely the budget and the pandemic, even as many in Albany are calling for Cuomo to go.

"We have to understand that we're at an impasse but yet government has to continue to run," Jacobs told CNN.

Biden reiterates pledge to raise taxes on Americans making \$400,000 or more

(News Agencies)- President Joe Biden again reiterated he intends to raise taxes for the most wealthy Americans in an ABC News interview aired Wednesday, saying "anybody making more than \$400,000 a year will see a small to significant tax increase." He also pledged that individual Americans who make less than \$400,000 -- which is more than 90% of taxpayers -- "won't see one single penny in additional federal tax."

Biden said Republican criticism for his \$1.9 trillion Covid-19 relief law is because the tax breaks in his plan go to the

bottom 60% of the population while "their idea of a tax cut is to give the Trump tax cut where 83% went to the top 1% of people in America."

Biden acknowledged that he may not get any Republican support for a tax increase but he said he "will get Democratic votes." He then added he thinks the Senate filibuster should return to the "talking filibuster" but he did not say that he wants to see the 60-vote threshold to end debate on bills eliminated -- something that could make achieving a tax increase without Republican votes unlikely. "If we just took the tax rate back to what it was

when (George W.) Bush was president, top rate paid 39.6% in federal tax, that would raise \$230 billion. Yet they're complaining because I'm providing a tax credit for child care? For the poor? For the middle class?" Biden added.

Biden put forth several proposals during his presidential campaign that would raise taxes for the wealthy and on corporations by reversing some of the tax cuts that President Donald Trump signed into law in 2017.

On Monday, White house press secretary Jen Psaki said that Biden believes that "those at the top are not

doing their part" and "obviously that corporations could be paying higher taxes." Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on Sunday suggested a tax hike could be on the horizon when she said she expects the White House to put forward proposals over time to get deficits under control. "(Biden) hasn't proposed a wealth tax but he has proposed that corporations and wealthy individuals should pay more in order to meet the needs of the economy, the spending we need to do, and over time I expect that we will be putting forth proposals to get deficits under control," Yellen told ABC.

IRS plans to delay this year's tax filing deadline to mid-May

(News Agencies)-The Internal Revenue Service plans to delay this year's tax filing deadline by roughly a month, to mid-May. Democratic Reps. Bill Pascrell of New Jersey and Richard Neal of Massachusetts, the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, said that the new deadline would be May 17. The IRS late Wednesday put out a statement confirming the date change.

An official familiar with the plans earlier told CNN the decision was made in order to allow filers more time to navigate tax situations complicated by the coronavirus pandemic.

There has been growing bipartisan support to extend the deadline. Lawmakers, led by Pascrell along with Democratic Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland and Republican Sen. Mike Crapo of Idaho, had urged the move, citing the pandemic.

Bloomberg was first to report the news of the deadline delay.

Last year, the IRS moved the deadline to July 15, giving Ameri-

cans an additional three months to file their taxes. "Almost a year later, we are still grappling with the massive economic, logistical and health challenges wrought by this devastating pandemic," wrote Raskin and Pascrell in a letter sent to the IRS earlier this week.

In a separate statement, Crapo noted that major Covid stimulus bills passed by Congress over the past year have made several changes to the tax system.

"The various coronavirus relief programs created over the last year, including the bill signed into law just last week, have resulted in a large amount of extra paperwork for taxpayers this year and have required tax preparation firms to constantly update their systems," Crapo said.

Delays are already piling up

As of March 5, the IRS had yet to process 6.7 million of the 2020 returns that had been filed since February 12. It had processed nearly 49 million. The agency has processed about 88% of the returns it received compared with

96% on roughly the same time frame last year.

In addition to processing tax returns, the IRS is also in the process of sending out a third round of about 150 million stimulus payments. As of Wednesday, about 90 million had been sent out.

The \$1.9 trillion Covid relief bill signed into law by President Joe Biden also directs the IRS to send out periodic payments for an expanded child tax credit, as well as handle several other changes

like waiving income taxes on up to \$10,200 in unemployment benefits received in 2020 for households earning less than \$150,000, helping laid-off workers who faced surprise tax bills on their jobless benefits.

The IRS has yet to provide guidance to the jobless who have already filed their 2020 tax returns. If the agency can't come up with an automatic way to adjust returns reporting unemployment income, filers may have to send in amended returns, although the IRS is not recommending they do so at this time.



The IRS recently provided instructions and a worksheet for those who have yet to complete their 2020 returns and who will report unemployment compensation. It guides the jobless through filling out the correct amounts on Schedule 1 of Form 1040.

Backers of this provision are among those who urged the IRS to delay the filing deadline.

Still working through last year's backlog

The agency started the year already behind. At the end of December, it still had millions of tax year 2019 returns to be pro-

cessed. Many IRS workers were sent to work from home during the pandemic, leading to a backlog of paper returns. At one point last year, the pile up of unopened mail had to be kept in trailers.

"They are already behind," said Nina Olson, who previously served as the IRS' national taxpayer advocate and is now executive director of the Center for Taxpayer Rights.

"They didn't get through all of the 2020 work before they had to start the 2021 filing season. So this year is going to be a real challenge," she added.

Biden says Cuomo should resign if investigation confirms sexual harassment allegations

(News Agencies)-President Joe Biden said in an interview aired Tuesday that Democratic New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo should resign if an investigation confirms the allegations of sexual harassment against him.

Asked by ABC News' George Stephanopoulos if Cuomo should step down if the investigation confirms the allegations, Biden replied, "Yes."

"I think he'll probably end up being prosecuted, too," Biden said. The President added that "a woman should be presumed telling the truth and should not be scapegoated and become victimized by her coming forward." "Takes a lot of courage to come forward," he said. "So, the presumption is they should be taken seriously. And it should be investigated. And that's what's underway now."

The comments from Biden mark his most explicit repudiation of Cuomo since multiple women made allegations of sexual harassment or unwanted advances against the New York governor. They came in an interview with Stephanopoulos in which Biden

encouraged migrants not to come to the US as a crisis unfolds at the country's southwestern border -- with thousands of unaccompanied children now in federal custody -- and he expressed openness to changing the Senate's filibuster rule for the first time.

Cuomo, asked about the President's comments during a teleconference call Wednesday, said, "If you committed a crime, you can be prosecuted. That's true. But what President Biden said was we should do an investigation."

The President, Cuomo continued, "said there should be a review. I agree with him on that." Biden had said Sunday that he wants to see what comes of the investigation into the allegations when asked if the Democratic governor should resign.

"I think the investigation is underway and we should see what it brings us," the President told reporters. White House chief of staff Ron Klain echoed Biden's comments later Sunday evening, telling MSNBC that the investigation "ought to run its course."

Vanessa Bryant names deputies who allegedly took photos of crash site

(News Agencies)-In a series of Instagram posts on Wednesday, Vanessa Bryant revealed the names of the four Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department deputies who allegedly took or shared grisly photos of the scene of the helicopter crash that killed her husband, NBA legend Kobe Bryant, their daughter Gianna, and seven others.

The posts were of an amended complaint -- filed Wednesday in U.S. District Court in Los Angeles and obtained by CNN -- that named deputies Joey Cruz, Rafael Mejia, Michael Russell, and Raul Versales as the defendants, in addition to Los Angeles County, its sheriff and fire departments. The lawsuit seeks damages, claiming negligence and invasion of privacy. The complaint alleges Cruz "boasted that he had worked at the scene of the accident where Kobe Bryant had died" and showed photos of the crash site to a bartender and a bar patron on January 28, 2020, two days after the crash.



On the same day, Cruz also showed the photos of the Bryants' remains to his niece, according to the complaint.

The bartender who saw the photos then shared with other customers that he had seen the photos and "described specific characteristics of Mr. Bryant's remains," the complaint states. One of the customers found this situation "very, very disturbing" and emailed a complaint to the sheriff's department, describing the deputy. Another deputy, Russell, allegedly shared photos with a friend with whom he "plays video games nightly," the

complaint said. Vanessa Bryant won her case earlier this month to disclose the names of the deputies allegedly involved. Attorneys for the LASD and Los Angeles County wanted to keep the deputies' names and ranks sealed, arguing that "hackers may attempt to seek out and gain access to the individual deputies' devices to locate any photographs and publish them," according to court documents. In February, she had called for the sheriff's department to release the names of the deputies, saying they must be held accountable.

India coronavirus: Can its vaccine producers meet demand?

The firm said it has also faced difficulties importing cell culture media, single-use tubing and specialised chemicals from the US.

"The sharing of these...raw materials is going to become a critical limiting factor - nobody has been able to address this so far," said Mr Poonawalla.

The SII has written to the Indian government asking it to intervene to ensure the uninterrupted manufacture and supply of vaccines globally.

Another Indian manufacturer, Biological E, which is producing the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, has also raised concerns about possible shortages affecting vaccine production.

Mahima Datla, the company's chief executive, recently said US suppliers were "reluctant to commit that they will stick to their delivery timelines".

Why is the US restricting supplies?

President Biden has asked his administration to identify potential shortfalls in materials required for vaccine production. He has invoked the Defense Production Act (DPA), legislation from the 1950s which gives the US president powers to mobilise the domestic economy in response to emergencies.

This allows the US to restrict the export of such products as vaccine supplies, to enable it to ramp up its own production.

President Trump also used these powers to restrict the export of some personal protective equipment (PPE) last year.

Representatives of various global vaccine makers raised concerns in early March, warning that:

"Export restrictions from key suppliers could affect global production

"Some items lack standardisation and are highly specialised

"Replacement with substitutes sourced from elsewhere could take up to 12 months

Dr Sarah Schiffling, an expert on vaccine supply chains at Liverpool's John Moores University, says the pharmaceutical supply chain is very complex.

"Even when demand is very high, new suppliers can't spring up as quickly as they would in some other industries, or at least those new suppliers would not be trusted."

She also says that the US measures are as much a reaction to existing global shortages, as they are the cause of them.

"To some degree, shortages would be unavoidable for

materials needed for any kind of product that is suddenly in demand around the world," she says.

Impact on India's vaccine production

There are currently two vaccines approved in India - the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine (known locally as Covishield) and Covaxin, developed in Indian laboratories.

Since early January, nearly 130 million doses of Covishield from the SII have been either exported or used domestically.

Indian pharmaceutical companies have been ramping up production by adding new facilities or converting existing production lines for some months now, both to meet domestic demand and meet global supply requirements.

The Serum Institute said in January it could at that point turn

out between 60 and 70 million vaccine doses a month - this includes Covishield and the US-developed Novavax (not yet licensed for use).

The SII told the BBC back then it was aiming to boost production to 100 million doses a month from March - but when we checked with them recently, production was still at 60 to 70 million doses, and had not increased.

The company did not clarify if it already had stockpiles of the vaccines it produces, and how much of its production has been earmarked for domestic use only. Is India meeting domestic needs?

The Indian government began its vaccination programme on 16 January, and so far the country has inoculated over 37 million people amid fears of a possible second wave.

Infections have been increasing in some parts of the country.

The authorities aim to administer 600 million doses within seven months - that's about 85 million doses a month.

So far, the SII has an agreement to supply 100 million doses to the Indian government, with another firm, Bharat Biotech, supplying 10 million doses.

India also has licensing deals with the Russian Gamaleya Research Institute to produce 200 million doses of the Sputnik vaccine.

These will be produced by Indian manufacturers, for both the Indian market and for export.

The SII chief, Adar Poonawalla, indicated in January that official approval for Covishield was granted on the understanding that company prioritise Indian domestic needs.

The rise and fall of Param Bir Singh

Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray on March 17 unceremoniously transferred Param Bir Singh out from his prestigious post of Mumbai police commissioner. Under flak for his mishandling of the Mukesh Ambani threat scare case, Singh was replaced by Hemant Nagrale, an IPS officer, 1987 batch. Rajnish Sheth, director general (anti-corruption bureau), will replace Nagrale as the new acting director general of police. Singh, meanwhile, has been posted to the relatively insignificant post of DG Home Guards. It is widely believed that Singh was the choice of Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) president Sharad Pawar, who had convinced Thackeray to bypass Nagrale's seniority

while appointing Singh as police commissioner on March 1, 2020.

The planting of an explosives-filled vehicle outside Ambani's



Mumbai residence on February 25, the subsequent murder of the car owner and the arrest of crime branch police officer Sachin Vaze for his alleged involvement in the case-with Singh at the helm, the Mumbai police seems to have steered into troubled waters. The last time the city

police faced a scandal of this magnitude was in 2003 when then police commissioner R.S. Sharma was arrested for allegedly shielding the prime

accused Abdul Karim Telgi in the fake stamp paper case. (Sharma was acquitted in 2007 for lack of evidence).

Time of glory Singh shot to fame in 2008 when, as additional commissioner of the Anti-Terrorism Squad, he investigated the Malegaon bomb blast case and arrested two prime accused-Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur and Lt. Col. Prasad Purohit-catching the attention of the national and

international media. Thakur's family alleged that Singh physically tortured her while she was in custody and falsely implicated her in the case. In 2015, Singh proved himself again after then chief minister Devendra Fadnavis posted him as police commissioner of Thane. Under him, the Thane police solved several cases, including a fake international call centre racket, a fake sim card scam and even busted an international narcotics syndicate.

Singh's handling of the arrest of five activists in 2018 in Pune's Elgar Parishad case, wherein inflammatory speeches were made against the government on December 31, 2017, also earned him praise.

Osho Ashram land sale: Nine more disciples file intervention application

Zurich-based OIF, which owns the Osho International Meditation Resort or Osho Ashram, has sought permission from the Charity Commissioner to sell two of its plots (about 9,836 square meters) in the resort located at posh Koregaon Park area here to Rajiv Bajaj of Bajaj Auto and Rishabh Family Trust for Rs 107 crore.

While speaking to India Today, the first ex-trustee of Osho, Yogesh Thakkar, claimed that the

nine disciples had shown their interest in paying the deficit amount of Rs 3.64 crore to Pune Osho Commune.

