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## When Taxpayer's Money Fund Political Advertising



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## Crypto is out of control. FTX is just the latest example



(SAI Bureau) As investigators and authorities continue to sort through the fallout of the collapse of cryptocurrency exchange FTX, the contours of the implosion are becoming clearer. It will likely take many more months to disentangle the web of corporate greed and financial malfeasance at the heart of FTX's bankruptcy. But we can safely say that the company owes billions of dollars to creditors and, according to sources, at least \$1 billion to clients, in what appears to be the greatest crypto collapse to date.

(Contd. on page 22)

## PM Modi Chairs Review Meeting On Covid, Stresses On Masking Up, More Tests

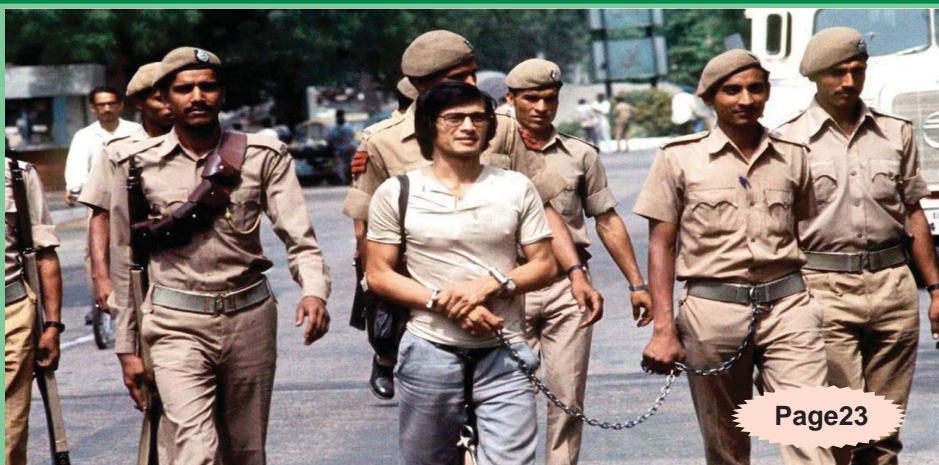
The high-level review meeting comes against the backdrop of an alarming spike in Covid-19 cases in some countries, especially in neighbouring China



Page 23

## The legend of Charles Sobhraj

From petty crimes, Sobhraj graduated to robbing and murdering Western backpackers. As the Nepal Supreme Court orders his release from jail, here's a glimpse into his dark history.



Page23

## India's Visa Temples Attract Devotees Aspiring To Go Abroad



(SAI Bureau) : a visa seeker stood on the street, his hands folded, eyes fixed on the idol of the Hindu deity Ganesh. On a humid morning, the information technology

(Contd. on page 23 )

## Time for Bharat Ratna for Amitabh ?



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## Biden's refusal to act on Title 42 creates 'state of emergency' at border, and Nationwide



Page 21

## "Thermo Nuclear Bad" Expert Says 60% Of China May Get Infected In 3 Months



Page 22



# Nirav Modi exhausts all legal remedies to stay in UK, political asylum now last hope

**Modi, who is accused in Punjab National Bank fraud case, has lost his bid to move UK Supreme Court against extradition to India. Political asylum request still pending with UK govt**



(SAI Bureau) New Delhi: Fugitive diamond merchant Nirav Modi, one of the accused in the Rs 11,000-crore Punjab National Bank (PNB) fraud case, Thursday lost a bid to move the UK Supreme Court against his extradition to India, technically exhausting all his legal remedies to stay in Britain. However, he still has a political asylum request pending with the UK authorities, which is his last hope to evade extradition. In case he is granted asylum, he would not be extradited to India despite court orders. Modi had moved the request in 2018, when he had fled

from India. "As far as the extradition request from India is concerned, in connection with Nirav Modi's involvement in the multi-crore fraud, he has exhausted all his legal remedies to stay back in the UK. This is a big victory for us and he should be sent back to India for a further probe after this," a government source said. "He, however, still has a request for political asylum pending with the UK authorities, which is a separate procedure. That is his last-ditch attempt to evade extradition," the source added. The High Court in London on 9 November had given the go-ahead for Modi's extradition to India. Modi had appealed against the extradition saying he had

"suicidal tendencies". The High Court, however, rejected the plea after an assurance from the Indian government that a panel of experts and doctors would take care of Modi's mental condition and risk of suicide. Modi's counsel had also raised concerns over the "poor condition of the prison" (Mumbai's Arthur Road Jail), which would apparently put him at high risk of committing suicide. A long process Extradition is a long-drawn judicial process that can be reviewed multiple times. For countries that have a treaty with the UK, extradition requests require decisions by both the home secretary and the courts. Once a request is made, the

home secretary has to certify the request, and then the hearing in the case begins. For a judge to pass an order in favour of the country demanding extradition, they have to be satisfied that the person will get a fair trial in the requesting country and that their human rights will not be violated after being extradited. If the judge is satisfied that the person can be extradited, the case is once again sent back to the home secretary for a decision on whether to order extradition. The person can challenge this in the higher courts. Similarly, the decision of the High Court can be challenged in the Supreme Court, but only with the permission of the High Court — which was denied in Modi's case.

## New Zealand offers nurses residency to meet shortfall

(SAI Bureau) AUCKLAN : New Zealand on Monday offered overseas nurses and midwives an immediate pathway to residency, as the country tries to address an acute shortfall of medical staff. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said changes to the immigration system meant those eligible can get fast-tracked residency from Thursday. Specialist doctors have also been added to New Zealand's "Green List", which allows skilled

workers in hard-to-fill roles to get residency. The New Zealand Nurses Organisation estimates the country needs around 4,000 more nurses. Earlier this year, health minister Andrew Little said New Zealand needed hundreds of mental health nurses alone. The country only fully opened its borders in August, after more than two years of travel restrictions to combat Covid-19. Ardern told reporters on Monday that the message to nurses everywhere now is that New Zealand is the "best place to live, work and play". "We need to be as competitive as we can be," she said, defending against allegations that her government

had been slow to address shortfalls. The change to the immigration settings drew criticism from the opposition, who said the move should have come sooner. "The government's major backdown on giving migrant nurses a direct pathway to residence should have happened a year ago," said National Party's immigration spokeswoman Erica Stanford. "Leaving migrant nurses off the fast track to residence pathway was nothing short of madness while New Zealand faced critical staff shortages."

Ten additional professions were also added to the Green List on Monday, including roles across the healthcare, education



and construction sectors to help boost the country's workforce. Unemployment in New Zealand is just 3.3 percent, with only 97,000 people currently out of work and looking for a job.

### Seminar held on Tax Planning and Financial Seminar in Long Island



The Association of Indians in America (AIA-National) recently held a Free Seminar on Tax Planning and Financial Seminar in Long Island. Organizers claimed that the event was quite a success. This Tax Seminar was attended by many respected and eminent individuals, past National Presidents and Chapter Presidents of AIA, executive committee members, community leaders and dignitaries including members of the Media. Consul (Trade) Manish Kulhary from the Indian Consulate graced the occasion as Guest of Honor. (Seen in picture: Gobind Munjal, Past PResident of AIA, & other speakers)

### Dr Rashmi Patel Elected