The condition put up by nine Osho disciples for paying the deficit amount was that present trustees would have to share details of the expenditure incurred during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Yogesh Thakkar, in his petition, stated three reasons for objection to the proposed sale. The first one stated that the

reason put up by present Osho Trustees for the land sale was unacceptable because the expenditure of Rs 3.65 crore for 6 months was beyond expectation during the lockdown as all activities did not take place at Osho Ashram and only 10 people were staying inside. "If more disciples were staying, then this information has not been shared by present trustees," he alleged. The plea further stated that before putting up the land for

sale, the present trustees -- Mukesh Sarda, Maa Sadhana Belapurkar, Laal Pratap Singh and Devendra Singh Deval -- mentioned that the ashram was in need of Rs 3.65 crore for maintenance. Yogesh Thakkar also alleged that the four trustees were directors of Osho Multimedia and Resorts Pvt limited and Zen Properties Private limited. Thakkar said funds of Osho Ashram and properties of the trust were

siphoned by the trustees in the said companies, amounting to Rs 800 crore. Thakkar also mentioned that the Charity Commissioner's office had initiated an inquiry into the alleged affairs of the trust, which is still pending. Reacting to the allegations of financial irregularities, Osho trustee Maa Sadhana told India Today, "It is inappropriate to talk on this matter when the case is being heard in front of Charity Commissioner.

NH director tells faith leaders getting Covid-19 vaccination is a 'love your neighbor opportunity'

"I discussed it with my team, and they say the thing that has more impact than anything Trump would say to the MAGA folks is what the local doctor, what the local preachers, what the local people in the community say," he told reporters.

Vaccine hesitancy is significantly higher among Republicans, according to CNN polling.

You asked, we answered: Your top questions about Covid-19 and vaccines

Concerning variant is about to become dominant in the US, experts say

Experts are worried some Americans are letting up too early -- at a critical time when looming dangers are threatening to wipe out the progress the US has made in its battle against Covid-19.

At least a dozen state leaders have eased Covid-19 restrictions this month, often citing improving Covid-19 trends and growing vaccination numbers. At the same time, air travel is hitting pandemic-era records and the first spring break crowds have begun descending on Florida and other sunny regions while cases of a dangerous variant are on the rise.

The Transportation Security Administration said it screened more than 1.2 million people at airports across the US on Monday -- bringing the total number of US air travelers since Thursday to about 6.4 million. That's the highest number of any five-day period of the pandemic. In Florida, spring breakers have begun packing shores with some Miami Beach officials reporting swelling crowds and precautions going out the

window. It's a combination of all those factors, officials fear, that could lay the groundwork for another spike.

"We have seen footage of people enjoying spring break festivities, maskless," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said



Monday. "This is all in the context of still 50,000 cases per day."

So is another surge inevitable? "We could go in either direction," emergency physician Dr. Leana Wen told CNN on Monday. "What happens now is really up to us and whether we keep up masking and avoiding indoor gatherings as we should be until the point that we're vaccinated." New Covid-19 cases reported over the past week in 15 states are at least 10% higher than the seven days prior to that period, according to Johns Hopkins University data. In two of those states -- Minnesota and Michigan -- cases are more than 40% higher than they were a week ago.

Typically, data from at least a couple of weeks is needed to identify a trend, experts say, but as newer and more contagious variants become more prevalent, catching early warning signs may be key to limiting their spread. Overall in the country, new cases are still trending lower.

Experts have said safety measures will be crucial because multiple variants of the virus are circulating -- including the highly contagious B.1.1.7 variant that was first identified in the UK. B.1.1.7 is projected to become the dominant variant in the US by the end of this month or early

April, Walensky said Monday. Because it is highly contagious, it could cause a surge in cases, and vaccination levels are not high enough to stop such a spike, experts have said.

"The way the variants spread is by letting our guard down," Dr. Richard Besser, the former acting CDC director, told CNN on Monday. "By not wearing masks, by not social distancing. If we can hang in there for a few more months, there will be enough vaccine for every adult in America to be vaccinated."

"Then we can truly let go of some of the restrictions that are in place. But if we do this too quickly, we could see an increase in cases, we could see a backslide that is occurring in many European countries and that does not have to be the outcome here in America," he added.

Research published last week suggested that the variant was associated with an estimated 64% higher risk of dying from Covid-19. Researchers have said

current vaccines generally offer good protection against the B.1.1.7 variant. Moderna's Phase 2/3 vaccine trial for kids up to 11 starts. The first children have been vaccinated in Moderna's Phase 2/3 Covid-19 vaccine trial for ages 6 months to 11 years, the company said Tuesday.

The clinical trial, called the KidCOVE study, will enroll approximately 6,750 children of those ages in the US and Canada.

The trial is broken into two parts. In part one, different dosages of the vaccine are being tested on children ages 6 months to 1 year, and ages 2 to 11.

Those findings will determine which dose will be used in the second part, when the trial will also include children who are given a saline placebo, which does nothing. The children will be followed for 12 months after their second injection.

Moderna is doing the tests to see whether the vaccine protects children from getting sick if they come into contact with coronavirus, according to the clinical trial's patient information website.

Moderna also has been running a separate Phase 2/3 trial, for adolescents ages 12 to 17.

Moderna's vaccine is currently authorized only for people ages 18 and older. So far, the youngest age OK'd for any of the three Covid-19 inoculations authorized in the US is 16, for the Pfizer vaccine.

Pfizer has been running a trial of its vaccine for ages 12 to 15.

Johnson & Johnson has announced plans to study its vaccine in children ages 12 to 17, and its CEO has said he

thinks the company could have a vaccine approved for ages below 18 by September.

It is difficult to estimate when a Covid-19 vaccine for children -- if studies find they're safe and effective -- could be authorized for them, Dr. Paul Offit, director of the Vaccine Education Center at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, told CNN on Tuesday. "(But) if I had to make a rough guess, I would think it would be possible that we would have enough vaccines, enough data, for children down to 12 years of age by the summer, and then for much younger children, by later in the year. But we'll see," Offit, a member of the US Food and Drug Administration's Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee, said.

Experts have said about 70% to 85% of people must achieve immunity -- either by surviving Covid-19 or receiving a vaccine -- for the population to reach herd immunity. That's the point at which enough people are protected against a disease that it cannot spread through the population.

Children will need to be part of that, Offit said.

"I think if we're going to get to 80% population immunity, some level of children are going to need to be vaccinated," he said.

More people eligible for vaccines. More states are expanding their eligibility requirements for vaccinations. Ohio will open vaccine eligibility to anyone older than 40 on Friday, and anyone older than 16 on March 29, Gov. Mike DeWine said Tuesday.

Mississippi began opening appointments to all residents who are 16 and older Tuesday. Alaska did this last week, and Connecticut's governor has said he tentatively plans to have his state to do the same by April 5.

President Joe Biden has said he wants states to expand eligibility to all adults by May 1, and he's said the country would have enough doses to vaccinate every US adult by the end of May.

In West Virginia, Gov. Jim Justice expanded the list of pre-existing medical conditions that make residents eligible to receive a vaccine.

Army recruitment scam: CBI books 5 Lt Colonels, 2 Majors; searches conducted in 13 cities

In its complaint to the CBI, the Ministry of Defence said, "On February 27, 2021, an input was received from a reliable source about the involvement of serving personnel in accepting a bribe for clearance of review medical examination of temporary rejected candidates at Base Hospital, Delhi Cantt (BHDC).""Further involvement also revealed that Naib Subedar Kuldeep Singh, BHDC and

Lieutenant Colonel MVSMA Bhagwan, on study leave at



Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh are also involved in seeking gratification from potential officer candidates at service selection board centres. The case involves a wider network of service personnel and civilians," the complaint went on

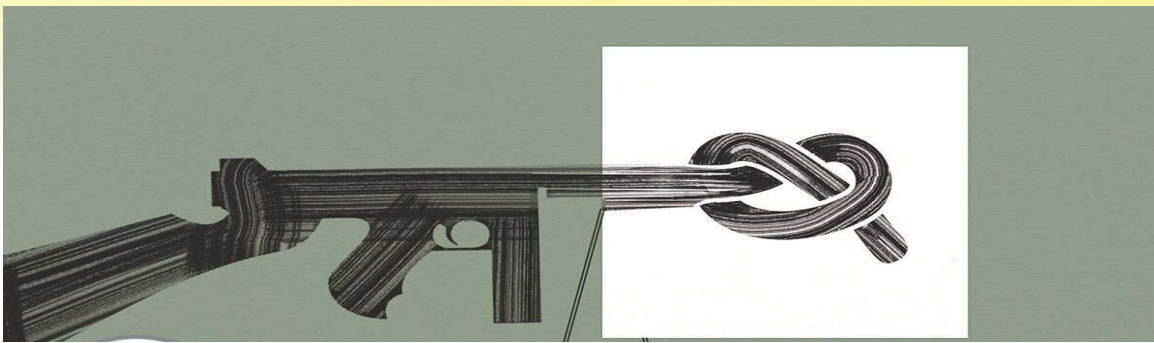
to say. The MoD's letter also says that the culprits should not go 'scot-free'. The CBI in its FIR has booked 23 persons which includes army personnel and a few of their family members along with unknown persons. As many as six army personnel of Lieutenant Colonel Rank have also been named as accused in the case.

Hope for Indo-Pak peace, with caution

The winds of a tentative peace are once again blowing in India and Pakistan. The two neighbours have renewed their commitment to a nearly two-decade-old ceasefire, which had existed in name only since 2013, but had started to fray from 2007-08. Will peace at the LoC pave the way for a wider process between India and Pakistan?

From what is publicly known or apparent, an active backchannel process over the last few months led to the point where Pakistan breached its own minimum precondition of a full reversal of India's August 5, 2019 reorganisation of Jammu & Kashmir for any peaceful engagement with India; and Delhi too set aside its long-held demand that talks could only be held after cross-border terrorism ends. This enabled the Directors General of Military Operations to arrive at the February 25 joint statement for adherence to the ceasefire. They have also agreed to discuss "core issues and concerns", which may be an allusion to Kashmir (for Pakistan) and terrorism (for India).

It has also emerged in Indian media reports that National Security Adviser A K Doval was India's backchannel representative and that he may have held talks directly with the



Pakistan Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa. If this is true, it would be the first time India has sidestepped the government in Islamabad during a period of civilian rule. The last time India was in direct talks with the military was in the early 2000s, with military ruler General Pervez Musharraf. The present turn in India-Pakistan relations holds many similarities, but also some crucial differences. Seeing how much India has invested in Bajwa and his "hand of peace in all directions" doctrine, understanding that earlier phase of bilateral ties, how it progressed and sputtered out, long before getting totalled in the Mumbai 2008 attacks, may be instructive. The 2003 ceasefire came at a time when Pakistan, in the wake of 9/11, was under tremendous pressure from the US to clean up its act. This unwritten ceasefire was preceded by a backchannel process that had begun around 2000. It led to the Musharraf-

Vajpayee joint statement in which Pakistan declared it would not permit any terrorist group to operate in its territory or launch a terrorist attack from its territory on foreign soil. This time around, Financial Action Task Force pressures, the realisation of what it will take for an economic recovery amidst a pandemic, along with its role in the ongoing Afghan process, may have all worked to bring the Pakistan Army to the table with India.

The difference is that Musharraf was all-powerful as the army chief-cum-President of Pakistan. Bajwa is an army chief on an extension with less than two years left in office. Unless he has other plans, Bajwa's term ends in November 2022. How should India see the process continuing after him? How invested would the next Pakistani Army chief be in this process, particularly if the view on the ground is — as it was

during Musharraf's last years — that there has been a sell-out to India on Kashmir?

Musharraf's ISI chief, Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, was one of the few in a closed group who knew about the backchannel that continued alongside the bilateral "composite dialogue" that began in 2004. It was a time of many initiatives, including cross-LoC buses and trade. But after succeeding Musharraf as Army chief at the end of 2007, General Kayani appeared to disown the process. Ceasefire violations started shattering the four-year-long peace at the LoC. Musharraf's own unravelling had begun earlier in 2007 when his sacking of the Chief Justice triggered a lawyers' movement seeking the judge's restoration. That became a wider movement with the slogan "Go Musharraf Go", encompassing within it a number of political grievances, including the belief he had "sold

out to India". Bajwa's leadership of Pakistan's most powerful institution is already brimming with tension — one, there is popular resentment at the Army's "selection" of a civilian leadership that has proved inept; two, Bajwa's extension as army chief was problematic within the army; three, in a trope familiar from 2007, he has been criticised by opposition parties since 2019 for "doing nothing" about India's changes in Kashmir; and four, former PM Nawaz Sharif holds him responsible for his judicial ouster. Add to this the widespread belief that the powerful ISI was unable, despite frantic efforts, to secure a seat for the country's finance minister in the Senate, the Pakistani upper House, earlier this week, and that it was gamed by ruling party members and allies, leading to a victory for opposition candidate and former PM Yusuf Raza Gilani. What you see now is a vulnerable government — Imran Khan has scheduled a vote of confidence today — and an Army with several exposed flanks. At the moment, Pakistani reactions on the new India-Pakistan development have been next to non-existent. It has stirred no big debates in Pakistani media.

Except for Imran Khan, who welcomed the ceasefire, political responses have been conspicuous by their absence.

Sharif, who had made no secret of his desire to make peace with India while in office, spoke briefly about Kashmir during a meeting with his party workers, but appeared to ignore the latest agreement on the truce, only saying that once in power, his party would take up the "masla-e-Kashmir" with India. The loudest voice came from Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, where "Prime Minister" Raja Muhammed Farooq Haider Khan condemned the Pakistani parliamentary committee on Kashmir as "jahil" for its condemnation of a Kashmiri separatist who questioned the ceasefire as a "sellout" to India. Farooq Khan, who is from Sharif's party, and other politicians in PoK aligned with the national opposition believe Imran Khan's PTI will stop at nothing to win the election due in the territory this July, and Islamabad, under the guiding hand of the Army, will proceed to integrate it into Pakistan as a province, in actions mirroring those of India on August 5, 2019. Such a process is already underway in Gilgit Baltistan.

By Nirupama Subramanian

Peace with Pakistan will give India direct access to Central Asia: Imran Khan

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday said India will be benefitted economically by having peace with his country as it will enable New Delhi to directly access the resource-rich Central Asia region through Pakistani territory.

Delivering the inaugural address at the launch of the two-day Islamabad Security Dialogue, Khan also said that his government after coming to power in 2018 did everything for better ties with India and it was for India to reciprocate.

"India will have to take the first step. Unless they do so, we cannot do much," he said. India last month said that it desires normal neighbourly relations with Pakistan in an environment free of terror, hostility and violence. India has said the onus is on Pakistan to create an environment free of terror and hostility.

India has also told Pakistan that "talks and terror" cannot go together and has asked Islamabad to take demonstrable steps against terror groups



responsible for launching various attacks on India. Khan discussed Pakistan's vision of comprehensive national security, built on the pillars of traditional and non-traditional security, including his vision for economic prosperity and human welfare. Khan dwelt at length on the issue of peace in the region, including peace between Pakistan and India, saying "the unresolved Kashmir issue was the biggest hurdle between the two countries." "If India gives the Kashmiris their right under the UN (resolutions), it will be greatly beneficial for Pakistan as well as for India," he said and added, "India

can access Central Asia after peace." Khan said that having a direct route to the Central Asian region will economically benefit India. Central Asia is rich in oil and gas. Central Asia, in the modern context, generally includes five resource-rich countries—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Pakistan has been unsuccessfully trying to drum up international support against India for withdrawing Jammu and Kashmir's special status and bifurcating it into two Union territories in August, 2019. India

has categorically told the international community that the scrapping of Article 370 of the Constitution was its internal matter. The Ministry of External Affairs has also underlined that the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir is an integral and inalienable part of India.

India and Pakistan had announced on February 25 that they have agreed to strictly observe all agreements on ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir and other sectors. Ties between India and Pakistan nosedived after a terror attack on the Pathankot Air Force base in 2016 by terror groups based in the neighbouring country. Subsequent attacks, including one on Indian Army camp in Uri, further deteriorated the relationship. The relationship dipped further after India's war planes pounded a Jaish-e-Mohammed terrorist training camp deep inside Pakistan on February 26, 2019 in response to the Pulwama terror attack in which 40 CRPF jawans were killed.

Why Pakistan is offering peace with India

India's western neighbour Pakistan is offering to "bury the past and move forward", a day after Prime Minister Imran Khan made similar overtures towards New Delhi following an unexpected ceasefire announcement by the militaries of the two countries weeks ago. Last month, India said that it wished to have normal neighbourly relations with Pakistan in an environment free of terror, hostility and violence. India has said the onus is on Pakistan to create an environment free of terror and hostility. India has also told Pakistan that "talks and terror" cannot go together and has asked Islamabad to take demonstrable steps against terror groups responsible for launching various attacks on India. However, Pakistan's Army Chief of Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa's call for movement towards cooperation has a few reasons: Financial Action Task Force Amid low chances of Pakistan exiting the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) grey list, a research paper by an Islamabad-

based think tank has revealed that Pakistan sustained a total of \$38 billion in economic losses due to FATF's decision to thrice place the country on its grey list. Pakistan has been on the FATF's grey list since June 2018 and the government was given a final warning in February 2020 to complete the 27 action points by June in the same year.

Cash-strapped The World Bank has approved a USD 300 million loan to help cash-strapped Pakistan address issues of climate change, health emergency and manage solid waste to reduce flooding chances in the country's financial capital Karachi, a media report said on Thursday.

Pakistan received \$500 million from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank each in June this year to prop up its struggling economy.

Pakistan's total public debt, domestic and external, was recorded at Rs36.3 trillion in the financial year 2019-20, up 154 per cent (or Rs22 trillion) since FY13, when it was recorded at Rs 14.3 trillion, according to

official data.

Daniel Pearl case US President Joe Biden had said he was "outraged" after Pakistan's top court upheld the acquittal and ordered the release of Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, the terrorist convicted of masterminding the 2002 beheading of US journalist Daniel Pearl.

Pearl's killing -- which was filmed -- caused international shock and outrage.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that Washington is ready to prosecute Sheikh in the United States for his horrific crimes against an American citizen.

Sinking economy

Pakistan's economy is in the doldrums, plunging to new lows every day with inflation at an all-time high.

In January, Pakistan had witnessed 12-year high inflation at 14.6 per cent which is among the highest in the world.

Food prices have been spiralling out of control in the country. In October, food inflation was at 16.6 per cent. The Pakistan government went on a panic-



buying spree to bring the prices down. The East Asia forum calls 2020 a forgettable year for Pakistan's economy as its GDP fell to -0.4 per cent. Pakistan's per capita income fell from \$1625 to \$1325. Pakistan's economy is scraping the bottom of the barrel with unemployment zooming. According to the World Economic Forum, the youth unemployment rate in Pakistan stands at 8.5 per cent in a country where 64 per cent of the population is below the age of 30. Top officials of the Pakistan government are in panic mode after the United Arab Emirates (UAE) demanded its \$1 billion back. The amount is deposited with the State Bank of Pakistan

(SBP), the central bank of the country. The deadline to return the \$1 billion is 12 March. The money is demanded as the amount has reached its maturity. In 2018, the Pentagon cancelled \$300 million in aid to Pakistan because of Islamabad's inaction against terror groups.

India and Pakistan signed a ceasefire agreement in 2003, but it had hardly been followed in letter and spirit over the past several years with more violations than observance of the pact. Ties between India and Pakistan nose-dived after a terror attack on the Pathankot Air Force base in 2016 by terror groups based in the neighbouring country.

Pakistan offers conditional peace, India says onus on Islamabad to end terror



Pakistan Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa said on Thursday that "stable" Indo-Pak relations is a "key" to unlock the untapped potential of South and Central Asia by ensuring connectivity between East and West Asia. Addressing a session of the first-ever Islamabad Security Dialogue, General Bajwa said that it was time for India and Pakistan to "bury the past and move forward" but added a condition and said that for "resumption of peace process or meaningful dialogue", India will have to create a "conducive environment", particularly in

Jammu and Kashmir.

Sources in India said that while India desired peace, Pakistan will

first have to end "terrorism" emanating from their own country. The Pakistani Army chief also said that the potential of the region has "forever remained hostage to disputes and issues between two nuclear neighbours".

Calling the Kashmir dispute the "heart of this problem", General Bajwa said, "It is important to understand that without the resolution of Kashmir dispute through peaceful means, the process of sub-continental

rapprochement will always remain susceptible to derailment due to politically motivated bellicosity".

India and Pakistan had announced on February 25 that they have agreed to strictly observe all agreements on ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir and other sectors. The ceasefire continues to hold, which is a positive sign.

India had last month said that it desires normal neighbourly

relations with Pakistan in an environment free of terror, hostility and violence. India had said the onus is on Pakistan to create an environment free of terror and hostility.

This came in the wake of General Bajwa's earlier offer of peace, which was also replete with conditions.

"Our position is well known. India desires normal neighbourly relations with Pakistan in an environment free of terror, hostility and violence.

Time for India, Pakistan to bury the past, move forward: Pak Army chief

Pakistan's army chief called on Thursday for arch rivals India and Pakistan to "bury the past" and move towards cooperation, an overture towards New Delhi that follows an unexpected joint ceasefire announcement last month between the two countries' militaries.

General Qamar Javed Bajwa stressed however that the burden was on India to create a "conducive environment", and said

Washington had a role to play in ending regional conflicts.

Pakistan and India, both nuclear-armed countries, have fought three wars, and in 2019, tensions rose dramatically post the Pulwama terror attack and the Balakot airstrikes.

"We feel it is time to bury the past and move forward," Gen Bajwa said in a speech at a conference in Islamabad meant to highlight the Pakistani government's new security

policies. "But...our neighbour (India) will have to create a conducive environment, particularly in Kashmir," he said. Pakistan's powerful army has ruled the country for nearly half of its 73-year existence, and the military has long controlled foreign and security policies.

Bajwa said the economic potential of South and Central Asia had "forever remained hostage" to the India-Pakistan disputes. The militaries of both countries

released a rare joint statement on February 25 announcing a ceasefire along the disputed border in Kashmir, having exchanged fire hundreds of times in recent months. The United States immediately welcomed the move, and encouraged the two to "keep building on this progress". Gen Bajwa said Pakistan had "hope" in the form of President Joe Biden's new administration, which he said could help facilitate peace in the region.

War Is Over Between India and Pakistan—for Now

A new cease-fire at the Line of Control must avoid problems that have derailed past attempts at peace.

(SAI Bureau) New Delhi—In 2003, after decades of tensions and sniping along the Line of Control, the de facto international border in disputed Kashmir, India and Pakistan finally agreed to a cease-fire. The agreement came in the aftermath of a major crisis in 2001-2002, which had brought the two states to the brink of war.

That meltdown started with an attack that Jaish-e-Mohammed, a Pakistan-based terrorist organization, launched on the Indian parliament in December 2001. In response, India undertook a massive military mobilization along its borders with Pakistan to force it to end its support for a range of terrorist groups operating from its soil. Pakistan made some nods toward reining in various terrorist groups, but it was clear that it was not prepared to bow to Indian pressure.

The 2003 accord lasted a mere three years, but it nevertheless proved to be robust during that period. According to reliable sources, neither side violated its terms during that period.

Now, after a couple of years in which Indian-Pakistan relations have taken a nosedive over a series of bloody border clashes, the two sides have agreed to

strike another deal. Both will hold their fire and continue negotiations to end the long-simmering conflict between them. There is reason for optimism; even a fragile peace is better than continued conflict. That said, given the fraught history of peace agreements between India and Pakistan, there is ample reason for caution as well.

The Line of Control was created in 1972 in the aftermath of the third India-Pakistan war. The original intention was to create a working border while efforts continued to secure

a permanent one. Ever since, the Line of Control has seen periodic clashes between the two warring parties.

In April 1999, the Pakistani military infiltrated the Line of Control in the region of Kargil, precipitating yet another war over Kashmir. This fight, which took place following the nuclearization of both countries in May 1998, attracted considerable international attention because it was only the second-ever armed conflict between two nuclear-armed states. The world breathed

a sigh of relief when the dispute remained contained and was brought to a peaceful close through U.S. intervention.

In the 20 years since, neither side has taken actions along the Line of Control to initiate another war, but a range of crises have nevertheless punctuated India-Pakistan relations. Besides



sparring in 2001-2002, in November 2008, following a major terrorist attack on the city of Mumbai, which was traced to another Pakistan-based terrorist organization, the two sides came perilously close to war once more. With some prodding on the part of the United States, though, they moved to another cease-fire.

It was not to last, though. And, last week, after years of escalating tension and strife along the Line of Control, the two sides again agreed to an

indefinite cease-fire in the area.

Since August 2019, when India revoked the special status of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, violations of earlier cease-fires had become commonplace. According to a report presented in the Indian parliament, there were over 5,000 cease-fire violations last year alone. The

report, released by Indian Minister of Defense Rajnath Singh, attributed them all to Pakistan. A more dispassionate source, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, confirms a high

number of violations in the last several years, but it finds attribution a bit murkier. Pakistan's director-general of military operations, meanwhile, asserted there were nearly 1,300 Indian infractions in 2017.

It is tempting to blame the dramatic growth in cease-fire violations on the rise of the right-wing, hawkish, Hindu nationalist, Bharatiya Janata Party government in India in 2014. But that does not provide a full account. For one, according to the Indian scholar Happyman

Jacob, who has conducted what is probably the most complete analysis of the sources of cease-fire lapses, local commanders on both sides of the border have considerable latitude to undertake military actions. When one side bolsters its position through the construction of new bunkers or other fortifications on its side of the border, the opposing side often initiates fire. These actions rarely have the formal imprimatur of either higher commanders or political authorities.

Then, there are also other politics at play. In 2013, after Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif returned to office, he was apparently keen on improving relations with India. The Pakistani military establishment, however, had little interest in pursuing any such overtures. Consequently, they chose to stir up trouble along the Line of Control, thereby undermining Sharif's peace overtures.

In 2014, when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi assumed office, his government gave greater leeway to local commanders to use force as they deemed appropriate. As far as it is possible to tell, Indian cease-fire violations ticked up after that point. Further, in pursuit of their counterinsurgency strategy in the Indian-controlled portion of Kashmir, in 2016, the Indian Army killed Burhan Wani, a local commander of the insurgent group Hizbul Mujahideen. Wani's killing prompted a further infiltration of insurgents from their sanctuaries in Pakistan as his compatriots sought to avenge his death. Cease-fire violations on both sides then spiked.

Over the past five years or so, Indian-Pakistani relations have deteriorated sharply, especially after a suicide bomb attack on an Indian military convoy near the town of Pulwama in Indian-controlled Kashmir in February 2019. Jaish-e-Mohammed, which carried out the 2001 attack on the Indian parliament, claimed responsibility for the incident. Following the attack, for the first time since the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War, the Modi government authorized the Indian Air Force to make an incursion across the international border and strike at what it said was a terrorist training camp at Balakot.

India's Sudden Peace Push With Nuclear Rivals Shows Biden Impact

After a year of some of the worst fighting on India's frontiers with Pakistan and China, all three countries are suddenly talking peace as they wait to see how President Joe Biden will shift policy in the region.

India and China's top diplomats on Thursday discussed plans to disengage troops from their Himalayan border, which last year saw the deadliest clashes since the 1970s. The phone call between Subrahmanyam Jaishankar and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, which stretched for more than an hour, came shortly after India and Pakistan released a rare joint statement by senior army officials announcing a halt in operations along their border.

The moves reduce tensions in one of Asia's top flashpoints, where three nuclear-armed countries regularly challenge each other's territorial claims. While India and Pakistan have fought three wars since Britain left the subcontinent and barely have any trade, tensions between New Delhi and Beijing escalated last year to the point where Prime Minister Narendra Modi banned hundreds of Chinese apps and slowed investment approvals.

The detente in South Asia shows all three countries responding to initiatives from the Biden administration, which is formulating

policy toward the region following the unpredictable years of President Donald Trump. Pakistan wants to show the U.S. its not too close to China.

"On the one hand India hopes that the U.S.-China peer rivalry means India remains important and Pakistan -- as an ally of China -- will face more pressure," said Aparna Pande, director of the Initiative on the Future of India and South Asia at Washington-based Hudson Institute. "But Delhi is not sure how strong Washington will be vis-à-vis Beijing, so a temporary ceasefire with Pakistan and slow disengagement with China may buy some time and relieve immediate pressure on India."

India's borders with Pakistan and China stretch nearly 7,000 kilometers (4,300 miles), much of which is disputed. Though India and Chinese troops have started pulling back their troops from some parts of the contested border in the remote Himalayan region, there are still areas where soldiers are facing off.

India's Foreign Ministry said Jaishankar stressed to Wang the need to improve bilateral relations and ensure peace on the contested border between the two nations. Wang, meanwhile, called on China and India to firmly follow the right path of mutual trust and cooperation and "promote pragmatic

cooperation," Chinese state media reported.

New Delhi and Islamabad in 2003 signed a cease-fire agreement along their 742-kilometer (460-mile) Himalayan frontier, known as the Line of Control, but that truce has been violated repeatedly. Tensions worsened after August 2019 when Modi revoked the constitutional autonomy of its part of Kashmir, which is divided between India and Pakistan and claimed in its entirety by both.

'No One Should Question' "In the interest of achieving mutually beneficial and sustainable peace along the borders," top military officials from both nations "agreed to address each other's core issues and concerns," they said in the statement. The agreement "will save innocent lives so no one should question the intent," Moeed W. Yusuf, special assistant to Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, said on Twitter. "Nor should wrong inferences be drawn. There is nothing more than meets the eye here."

Pakistan has continued to call for the 2003 ceasefire agreement to be honored and I am glad we have reached the understanding. It must be followed in letter and spirit.

By By Sudhi Ranjan Sen, Ismail Dilawar, and Archana Chaudhary

To Get to the Negotiating Table, India and Pakistan Had Help

Outside parties may have pushed the two sides toward a cease-fire. To keep the peace, they'll need continued support.

BY SUSHANT SINGH

On Feb. 25, senior Indian and Pakistani military officials issued a simultaneous statement after a scheduled weekly telephone call. In it, they declared that both the sides would adhere to "all agreements, understandings and cease firing along the Line of Control and all other sectors." Since 2018, the Line of Control, the heavily militarized 450-mile-long border dividing Kashmir between India and Pakistan since a United Nations-mandated cease-fire between the two countries in 1949, has thousands of violations. That's despite a cease-fire agreed on by the two sides in 2003. Although the news about the cease-fire grabbed headlines, the more significant bit of the statement was that the two countries "agreed to address each other's core issues and concerns which have the propensity to disturb peace and lead to violence.

By agreeing to address each other's core issues—for Pakistan, Kashmir; and for India, Pakistan-backed terrorism—the statement clearly indicates that the cease-fire is meant as the first step in a longer peace process. The announcement could not have emerged without weeks of back channel

diplomatic work by the two governments, including the buy-in of the top political leaderships of both countries and of Pakistan's powerful military leadership.

Within two weeks, both of India's restive borders have become calmer.

The question is: why now? Last month, New Delhi also announced a disengagement on its northern borders with China, ratcheting down a tense nine-month-long military standoff in the Himalayas. Within two weeks, in other words, both of India's restive borders have become calmer.

Although the two announcements seem disconnected, India's chastening experience along the border with China—where its military had to scurry and scrap for resources against a more powerful adversary—was one of the drivers for its move with Pakistan. U.S. President Joe Biden winning the November 2020 presidential election likely played a role as well, given expectations that he will lead a more consistent and coherent strategy in Afghanistan and the Indo-Pacific than the Trump administration. Finally, there may have been a third country with

friendly ties to both India and Pakistan, pressing the two nuclear-armed neighbors for a deal.

The welcomed announcement of a cease-fire will prevent the further futile loss of lives of soldiers and residents due to firing and shelling on the Line of Control. On a deeper level, it also holds a promise for normalcy in India-Pakistan ties. But historical animosity, irreconcilable negotiating positions, and abiding mistrust leaves a process beset with risks. Talks can be derailed as much by a lone suicide bomber in Kashmir as by the powerful "deep state" in Pakistan or by the strident anti-Pakistan Hindu majoritarian electoral agenda of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. These risks can be controlled and minimized if current engagement between New Delhi and Islamabad is supported by other countries that have a stake in ensuring peace in the region.

As early as 2009, the Indian political leadership formally asked its military to be prepared for a two-front threat from China and Pakistan, but the government seemed to operate on the unstated assumption that it could deal with Beijing through a combination of political,

diplomatic, and economic engagement. The 2020 border crisis, where New Delhi was forced to scramble its soldiers, tanks, and guns to tackle multiple Chinese incursions into Indian territory in Ladakh, drove home the need for more military resources to deal with a belligerent Beijing. Soon, India made emergency purchases of ammunition and stores, and it reoriented some of its strike military elements from the border with Pakistan to the border with China. The adjustments made evident that the Indian economy, just coming out of a recession following three years of pre-pandemic decline, cannot fund the military to fight a war on two fronts. Even worse, with no change in Pakistan's policies toward supporting armed militancy in Indian-administered Kashmir, it became clear that India's 2016-2017 military strikes inside Pakistan-administered Kashmir and 2019 airstrikes on Balakot in Pakistan had failed to deter Islamabad or alter its approach. Yet with China assessed to be the bigger strategic challenge, Modi's government was left with no option but to strike a deal with Pakistan to cool down at least one front. New Delhi must also

have noted that the Pakistan Army held back during the Sino-India border crisis, not using it as an opportunity to threaten India—a fact, Indian generals even publicly acknowledged.

Given Pakistan's close relationship with China, any deal with Pakistan would have no meaning unless China was on board. In turn, it has been speculated that India may have effectively signed a composite deal for both borders, where Chinese disengagement in Ladakh was contingent on an India-Pakistan peace deal. Even if that isn't the case, China's incursions on India's northern borders provided a strategic reality check to New Delhi, adding incentive for a chastened Indian government to deal with Pakistan. In interviews in early March, senior government officials on both sides confirmed that the first moves toward the latest India-Pakistan deal were made around October 2020. They gained momentum after Biden's election for several reasons. First, unlike former U.S. President Donald Trump's in-your-face, anti-China rhetoric, the Biden administration was expected to be more nuanced, leaving New Delhi unsure of unstinting U.S. support against Beijing.

US returns to South Asia pushing peace in Afghanistan, stability in India-Pakistan

South Asia is back in US reckoning, front and centre, not just with India and Pakistan committing to peace on the Line of Control, but US Secretary of State Antony Blinken this weekend making an important move on the Afghanistan chessboard.

Days after the LoC fell silent, Blinken wrote to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, suggesting senior Afghan leaders should hold face-to-face discussions with the Taliban as well as involve the UN in organising a conference on Afghanistan, in which India will also likely participate. Certainly, Blinken's letter is a major vote of confidence in India's staying power in Afghanistan. These past two decades, New Delhi has refused to be baited by Pakistan next door for not being an immediate neighbour to Kabul, overcome the geographical

disadvantage by opening its doors to thousands of Afghan students, ramped up its interest in the Chabahar Port in Iran to circumvent Pakistan and send goods via Iran, and kept in close touch with all shades of the Afghan leadership.

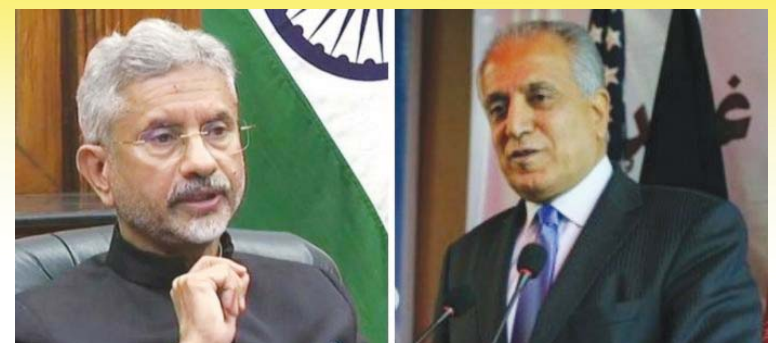
(An anecdote is in order here. In an effort to also attract young Afghan female students who wish to study in India but don't get permission from their conservative families to travel and live alone, Indian diplomats have sometimes bent the rules a little by also giving scholarships to their fiances and brothers.)

So over the last year, even as the pandemic raged, India turned around its policy on Afghanistan in order to be present at the table when the big boys dealt the cards. Only in 2018, when Moscow had invited an Indian delegation to participate in a consultation with the Taliban, the

Indian team had been given express instructions not to talk to them at all. Talking it out with the US

Last September, External Affairs minister S. Jaishankar addressed the inaugural peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government in Doha. It was an assertion of several decisions.

First, India would not remain on the sidelines even when it abided by the "Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process" underlined by President Ghani, that was also intended to keep himself in the limelight. Second, if the US was bringing Pakistan back into the peace talks because it was the only country with the influence to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table, then that was a message to Delhi too: Talk to the Taliban. Don't marginalise yourself. There was a third assertion. Despite its



weakening, US influence in Afghanistan would remain second to none for a long while to come. As part of the growing India-US partnership, Jaishankar decided to reach out to the US also on Afghanistan.

Despite the huge divergence in their positions, Jaishankar realised that it was important to be seen to be holding Zalmay Khalilzad's hand. So when Donald Trump's special envoy — and now Joe Biden's — came to Delhi just before the pandemic grew out of control, Delhi rolled out the red carpet. What Khalilzad

wanted was somewhat different from Jaishankar's expectations. Khalilzad wanted Delhi to not put spokes in Taliban's return to the peace table with the Afghan republic, but continue to support the economic reconstruction of Afghanistan. Delhi wanted Khalilzad to open his eyes and smell the coffee about Pakistan not changing its stripes. It wanted to remind him that Pakistan had not kept the Taliban on a tight leash in various Pakistani towns such as Quetta and Miranshah since 2001, only to now abandon its intention to control the throne of Kabul.

The royals have always stayed out of politics. Now they've waded into Britain's culture wars

The fairy-tale wedding of Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex, to Prince Harry represented to many the long-overdue modernization of Britain's most famous family. Nearly three years later, her allegations of racism within the royal family and the media punched a hole in the spectacle, reflecting an all-too-real home truth for Black people and other minorities living in the country. The pair spoke of racist coverage in the British press during their bombshell interview with Oprah Winfrey last week, claims that led to the resignation of the head of the UK Society of Editors after he refused to acknowledge the problem.

Meghan's allegation that one of her in-laws expressed concern over the color of her then-unborn son Archie has met no such reckoning. Instead, the royals have placed themselves in the apex of the culture wars, which have been growing since last summer's Black Lives Matter protests. These saw Prime Minister Boris Johnson deny that the UK was a

racist country -- ignoring evidence of the lived experience of many Black British people. British commentators questioned the validity of her claims. "We don't know exactly what was said, we don't know how it was said, we don't know who said it. The only context that we can give to this story is one, frankly, conjured up out of our own fantasies and prejudices," wrote columnist David Aaronovitch in the center-right British daily, the Times. "We need to push back hard against this. Intention matters, context matters, facts matter. If 'feelings' are all that count, then eventually we are, every one of us, potentially lost to someone else's emotional intensity. And that, not duchesses, is what matters here."

Last week, Prince William told reporters that the royals were "very much not a racist family," days after the Palace said that -- "while recollections vary" -- the serious claims were going to be addressed by the family privately. The Palace has however hired an

external law firm to investigate claims that Meghan bullied royal staff.

No normal family

In any normal circumstance "you can draw a line and say this is a private family matter," said Halima Begum, the head of race equalities think tank the Runnymede Trust, "but the royals are not a normal family."

Its matriarch, Queen Elizabeth, is the head of state of the UK and 15 other countries in the Commonwealth -- an association of 54 countries that were almost all formerly under British rule. The monarchy's role at the heart of the Commonwealth means the institution represents 2.4 billion people, the majority of whom are not White.

While beloved in the UK and abroad, the monarchy is the most identifiable symbol of Whiteness and imperial nostalgia in British society. "A born to rule White elite encrusted with the wealth and jewels stolen from their former colonies," wrote Kehinde Andrews, professor of



Black Studies at Birmingham City University, in a CNN op-ed.

"It is baffling that anyone is surprised about the questions raised over the skin color of the couple's baby, given how central Whiteness is to the image of the monarchy."

By skirting over the claims, the royals missed an opportunity to address a profound issue with the sensitivity that was needed, say campaigners. "This is the kind of conversation in modern Britain that we shouldn't tolerate," Begum told CNN.

Royal protocol dictates the family sits above politics and should avoid expressing their political views. Race is also apolitical, she said, and a "fundamental human right ... so for that reason I think the royal family need to publicly reckon with racism the same way other organizations have done so."

The monarchy has a role to unite the country when it comes to race. "If they have not spoken about racism before, or their role in empire, now is an opportunity to do so."

The hidden upside of imposter syndrome



It's no wonder that imposter syndrome -- the feeling that your work achievements are undeserved and that you are likely to be exposed as a fraud -- has long been perceived by those experiencing it as harmful to their success. Believing you're unworthy of your accomplishments and that someone will eventually see through your charade naturally adds an unwanted layer of pressure to the workday. But according to recent findings from Basima Tewfik, assistant professor of Work and Organization Studies at the

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the behaviours that 'imposters' exhibit in an attempt to compensate for their self-doubt can actually make them good at their jobs. By leaning into the feelings of inadequacy -- rather than trying to resist or overcome them -- and putting extra effort into communication, imposters can actually outperform their non-imposter peers in interpersonal skills. What this means, says Tewfik, is that a trait most people dislike in themselves may in fact be motivating them to perform better. The imposter cycle-- According to

the International Journal of Behavioral Science, more than 70% of people are affected by workplace imposter thoughts at some point in their lives. And while specific workplace pressure-points vary across careers, the internal symptoms typically remain the same. Imposters have perfectionist tendencies, harbouring a secret need to be the very best at what they do. When they are unable to fulfil their perfectionist goals, "imposters often feel overwhelmed, disappointed, and overgeneralise themselves as failures". A cycle thus emerges in the workplace that causes imposters to forbid themselves from accepting positive feedback on their work. If anxiety about underperforming leads them to over-prepare for a presentation, for example, even if the presentation is successful, they will feel like they expended too much effort in the process -- accomplishing the task should have been easier. On the other

hand, if they procrastinate over an assignment and still manage to hand it in on time, they attribute their success to luck rather than their own ability.

In her upcoming report, the first of its kind to identify tangible benefits that can emerge from workplace imposter thoughts, Tewfik posits that one of the main definers of imposter syndrome is a gap in how individuals perceive their own competence compared to how competent they actually are. Tewfik wanted to find out how that perceived competence gap might impact on imposters' careers -- both in terms of the quality of their work and their social standing among colleagues.

She began by working with supervisors at an investment-advisory firm, who observed and scored the interpersonal skills of their employees -- some of whom were experiencing imposter thoughts -- over two months. What Tewfik found was that despite their self-doubt, the

finance workers experiencing imposter thoughts were actually rated more interpersonally effective than their non-imposter peers; managers described them as better collaborators who worked well with colleagues. She then worked with a group of late-stage medical students about to enter their clinical rotation. Some of them were first induced to experience imposter thoughts by writing about a time when they had experienced them in the past -- a process that effectively produces the conditions of imposter syndrome even in a controlled environment, says Tewfik. Students were then tasked with diagnosing the ailments of actors trained to manifest the symptoms and demeanour of someone with a particular disease. Once again, Tewfik found that the imposter students received higher ratings on their bedside manner from the patients.

The human right that benefits nature

The history behind one of Costa Rica's most important environmental commitments reads something like a legal fairytale. It started nearly 30 years ago, with a young boy who wanted to stop the pollution in his neighborhood and ended with a constitutional reform. The impacts of the boy's efforts are still causing ripples to the present day.

It began in 1992, by a stream weaving through a small town near the capital, San José. Without a proper waste management system, locals would throw their garbage into the stream, causing waste to pile up at its banks. Frustrated about the situation, then 10-year-old Carlos Roberto Mejía Chacón, with help from his family, filed an appeal with Costa Rica's constitutional chamber against the local municipality. Allowing the river to be used as a garbage dump, he argued, violated the human right to life, which requires adequate living conditions and protected, clean waterways.

The chamber sided with Chacón a year later and ordered the municipality to clear up the garbage



and start managing residents' waste properly. But it also came to a much deeper recognition. A clean and healthy environment is a very basis of human life, as are balanced ecosystems, biodiversity, and other elements of nature on which people depend, the judges reasoned. Just like food, work, housing and education, an all-round healthy environment should be considered a human right.

In a worsening global environmental crisis, some legal scholars have argued that the right to a healthy environment acts as a crucial legal pathway to protect the natural world - This remarkable

conclusion not only set a new legal standard for courts around the country, but also spurred the decision to carve the human right to a healthy environment into Costa Rica's legal DNA during a constitutional reform in 1994, recalls lawyer Patricia Madrigal Cordero, who was involved in the legislative process at the time. Since then, the constitutional right has helped guide many of Costa Rica's widely praised - although far from perfect - environmental policies and reverberated through the country's landscape and culture. "I think Costa Rica would be different if we didn't establish that

relationship between human rights and the environment," Cordero says.

The human right to a healthy environment - encompassing clean and balanced ecosystems, rich biodiversity and a stable climate - recognises that nature is a keystone of a dignified human existence, in line with a wealth of scientific evidence linking human welfare and the natural world. People depend on thriving ecosystems that clean water and air, yield seafood and pollinators, and soak up greenhouse gases. Recognising this link legally can greatly strengthen human rights. But equally important, Cordero

notes, is that the right provides a powerful basis to protect nature itself. In a worsening global environmental crisis, some legal scholars have argued that the right to a healthy environment acts as a crucial legal pathway to protecting the natural world, both by encouraging governments to pass stronger environmental laws and allowing courts to hold violators accountable. Especially when installed into constitutions, such rights are taken seriously by many judicial systems and become hard to undo, creating an enduring force counteracting the interests against protecting nature.

The right has created a powerful bulwark against a rising tide of environmental destruction in many countries, such as Costa Rica, Colombia and South Africa. But although there is clear scientific consensus on the benefits of nature to people, the evolution of nature as a human right has been remarkably patchy around the world. Today, many Latin American countries are forging ahead while Europe and North America lag somewhat behind.

Since the right's first mention in the Stockholm Declaration in 1972 - a result of the first major environmental conference - some 110 countries have constitutionally recognised it. While its impact varies across the globe, it has created a powerful bulwark against a rising tide of environmental destruction in many countries, such as Costa Rica, Colombia and South Africa, as more nations look set to follow suit soon.

Of course, recognising the right "is not a magic wand we can use to solve all of our challenges", says environmental lawyer David Boyd, who is appointed as a special rapporteur on human rights and the environment at the United Nations. "It's a catalyst for better actions."

Indeed, some of Boyd's research has found that countries with the right to a healthy environment - or other environmental mandates - in their constitutions tend to have stronger environmental policies in general. They're also more likely to score better on metrics of sustainable development, according to studies by economist Chris Jeffords of Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Could plastic roads make for a smoother ride?

On a road into New Delhi, countless cars a day speed over tonnes of plastic bags, bottle tops and discarded polystyrene cups. In a single kilometre, a driver covers one tonne of plastic waste. But far from being an unpleasant journey through a sea of litter, this road is smooth and well-maintained - in fact the plastic that each driver passes over isn't visible to the naked eye. It is simply a part of the road.

This road, stretching from New Delhi to nearby Meerut, was laid using a system developed by Rajagopalan Vasudevan, a professor of chemistry at the Thiagarajar College of Engineering in India, which replaces 10% of a road's bitumen with repurposed plastic waste.

India has been leading the world in experimenting with plastic-tar roads since the early 2000s. But a growing number of countries are beginning to follow suit. From Ghana to the Netherlands, building plastic into roads and pathways is helping to save carbon



emissions, keep plastic from the oceans and landfill, and improve the life-expectancy of the average road.

By 2040, there is set to be 1.3 billion tonnes of plastic in the environment globally. India alone already generates more than 3.3 million tonnes of plastic a year - which was one of the motivators behind Vasudevan's system for incorporating waste into roads.

It has the benefit of being a very simple process, requiring little high-tech machinery. First, the shredded plastic waste is scattered onto an aggregate of crushed stones and sand before being

heated to about 170C - hot enough to melt the waste. The melted plastics then coat the aggregate in a thin layer. Then heated bitumen is added on top, which helps to solidify the aggregate, and the mixture is complete.

Many different types of plastics can be added to the mix: carrier bags, disposable cups, hard-to-recycle multi-layer films and polyethylene and polypropylene foams have all found their way into India's roads, and they don't have to be sorted or cleaned before shredding.

As well as ensuring these plas-

tics don't go to landfill, incinerator or the ocean, there is some evidence that the plastic also helps the road function better. Adding plastic to roads appears to slow their deterioration and minimise potholes. The plastic content improves the surface's flexibility, and after 10 years Vasudevan's earliest plastic roads showed no signs of potholes. Though as many of these roads are still relatively young, their long-term durability remains to be tested.

By Vasudevan's calculations, incorporating the waste plastic instead of incinerating it also saves three tonnes of carbon dioxide for every kilometre of road. And there are economic benefits too, with the incorporation of plastic resulting in savings of roughly \$670 (£480) per kilometre of road.

In 2015, the Indian government made it mandatory for plastic waste to be used in constructing roads near large cities of more than 500,000 people, after Vasudevan gave his patent for the system to the government for free.

The Dark Web of Child Porn

Driven by demand and veiled by the dark web, the creation and circulation of child pornography has seen an alarming rise in India—now the biggest uploader of child sexual imagery in the world

Last October, Prajwala, a Hyderabad-based NGO that rescues and rehabilitates sex trafficking survivors, came across some disturbing footage of child pornography on the internet. When Sunitha Krishnan, co-founder of Prajwala, went to meet a child featured in it, she expected a scared, silent, suspicious person. Instead, she found a cherubic 12-year-old girl, bursting with enthusiasm. Priniti (name changed) was no problem child. She attended school, was polite and never begged for chips or soda. She would chat with a close friend online, someone her parents assumed was from school. Nothing prepared them for the discovery that the person was a stranger and that sexually explicit photographs of their daughter were all over the internet. Priniti's reaction was different. There was only denial. "She was adamant this person was her friend, that she had done

nothing wrong," says Krishnan. The biggest threat in children being 'groomed' through the internet is the complete transfer of trust from the prey to the predator. It destroys the construct of victimhood in a child's mind. "The child doesn't know he or she is being exploited. Imagine a childhood spent grappling with the notion of betrayal and abuse," says Krishnan. Cyber grooming of the very young, like Priniti, is the newest threat in a booming online child pornography market that has reached alarming proportions in India (see Perverse Patterns). According to the US-based National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), India now accounts for the maximum number of online child sexual abuse imagery in the world, followed by Thailand. NCMEC estimates that Indian users have uploaded 25,000 images or videos in just

the past five months. Delhi tops the list for the maximum uploads of child porn, followed by Maharashtra, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. "Innovation and the internet come with their own set of challenges, some of which are alarming as in child pornography," says Dr Gulshan Rai, chief information security officer in the prime minister's office. "The IT Act bans the viewing, creation and distribution of child pornography in the country, but it still happens. Moreover, intermediaries like social networks are not removing such content fast enough. They are not owning up to their responsibility towards society, focusing instead on revenue and maximum visibility." Anyone a family member, criminal racket or cyber stranger can create child porn. They need not be paedophiles. "We are seeing an increase in self-generated child porn," says Siddharth



Pillai, co-founder of Aarambh, which runs a helpline for reporting child porn. Government figures also show that circulation of child porn is on the rise. Last year, 377 websites were blocked in India for posting child porn content. According to the latest National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report, 781 cases of creating or storing child porn were recorded in 2018. In 2017, it had been 331 cases. Odisha had the maximum number of such cases (333) in 2018, as opposed to only eight in 2017. "Much of child abuse footage is filmed inside homes by known relatives or family friends. This could happen anywhere urban,

rural, poor, rich. There would also be an offline apparatus where victims of sex trafficking could be filmed," says Pillai. Reports show that approximately 100 people have been arrested or summoned for viewing and distributing child porn across the country since November 2019. Additionally, Gujarat's Crime Investigation Department received names of 62 paedophiles in the same month. In October 2019, the CBI filed cases against seven Indians involved in an international child sex racket. What is not mentioned is whether these same people also create content. According to the NCRB, one child is sexually abused every 15 minutes in India.

White supremacy and hate are haunting Asian Americans



In one sense, it's immaterial whether the accused killer in the Atlanta spa shootings admits to a racist motivation. Asian Americans, already traumatized by a rising tide of hate, violence and rhetoric, have been living in fear for months. The murders of eight people, including six Asian women, among them four South Koreans, further disoriented and horrified a community already unfairly stigmatized by racial association during a pandemic that originated in China. And they laid bare for the rest of the country the agony of yet another minority group left to

question its place in America, at a time of rising attacks and harassment amid cresting White nationalism and domestic extremism. Many Asian Americans feel exposed by a torrent of dangerous and racially motivated rhetoric by national figures on a cultural crusade. Most prominently that includes ex-President Donald Trump, who presided over four years of rising racial tensions and often used division as a tool of personal power. Campaigners talk of a perfect storm of prejudice targeting the Asian American and Pacific Is-

lander community that stirred latent hatreds as Covid-19 first arrived in the US, and was exacerbated by Trump's relish in flinging around terms like "China virus."

"There is a lot of fear in the community not just because of the hate crimes of the last year, which are the result of xenophobic messaging around the pandemic by the former President," Georgia state Rep. Bee Nguyen, a Democrat, told CNN's Erin Burnett on Wednesday. "There is a lot of history of Asian American violence in this country -- and many of our parents or grandparents and ancestors experienced that."

Anti-Asian hate crimes are up 150% during the pandemic, according to the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University, San Bernardino.

NBA veteran Jeremy Lin told CNN's Anderson Cooper on Wednesday night that while he had experienced bigotry when he was younger, it was now much

more pronounced.

"It feels very different. I think growing up, it was always something that might be a little more subtle or verbal. But I think what we are seeing right now is a lot of physical actual violence, lives being taken. A lot of Asian Americans who are looking over their shoulders when they go outside, when they go to the grocery store," Lin said.

"I think there is a lot of racially charged hatred right now that we're seeing and feeling."

The White supremacist threat Vivien Tsou, national field director for the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum, described a personal sense of dislocation and horror after Tuesday's killings, that she said were deeply felt in her community.

On a day when the new Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas told lawmakers that domestic extremism was the greatest threat to the homeland, Tsou argued that

Asian Americans did not face distinct peril but were targeted by the same forces of hate endured by Black Americans and that were evident in the insurrection against the US Capitol on January 6.

"While the focus is on anti-Asian hate, it all stems from White supremacy and anyone can be a scapegoat at any moment," Tsou said. "This is something that we need to face together and stand in solidarity," she said, referring to other ethnic minority groups.

More broadly, the ordeal of the Asian American community revealed another dimension of the much discussed national reckoning over race. A flurry of current events -- from the crisis on the southwestern border, to Republicans' voter suppression efforts, to the disparities in Covid-19 vaccine availability -- all revolve to some extent around questions of ethnicity. And they are highlighting the particular pain of minority Americans that can never be felt and is rarely truly appreciated by those in the White majority.

Why hate crime data can't capture the true scope of anti-Asian violence



There has been a marked rise in anti-Asian violence across the United States, an issue that once again rattled a community on edge after the Tuesday mass shooting deaths of eight people at spas in the Atlanta area, six of whom were Asian women.

Police have said it is too early to know the shooter's motive, but the attacks come at a time of increased reports of anti-Asian racism and communities sounding the alarm about a wave of violent incidents. The true scope of the problem, though, is difficult to quantify because of poor data collection and low rates of

reporting. In January, President Joe Biden acknowledged the difficulties in reporting on these statistics, signing a memorandum condemning the rise in attacks towards the Asian community and asking the attorney general to "expand collection of data and public reporting regarding hate incidents against such individuals." Hate crime and bias incident data released by police departments and federal agencies is just a fraction of actual incidents, and deficiencies in hate-crime reporting have led organizers and activists to take it upon themselves to collect data

on their own. Even then, the definitions of hate crime may differ, leaving policymakers with competing datasets that don't capture the scope of the problem.

Hate crime data is unreliable and underreported

The Justice Department and FBI are required by a 1990 federal law called the Hate Crime Statistics Act to publish an annual report on hate crime statistics. The annual report serves as the most comprehensive look at hate crime across the country.

These statistics are likely a vast undercount because law enforcement agencies are not required to submit their data to the FBI for their annual crime report. There are more than 18,000 agencies in the United States and more than 3,000 did not submit their crime statistics in 2019. Of the almost 16,000 agencies that did submit data, about 1 in 7 reported any instances of a hate crime. "Some of those reports are probably true zeroes, but it's really unlikely that all of those jurisdictions had zero hate crimes," said

Brendan Lantz, a criminology professor at Florida State University who researches hate and bias crimes.

Without dedicated resources, law enforcement agencies might not be trained to spot and report hate crimes accurately, creating the impression that hate crimes may be occurring with far less frequency than is accurate. The FBI's data may also be incomplete because in some jurisdictions, local prosecutors, not police, decide what is charged as a hate crime. The federal government does not collect hate crime statistics from local prosecutors or courts. However, major cities have reported a troubling rise in racist crimes targeting the Asian community. The New York Police Department reported 28 arrests for hate crimes targeting Asians in 2020, up from three in 2019 and two in 2018. The Los Angeles Police Department also reported an increase: 15 anti-Asian hate crimes were reported in 2020, up from seven in 2019

and 11 in 2018.

Some activists and officials have attributed the rise in anti-Asian bias incidents and hate crimes to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, which originated in China, as well as to inflammatory rhetoric by former President Donald Trump, who repeatedly referred to the coronavirus as "the China virus." "Hate crimes reflect power dynamics within a society," said Lantz. "If former President Donald Trump can legitimize bias through his own rhetoric, then people feel as if their bigotry and hate crimes are condoned."

Victims of hate crimes are often unlikely to report to the police. Longstanding distrust of law enforcement, language barriers and immigration status are all deterrents from reporting a crime.

"A lot of our community members don't know they can report, or they are afraid to report to law enforcement," said Quyen Dinh, executive director of Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, a community advocacy group and civil rights organization.

Fetishized, sexualized and marginalized, Asian women are uniquely vulnerable to violence

Of the eight people who were killed when a White man attacked three metro Atlanta spas, six were Asian women. Investigators said it was too early to say whether the crime was racially motivated, and instead pointed to the suspect's claim of a potential sex addiction.

But experts and activists argue it's no coincidence that six of the eight victims were Asian women. And the suspect's remarks, they say, are rooted in a history of misogyny and stereotypes that are all too familiar for Asian and Asian American women.

They're fetishized and hypersexualized. They're seen as docile and submissive. On top of that, they're often working in the service sector and are subject to the same racism that affects Asian Americans more broadly. The way their race intersects with their gender makes Asian and Asian American women uniquely vulnerable to violence, said Sung Yeon Choimorrow, executive director of the non-profit advocacy group National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum.

And those factors came together

this week in a dangerous, and ultimately deadly, way.

These perceptions are rooted in US history

The perceptions of Asian and Asian American women as submissive, hypersexual and exotic can be traced back centuries.

Rachel Kuo, a scholar on race and co-leader of Asian American Feminist Collective, points to legal and political measures throughout the nation's history that have shaped these harmful ideas.

One of the earliest examples comes from the Page Act of 1875. That law, coming a few years before the Chinese Exclusion Act, was enacted seemingly to restrict prostitution and forced labor. In reality, it was used systematically to prevent Chinese women from immigrating to the US, under the pretense that they were prostitutes.

US imperialism has also played a significant role in those attitudes, Kuo said.

American service members, while abroad for US military activities (including the Philippine-American War, World War II and the

Vietnam War), have a history of soliciting sex workers and patronizing industries that encouraged sex trafficking. That furthered denigrating stereotypes of Asian women as sexual deviants, which were memorialized on screen.

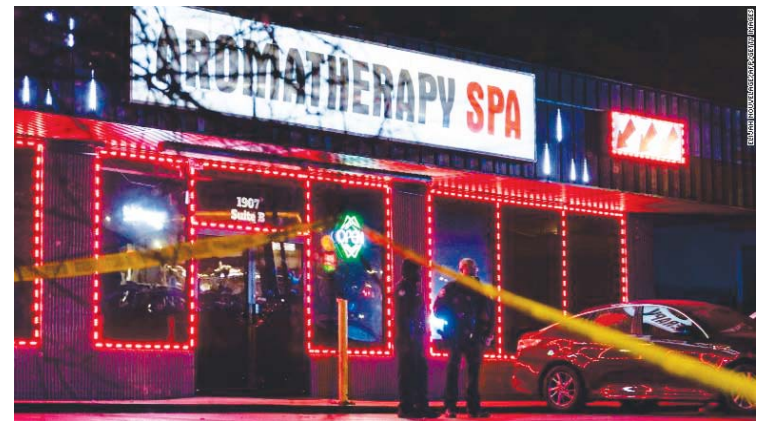
All of those perceptions "have had the effect of excusing and tolerating violence by ignoring, trivializing and normalizing it," Kuo said.

They've affected Asian women economically

Those stereotypes also feed into perceptions of "Asian women as cheap and disposable workers," said Kuo. That's made them economically vulnerable, too.

Asian American businesses have already been hit especially hard during the pandemic, fueled both by unemployment and xenophobia.

Asian women, in particular, made up the highest share of long-term unemployed workers last December, according to a January report from the National Women's Law Center. And many Asian American women work in service industries, such as beauty salons, hospitality and restaurants. "The narrative gets lost because we're seen as



the 'model minority,' where they think we're all lawyers and doctors and engineers, but look into it a little deeper and many of the women in our community work in frontline service-based sectors," Choimorrow, of the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum, said.

Other advocates also called attention to the recent victims' employment situations.

"That the Asian women murdered yesterday were working highly vulnerable and low-wage jobs during an ongoing pandemic speaks directly to the compounding impacts of misogyny, structural violence, and white supremacy," Phi Nguyen,

litigation director at Asian American Advancing Justice - Atlanta, said in a statement.

Massage parlor workers and sex workers are especially at risk, according to Esther Kao, an organizer with Red Canary Song, a New York-based collective of Asian and Asian American advocates for massage parlor workers and sex workers.

She said those workers not only face stigma, but are also often migrants. Some may fear they risk deportation should authorities investigate violence or crimes against them.

It's also important to note that not all massage businesses provide sexual services, Kao said.

Three takeaways from Credit Suisse's list of 100 Indian Unicorns

The report picks 100 unlisted companies, mostly with a valuation in excess of \$1 billion, but more than the specifics, which are, no doubt, the subject of celebration and debate in many quarters, it is the trends evident in the list that are interesting

Most lists are subjective. A list that did the rounds late last week, enumerating 100 Indian unicorns, is no exception. It is culled from a report by Credit Suisse-titled 100 Unicorns: India's Changing Corporate Landscape-which was not meant for wide circulation, but that, because of its theme, has gone as viral as the same firm's House of Debt Report that came out a few years ago (no prizes for guessing what that was about, though).

The report picks 100 unlisted companies, mostly with a valuation in excess of \$1 billion, but more than the specifics, which are, no doubt, the subject of celebration and debate in many quarters, it is the trends evident in the list that are interesting. There are three in particular. The first is location: 73 of the 100 Unicorns are located in Bengaluru (29), the Mumbai-

Pune belt (20/5), and the National Capital Region (Delhi, Gurugram, Noida; 19). By rough measure, a third of the companies started after 2005, are part of the new economy, and were founded by first-generation entrepreneurs. Most have been funded by private equity or venture capital firms. Yet, the geographical concentration that has characterised India's corporate sector for decades, remains. This is a lesson for India's policymakers and urban planners-India has, at least, 50 cities with population in excess of a million. That three geographical clusters account for three out of every four unicorns should be cause for concern (and also cause headaches for administrators in the three clusters who have to ensure that their soft- and hard-infrastructure can cope). Add Chennai (7) and Hyderabad (8)

to the mix and the number goes up to 88.

The second, especially in the context of the immediate past, is the emergence of Indian pharmaceutical and biotech companies as global powerhouses, not just in generics (or off patent drugs) but as innovators and manufacturers in their own right. The sector has been the next big thing for long, but appears to be coming into its own now, which is only apt.

The coronavirus disease pandemic continues to roil the world, although vaccination drives have begun in several countries, including India. India has approved two vaccines, both locally made, and one locally developed; local companies have rights to make at least two more vaccines that have been approved by regulators in other countries, and there is at least one more promising local



vaccine candidate. No other country can boast of such riches. As the world focuses more on healthcare, and with vaccine development moving to an entirely new (and hitherto unthinkable) trajectory-both are a result of the Covid-19 pandemic-the next decade promises to belong to the life sciences, and it is likely that the next big thing will actually become the next big thing.

The third is the emergence of large and hugely successful companies to address traditional bottlenecks in transactions and credit, and in logistics. On the first, fin-tech is a big story in India

- the market is huge and mostly untapped; many of the existing credit providers (lenders) and transaction engines are clunky and inefficient; and the regulatory regime is still emerging.

On the second, logistics and delivery were ripe for renewal and the economics of e-commerce delivery (and the rapid growth of e-commerce in the country) have hastened the process-which perhaps explains the presence of companies from this business in the list. In the new economy, ideas, competitiveness, and unit economics all matter, but timing is perhaps the secret sauce.

Rakesh Jhunjhunwala-backed Nazara Tech's IPO opens today. All you need to know

Through the issue, the company will sell 52,94,392 equity shares by the promoters and existing shareholders.

In a first for an Indian gaming and diversified sports platform, Nazara Technologies will open its initial public offering (IPO) for subscription on Wednesday. The three-day public issue will end on Friday and is likely to be listed on the BSE and NSE on March 30. The IPO is backed by investor Rakesh Jhunjhunwala, who owns 32,94,310 shares which account for 11.51 per cent stake in the company as of September 30, 2021. The company offers services like interactive gaming, e-sports and game-based early learning ecosystems and has an emerging presence in African and North American countries. Here's everything you need to know about Nazara Technology's IPO: 1. Through the issue, the company will sell



52,94,392 equity shares by the promoters and existing shareholders. Mitter Infotech LLP, which is the promoter of the company will be selling shares in the IPO along with IIFL Special Opportunities Fund, Good Game Investment Trust,

IndexArb Securities and Azimuth Investments.

2. The prize band of each share has been fixed at ₹1,100- ₹1,101 and the lot size has been fixed at 13 shares.

3. The company opened bidding for anchor investors on Tuesday.

4. The company has also reserved shares aggregating up to ₹2 crore for purchase for the company's employees in the IPO.

5. According to a statement by the company, it will use the proceeds of the IPO to achieve the benefits of listing equity shares on the stock exchanges and thereby provide liquidity to the existing shareholders of the company. 6. The lead managers of the IPO include ICICI Securities, Nomura Financial Advisory and Securities (India) Private Limited, Jefferies India Private Limited and IIFL Securities. 7. Link Intime India Private Ltd is the registrar of the IPO. 8. Incorporated in 1999, Nazara Technologies Ltd is known for its games on the World Cricket Championship, Chhota Bheem and Motu Patlu series.

Nokia to cut up to 10,000 jobs over next 2 years, to trim costs



IndiFinnish telecoms group Nokia said on Tuesday it plans to cut between 5,000 and 10,000 jobs within the next two years to trim costs and invest more in research capabilities. It said in a statement it expects about 600 million euros (\$715 million) to 700 million euros of restructuring and associated charges by 2023.

Trade gap widens to \$12.6 billion on lacklustre exports

Between April last year and February 2021, merchandise exports have contracted 12.23%, while merchandise imports fell 23.1%.

India's merchandise exports grew just 0.67% in February, while imports rose 7% leading to a trade deficit of \$12.6 billion during the month, showed data released by the commerce ministry on Monday. On March 2, preliminary data released by the ministry had hinted at an export contraction of 0.25% during the month. Between April 2020 and February, merchandise exports contracted 12.23%, while merchandise imports fell 23.1% resulting in a trade deficit of \$84.6 billion in the 11-month period.

In February, exports of petroleum products (-42%), gems and jewellery (-34%) and engineering goods (-8%) fell, while shipments of pharma products rose by around 16%. Among major import items, petroleum (-16.6%) and transport equipment (-23%) fell, while import of gold (124%), electronic goods (38%) and chemicals (37.6%) were up significantly. In February, the World Trade Organization said the decline in the volume of world trade in 2020 may be "slightly less severe" than its recent forecast of 9.2% due to strong performance of

trade in the fourth quarter, while prospects for 2021 and beyond were uncertain as new variants of Covid-19 have appeared. India's merchandise trade had been weakening even before the pandemic hit the economy and external demand. Exports fell in 15 of the past 20 months starting June 2019. Since March 2020, exports and imports started declining in high double digits, even temporarily leading to a trade surplus in June for the first time in 18 years. The Indian economy recovered in the December quarter to expand at 0.4% after two successive



quarters of historic contraction induced by the coronavirus pandemic, signalling that Asia's third-largest economy may be on the path of a slow but sustained recovery. For fiscal year 2021, however, the government's statistics office estimates a deeper contraction

of 8% than the earlier estimate of 7.7% contraction. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on Tuesday projected Indian economy to bounce back to grow at 12.6% in FY22, the highest among G20 countries.

Tech Mahindra acquires majority stake in Perigord Asset Holdings

The acquisition will help Tech Mahindra to augment expertise in the global pharmaceutical, healthcare and life science (HLS) sectors, the company said in a statement.

capabilities towards delivering efficiency and automation levers across sectors including consumer-packaged goods, medical devices and over the counter (OTC) products to enable growth and scalability in future. The acquisition is a part of Tech Mahindra's long-term growth plan to build presence across key markets in Ireland, Germany, the United States and India with enhanced global delivery. Vivek Agarwal,

President of BFSI, HLS and Corporate Development at Tech Mahindra, said HLS is a key vertical for the company and this acquisition will expand its footprint globally in these domains. "Perigord's disruptive proprietary platform and expertise in the artwork space and life sciences industry will add significant value to our offerings and capabilities. We welcome Perigord employees

into the Tech Mahindra family and look forward to achieve great success together," he said. Alan Leamy, Chief Executive Officer of Perigord Asset Holdings, said both companies' future ambitions and desires to digitally transform the world of pharmaceutical packaging services will deliver long-term innovative solutions to clients that will future proof their needs over the next 10 years.

Tech Mahindra has acquired 70 per cent stake in Perigord Asset Holdings, a digital workflow and artwork, labelling and BPO services firm. The acquisition will help Tech Mahindra to augment

expertise in the global pharmaceutical, healthcare and life science (HLS) sectors, the company said in a statement. The IT software major will leverage Perigord's expertise and offerings to extend

Microsoft Teams lets you use Snapchat filters in video meetings, here is how

When it comes to Microsoft Teams video meets, you can't run but you can hide. Yes, closing your camera is one option but you can't always get away with that. However, using a gazillion Snapchat filters that are now available for desktop, might just do the trick. You just have to make sure it is appropriate for you to appear on your video meetings in one of those avatars. Microsoft Teams and Zoom have their own wide array of filters. Microsoft Teams also separately rolled out a video filter feature, through which users can

choose the filter of their choice and adjust lighting levels and customise their appearance before a meeting starts. However, adding filters through Snap Camera gives users more filter options, and the camera lens works for other video conferencing apps like Zoom too. Users are essentially collaborating on two software while using Snapchat filters on Microsoft Teams or Zoom. Snap Camera, currently available for macOS and Windows 10 has a range of filters and effects that will be available to you on your

Desktop. You can be a floating potato, someone with a horned head, or the infamous but adorable white kitten.

Follow the given steps to use a Snapchat filter in one of your Teams meetings:

- Log on to <https://snapcamera.snapchat.com/>
- Select Download and agree to the terms and conditions.
- Select if you want to download the software for a Mac or Windows (PC).
- Install Snap Camera application.
- Search for a filter of your liking. Apart from the Cat filter,

you will find many categories to choose from.

- If you cannot find a filter, enter in a keyword.

- Once you have decided on a filter, open the Microsoft Teams app.

- Go to your profile picture.

- Select Settings > Devices.

- Scroll down till you see a Camera option.

- Select Snap Camera.

- Microsoft Teams will now enable your appearance on video as in the filter.

- You can change the filter by going to the snap camera.

- The filters will also change for Microsoft Teams if the camera

settings are set to snap camera,

Additionally, users can also add filters during a Zoom meeting:

- Open Zoom.

- Go to Settings > Video.

- Tap on the Camera option > Choose Snap Camera.

Users must note that they will have to switch back to their regular camera if they no longer want to use the filter. This is probably what happened when a Texas lawyer appeared as a cat for a hearing and could not turn the filter off during the meeting.

9 food ideas to help you sleep well



Did you know that what you eat can affect your sleep? That's right -- there are foods that can help us enjoy a blissful night's rest, while other foods and eating habits can prevent us from getting our needed zzz's.

"Foods higher in specific nutrients can enhance our ability to go to sleep and the quality of sleep," said Vandana Sheth, a California-based registered dietitian nutritionist who provides counseling about diet and sleep hygiene to clients.

That's probably welcome news for those of us who experience sleep problems occasionally or just about every night.

Below is a list of snacks and dinner foods worth considering for a good night's sleep.

1. Berries with yogurt

Carbohydrates in berries can help to amplify serotonin production in the brain, while yogurt is a source of sleep-promoting tryptophan. "Yogurt isn't just for breakfast, and it helps to satisfy that sweet, creamy treat that many individuals enjoy as a nighttime snack," said Nancy Z. Farrell Allen, a Virginia-based registered dietitian nutritionist

and national media spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

2. Tart cherry juice with walnuts This snack is rich in melatonin, a hormone that plays an important role in the body's sleep-wake cycle. Upon darkness, production of melatonin increases, helping to promote healthy sleep. Though some people who have trouble sleeping may consider a melatonin supplement, tart cherries provide a natural source of the hormone. In one study, those who drank tart cherry juice had higher melatonin levels and experienced longer, better quality sleep compared to a placebo group. Tart cherry juice had beneficial effects on sleep in older adults with insomnia in another study.

Walnuts, along with pistachios and almonds, are another source of melatonin, and can be combined with a shot of tart cherry juice for a post-dinner snack, according to Sheth.

3. Chickpeas with a glass of milk - Chickpeas and milk are a source of tryptophan, an amino acid that can help to im-

prove sleep. Tryptophan gets converted to melatonin in the brain, as well as serotonin, a neurotransmitter that helps promote sleep and relaxation.

I like roasting chickpeas with a little bit of olive oil and salt, which gives them a crunchy texture. (Simply rinse them, pat them dry, mix with oil and seasonings, then roast at 425 degrees Fahrenheit for 20 minutes.)

Enjoy them with a glass of warm milk for a nighttime snack. (Note that both cow's milk and soy milk are sources of tryptophan.)

4. Kiwifruit

Kiwi is a source of antioxidants and serotonin, which may help improve sleep onset, duration and efficiency -- which refers to percentage of total time in bed actually spent in sleep -- in adults with sleep disturbances according to one study.

An easy way to enjoy kiwi is to cut the fruit in half horizontally, and scoop the flesh with a spoon.

5. Spinach salad with quinoa, avocado and pumpkin seeds

Start your dinner with a salad containing these ingredients, which are rich sources of magnesium, a mineral needed for

normal sleep.

"Magnesium regulates the neurotransmitter melatonin, and helps to keep our sleep cycles in check," Farrell Allen said.

Magnesium also works by increasing the neurotransmitter GABA, or gamma-aminobutyric acid, in the brain, which slows down your thinking and helps you fall asleep. In fact, not having adequate levels of the mineral can contribute to insomnia.

If you don't have pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds and almonds are other good sources of magnesium, Farrell Allen explained. For a bonus hit of flavor, add a sprinkle of toasted pine nuts as well.

6. Bananas with peanut butter This combination is not only magnesium-rich, it will also help to blunt spikes in blood sugar and can be particularly helpful for those with diabetes, Sheth explained.

7. Protein-rich foods for dinner Consider fish, eggs and cheese at dinnertime, as they contain the amino acid L-ornithine, Sheth explained. According to one small study, this amino acid can potentially relieve stress and

improve sleep quality when it comes to fatigue.

8. Herbal tea

A cup of herbal tea can serve as a snoozeworthy beverage. "Some of my clients find chamomile tea helpful as part of their sleep routine to unwind and go to sleep," Sheth said. "It's soothing, calming and contains an antioxidant called apigenin which may help initiate the sleep cycle."

Passionflower tea may offer short-term sleep benefits for healthy adults with mild fluctuations in sleep quality, according to one study. "It actually increases levels of GABA in our brain," Sheth said.

9. Golden milk made with turmeric - Turmeric is calming to the stomach, and when you add it to warm milk, it can potentially help you fall asleep faster or sleep better, Sheth explained. You can add black pepper, which enhances our ability to absorb the curcumin, the bright yellow compound in turmeric that offers antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties. "I also like to add cinnamon, nutmeg and honey," Sheth said.

Is walking 10,000 steps every day really necessary?



When it comes to being fit and healthy, we're often reminded to aim to walk 10,000 steps per day. This can be a frustrating target to achieve, especially when we're busy with work and other commitments.

Most of us know by now that 10,000 steps is recommended

everywhere as a target to achieve -- and yet where did this number actually come from?

The 10,000 steps a day target seems to have come about from a trade name pedometer sold in 1965 by Yamasa Clock in Japan. The device was called "Manpokeni", which translates to "10,000

steps meter". This was a marketing tool for the device and has seemed to have stuck across the world as the daily step target. It's even included in daily activity targets by popular smartwatches, such as Fitbit.

Research has since investigated the 10,000 steps a day target. The fact that some studies have shown this step target improves heart health, mental health, and even lowers diabetes risk, may, to some extent, explain why we have stuck with this arbitrary number.

In ancient Rome, distances were actually measured by counting steps. In fact, the word "mile" was derived from the Latin phrase *mila passum*, which means

1,000 paces -- about 2,000 steps. It's suggested the average person walks about 100 steps per minute -- which would mean it would take a little under 30 minutes for the average person to walk a mile. So in order for someone to reach the 10,000 step goal, they would need to walk between four and five miles a day (around two hours of activity).

But while some research has shown health benefits at 10,000 steps, recent research from Harvard Medical School has shown that, on average, approximately 4,400 steps a day is enough to significantly lower the risk of death in women. This was when compared to only walking around 2,700 steps daily. The

more steps people walked, the lower their risk of dying was, before leveling off at around 7,500 steps a day. No additional benefits were seen with more steps. Although it's uncertain whether similar results would be seen in men, it's one example of how moving a little bit more daily can improve health and lower risk of death. While the World Health Organization recommends adults get at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity per week (or 75 minutes of vigorous physical activity), research also shows that even low-intensity exercise can improve your health -- though moderate-intensity exercise improves it to a greater extent.

Zack Snyder's Justice League movie review:**An exhausting yet exhilarating superhero epic; fan-service at its finest**

" Zack Snyder's Justice League movie review: The Snyder Cut, as it is popularly known, is an over-indulgent, overlong, and often overwhelming endurance test. But that's exactly what it is supposed to be.

Zack Snyder's Justice League
Director - Zack Snyder
Cast - Ben Affleck, Henry Cavill, Gal Gadot, Jason Momoa, Ezra Miller, Ray Fisher

Zack Snyder's Justice League is out on March 18 in India, on BookMyShow Stream, Google Play, YouTube, Apple TV, Hungama Play, and Tata Sky. You can't fault a film for being an indulgent endurance test if that is exactly what it was aiming for. What would have been criticism in normal circumstances, in a post Snyder Cut world, has become indistinguishable from praise. These are strange times, indeed. Overlong and often overwhelming, Zack Snyder's Justice League is a monumental achievement in blockbuster filmmaking, a cultural curiosity that the director only half-jokingly described as The Godfather of superhero movies. Its opening credits unfold across 10 minutes, over a flashback sequence of the Man of Steel's death from Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice - one of the earliest signs that

Snyder's four-hour cut of the superhero spectacle isn't going to be like the theatrical version at all. Batman, meanwhile, suits up for the first time almost two hours into the film.

If you watched Joss Whedon's version of Justice League in the theatres and thought that it needed more F-bombs and a scene in which Wonder Woman learns how to correctly brew a cup of tea, then you're in luck. This is what you asked for. This new version, for better or for worse, has the scope and sentimentality of Peter Jackson's Lord of the Rings trilogy, painted in trademark Snyder blood-splatter.

It's easily the filmmaker's most personal DC Extended Universe project - a film that is just as much about ponderous superpowered beings as it is about parenthood. Knowledge of what transpired behind-the-scenes - and I can't imagine anyone who is interested in watching this not being intimately familiar with what happened - only makes the experience all the more emotional.

For Autumn," reads the dedication at roughly the four-hour mark - it's Snyder's tribute to his daughter. Exhausted yet exhilarated, I stayed for the end credits - what's a couple more minutes at this point, I thought to myself - and was treated to the most moving cover of Leonard Cohen's Hallelujah, performed by Allison Crowe. It was Autumn's favourite song, played at her funeral, after her suicide. Death looms large in Zack Snyder's Justice League. Nearly every central character is in some way coping with the loss of a loved one. It is what binds them together - they're united by an unspoken grief, and a desire to not let anyone else suffer like they have.

The fall of Superman, as Lex Luthor correctly predicted in BvS, sends a signal to the villains of the vast DC universe - that God is dead, and Earth is up for grabs. So Darkseid, the DC equivalent of Marvel's Thanos, sends his henchman Steppenwolf to Earth, on a mission to locate three Mother



Boxes, DC's equivalent of Marvel's Infinity Stones. Uniting them can give Darkseid the ability to transform any planet into his home world, Apokolips.

There's a lot of exposition like this in the Snyder Cut, minus the Marvel context, of course. I found my attention drifting when conversations shifted to 'change machines', 'the anti-life equation', and everyone's obsession with either 'synchronising the unity' or stopping it. But that's part of the charm, I suppose.

The reason why Snyder himself is such a beloved character in this incredible saga - the studio essentially threw him under the bus midway through the shoot, and brought him back years later after sustained fan pressure - is that unlike some of his contemporaries, he never winks at the audience. To him, superheroes

are gods; and comic books modern myths. There is an almost slavish seriousness to this film, which you have no choice but to surrender to - the sooner the better. The Snyder Cut does, after all, deal with the resurrection of a deity, and if you think about it, Steppenwolf is nothing more than an overzealous missionary on a mass-conversion spree in a 'primitive' land.

He looks drastically different from the sentient piece of chewed up bubblegum that he resembled in the theatrical version - more sinister, and therefore, more believable. As is the film. Shot in the 4:3 aspect ratio by Fabian Wagner, there is an unmistakable operatic quality to the action. Characters seem larger, even on personal devices (I watched it on a press screener on my laptop, in two sittings).

Teddy movie review:**A promising plot squandered by silly execution**

Teddy movie review: Shakti Soundar Rajan, known for his out-of-the-ordinary movies, has made a disappointing entry to his filmography with Teddy.

Teddy
Director: Shakti Soundar Rajan
Cast: Arya, Sayyeshaa and Magizh Thirumeni

Shakti Soundar Rajan is an exciting filmmaker because he wants to try his hands at different genres and concepts. He introduced Tamil audiences to zombies in Miruthan, space exploration in Tik Tik Tik, and now he talks about out of body

experience in his latest release Teddy, which has landed directly on Disney Hotstar. Unlike most filmmakers, Shakti Soundar Rajan is smart when it comes to dealing with high end concepts as he takes the approach of a B movie to tell these stories. The result is mostly silly but still quite entertaining, given the fact that most filmmakers don't take this route.

Sayyeshaa plays Sri Vidya, a young college student who has a rare blood group. While helping out a motorist in an accident, she suffers an injury and is quickly admitted to a hospital where she becomes the victim of a gang that trades in live organs. When Sri becomes comatose, her soul gets transferred into a giant teddy bear, a shameless copy of the foul-mouthed teddy bear from Mark Wahlberg's Ted (2012), who seeks the help of Shakti (Arya), a loner with the intellect of Albert Einstein to save many like her from the gang which operates out of Azerbaijan. The rest of the story is about whether Shakti

manages to help Teddy meet with her body and put an end to the mastermind behind the gang. As a concept, Teddy sounds quite exciting. A talking teddy bear teams up with a loner with some exceptionally good fighting skills to stop an organ trafficking gang. Throw in some decent action stretches, this could've been a solid commercial action flick. Unfortunately, Teddy doesn't cash in on its promising plot and squanders it away by its silly execution. The initial scenes between Teddy and Shakti are fun and would appeal to kids. But if you take out these initial moments, there isn't much happening in the film. When the story shifts to Azerbaijan, it gets

sillier than one can imagine. Making a B movie on such a concept is fine but when you take audiences for granted, it doesn't always work in the film's favour. Arya manages a decent screen presence. With a poker face, he delivers a very restrained performance. It's the kind of performance we've rarely seen from him. If you take out Arya, there isn't a single other performance worth discussing. Filmmaker Magizh Thirumeni as the antagonist is a joke from the minute he appears on the screen. Going by the promos, he comes across as a villain with a big network. In the film, however, he gets just 3-4 scenes and hardly makes any impact.

Tara Sutaria, Alia Bhatt and Neetu Kapoor cheer for Aadar Jain's Hello Charlie

The teaser of Aadar Jain's film Hello Charlie released on March 17. Tara Sutaria, Alia Bhatt and Neetu Kapoor shared the teaser on their respective Instagram handles and expressed their excitement to watch the film.

The teaser of Aadar Jain's film Hello Charlie was unveiled today (March 17). Aadar's girlfriend Tara Sutaria, Alia Bhatt and Neetu Kapoor can't wait to watch the film. How do we know, you ask? Well, they shared the teaser of Aadar's film on their respective Instagram handles and expressed their eagerness to watch the film.

TARA, ALIA AND NEETU CHEER FOR AADAR JAIN AND HIS FILM HELLO CHARLIE

Tara Sutaria shared the teaser of the film on her Instagram stories and wrote, "The most fun you're going to have this year. Get ready for @excelfmovies #HelloCharlie on AP(E)RIL 9, on @primevideo.in. @aadarjain I'm so proud of you!!! (sic)."



Alia Bhatt wrote, "Aaaadaaarr!! Hello Charlie @aadarjain. Looks like a super fun movie (sic)," Looking too too cute! Waitinggggg to see this one (sic)." Aadar's aunt Neetu Kapoor too is eager to watch his film Hello Charlie. "Can't wait to say

driving a truck and listening to Fukrey song Ambarsariya. This is when we are introduced to a gorilla (seated right next to the driver's seat), who changes the song playing in the background.

From the teaser it appears that Hello Charlie will be an unconventional film.

Talking about the film, director Pankaj Saraswat said, "Working on Hello Charlie with Ritesh and Farhan has been an incredible experience. The film's unconventional storyline is truly one of its kind and hoping it spreads much joy. The cast has phenomenally helmed their characters with their unique comic timing and genuine appeal. It was always great fun on the sets and I am glad that people from worldwide will be able to see our film and be entertained."

Hello Charlie is all set release on April 9 on Amazon Prime Video. The film also stars Jackie Shroff, Shlokka Pandit and Elnaaz Norouzi in important roles.

Salman Khan announces Radhe release date is May 13. Eid par hi aayenge

For Salman Khan fans, the wait is finally over. The 55-year-old actor has announced the release date of his much-awaited film Radhe. Salman Khan took to social media to announce that his film is finally going to hit the theatres on May 13, which is two months from now. Fans, are you excited?

SALMAN KHAN'S RADHE TO RELEASE ON MAY 13- Salman Khan shared a poster of Radhe and announced that the film will be releasing on Eid as it was committed. "Eid ka commitment tha, Eid par hi aayenge kyun ki ek baar jo maine..... #RadheOn13thMay #2MonthsToRadhe (sic)," Salman Khan wrote on social media.

ABOUT RADHE

Directed by Prabhudeva, Radhe stars Jackie Shroff, Disha Patani and Randeep Hooda in important roles. Radhe is co-produced by Salman Khan, Sohail Khan and Atul Agnihotri's production houses, Salman Khan Films, Sohail Khan Productions, and Reel Life Production, respectively. Radhe is the Hindi remake of the Korean action film The Outlaws, which starred Ma Dong Seok and Yoon Kye Sang.

Radhe was scheduled to release last year but due to the ongoing novel coronavirus pandemic, the date had to be postponed. Salman Khan was last seen in Dabangg 3, which received a lukewarm response at the box office.

Akshay Kumar to fly to Ayodhya on March 18 for Ram Setu mahurat shot

Akshay Kumar, who is amped-up for his upcoming film Ram Setu, will be flying to Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, for the mahurat shot of the film. The actor will be accompanied by producer Chandraprakash Dwivedi and director Abhishek Sharma. Ram Setu also stars Jacqueline Fernandez and Nushratt Bharuccha in pivotal roles. Akshay Kumar plays an archaeologist in the film, which will be shot in Mumbai. Akshay Kumar, who returned from a family vacation from the Maldives today (March 16), will be flying to Ayodhya



on March 18. He will be shooting the mahurat shot of the film along with director Abhishek Sharma and producer Chandraprakash Dwivedi in Ayodhya. The film, however will be shot in Mumbai. Trade analyst Taran Adarsh shared the news on Twitter. He wrote,

"AKSHAY KUMAR: #RAMSETU MAHURAT IN #AYODHYA... #AkshayKumar, director Abhishek Sharma and creative producer Dr Chandraprakash Dwivedi will fly to #Ayodhya on 18 March 2021 to give the mahurat shot of #RamSetu from #RamJanmabhoomi... Filming date will be announced later (sic)."



Parineeti Chopra shares how she trained for Saina, says there were days she cried

Parineeti Chopra shared her journey of stepping into the shoes of ace badminton player Saina Nehwal for her upcoming film *Saina*. The actress, in a behind-the-scenes video, shared how she transformed into Saina, and learned the sport. **PARINEETI CHOPRA TALKS ABOUT HER JOURNEY**

The video begins with Parineeti Chopra talking about how she used to wake up early for training and had to get into the mindset of an athlete, before learning badminton. She further says that by the time she had to learn the sport, she was already excited.

Parineeti shared that there were days that she used to cry in the badminton court and felt like she 'could not do this film' anymore. The video also features members of the team who trained Parineeti for Saina. The actress concludes the video by saying that the idea was 'not to act like Saina, but to be Saina'.

AINA TRAILER

The trailer of *Saina* was unveiled on the occasion of International Women's Day this year and focused on Saina's journey of becoming a badminton player.



The Big Bull Teaser: Abhishek Bachchan Is Ready To Pull Off "The Mother Of All Scams"



The makers and actors of *The Big Bull* announced the release date of the forthcoming film on Tuesday by dropping its teaser on the Internet. *The Big Bull*, directed by Kookie Gulati, stars Abhishek Bachchan in the lead role and his character in the film is loosely based on that of stock-broker Harshad Mehta, who was charged for numerous financial crimes during the securities scams of 1992. In the teaser, Ajay Devgn, who has produced the film, introduces Abhishek Bachchan's character with his voiceover: "Chhote ghar mein paida hone waalo ko aksar, bade sapne dekhne se mana kar deti hai ye duniya. Isiliye usne apne duniya khadi kar di. *The Big Bull*, mother of all scams." The teaser, set in

the '80s, how Abhishek Bachchan's character changes Mumbai's stock world by pulling off "the mother of all scams." *The Big Bull*, which was earlier slated to release on October 23rd last year, will now premiere on Disney+Hotstar on April 8th. Its trailer will release this Friday. Sharing the teaser on Twitter, Abhishek Bachchan wrote: "Introducing *The Big Bull*... The mother of all scams! Trailer out on March 19. #TheBigBull releasing on April 8 only on Disney+Hotstar. *The Big Bull* also stars Ileana D'Cruz, who plays the role of a journalist in the film. Abhishek Bachchan and Ileana co-star with Nikita Dutta, Sumit Vats, Ram Kapoor, Sohum Shah and Lekha Prajapati in the film.

From Porn Addiction To Vaping, What Bombay Begums Didn't Show 5

Ahh, so our sensibilities have been hurt again. Our 'precarious' culture is under attack from another Netflix show and 'Western influences' will take down our children, announce those who think that if they scream loudly on social media, it becomes reality. This is true of our new soft target - OTT content.

We are a society that seldom has the pulse of its children. Those who are outraging over the portrayal of a 13-year-old girl in *Bombay Begums* pretend they see no evil and yet, ironically, talk evil - their public rant against the drama series is the real adult content. "She was fourteen when, bedridden while recovering from a surgery, she started chatting online with another girl - or so she thought. They exchanged similar stories of adverse circumstances and before long, the other person had convinced Meera to share her nudes." "I watch porn every day," confides a fourteen-year-old girl. "Even with it being banned, I downloaded VPN and I watch daily, since I was about ten, since I first got to know about sex." "In my experience of over 35

years, I have never had children as young as 13 in my rehab till about five years ago. Since then, I have been seeing five to ten teenagers every month, and as of today, 25 per cent of the cases I see are teens...A favourite of school children as young as 12 is Mephedrone, or 'Meow Meow' " he tells me.



"It does not have to be smoked and can be simply ingested by sniffing." "These aren't deleted portions from *Bombay Begums*, they are real conversations with real people - especially children across schools in the country who confided in me for my book "Stoned, Shamed, Depressed". This is the Netflix generation that identifies with all that is shown on *Bombay Begums* - and more.



NIH director tells faith leaders getting Covid-19 vaccination is a 'love your neighbor opportunity'

(SAI Bureau)- The average number of people getting a Covid-19 vaccination each day is at its highest, but officials are still concerned that many Americans are hesitant to get a shot.

National Institutes of Health Director Dr. Francis Collins said Tuesday that faith leaders can help get more people to be confident in the vaccines.

Getting vaccinated is a "love your neighbor opportunity," he said.

More than 72 million people in the United States have gotten at least one dose of one of the three vaccines

authorized by the Food and Drug Administration. Each day more than 2.4 million shots are given, a record. And every state has fully vaccinated at least 10% of their adult population, according to the data compiled

by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Collins spoke to faith leaders at Washington National Cathedral to help bolster Covid-19 vaccine confidence.

"The vaccines have in many ways for many people been an answer to prayer," Collins said. "They are safe and

effective, beyond what we had a right to expect." Unfortunately, many who could most benefit, because they are at highest risk of serious and even life-threatening infections, are still holding back."

President Joe Biden on Monday called on local leaders like

ministers and priests to talk about the importance of getting vaccinated. He said they were more important to influence skeptical Republicans than former President Donald Trump.

(Contd on page 29)



Osho Ashram land sale: Nine more disciples file intervention application



(SAI Bureau)- Nine more Osho disciples have filed an intervention petition before the Mumbai charity commissioner over the proposed sale of three-acre land located at the Osho International Meditation Resort in Pune to businessman Rajiv Bajaj of Bajaj Auto. The Charity Commissioner's office heard their objections on Monday and listed the matter for further hearing on March 25. The nine disciples who filed their intervention application are Amrender Bharati, Hemant Malik, Kashimra Modi, Swami Pratik, Swami Shanto, Maa Jeevan - Mumbai, Swami Chaintanya Kirti - Delhi, Swami Moksha and Swami Nikhil.

(Contd on page 28)

India coronavirus

Can its vaccine producers meet demand?



(SAI Bureau)- India, one of the world's largest producers of coronavirus vaccines, is struggling to meet its export commitments. Its largest manufacturer says doses intended for the UK could be held up, and a big order to supply Nepal has also been put on hold.

Why the shortfall?

The Serum Institute of India (SII) - which produces Novavax and AstraZeneca vaccines - recently raised concerns about raw material shortages. Its chief executive, Adar Poonawalla, attributed this to US export bans on specific items needed to make vaccines, such as specialised bags and filters.

(Contd on page 28)

Army recruitment scam CBI books 5 Lt Colonels, 2 Majors

(News Agencies)- The CBI on Monday conducted searches at several Army establishments in connection with an alleged Army recruitment scam. Residential and official premises of a number of Defence officials, Army hospitals and cantonments were also searched. Officials said the search operation

was extended to more than 30 places in 13 cities, including Kapurthala, Bathinda, Delhi, Kaithal, Palwal, Lucknow, Bareilly, Gorakhpur, Vishakhapatnam, Jaipur, Guwahati, Jorhat and Chirango. "The searches have led to the recovery of several incriminating documents. The documents so recovered during searches are being scrutinized," said CBI Spokesperson RC Joshi. The



federal probe agency has registered a case in this regard on the basis of a complaint from the office of Additional Directorate General, Discipline & Vigilance, Ministry of Defence (Army).

Among the accused in the case are 17 Army officials, including 5 Lieutenant Colonels, two Majors, a Naib Subedar, a Sepoy and six private persons. The individuals have been booked on charges of bribery and irregularities in the recruitment of officers and other ranks through the Service Selection Board (SSB). Sources say bribes were taken from candidates in the form of cash and online transactions. In some cases, this amount was nearly Rs lakh for each candidate.

(Contd on page 29)

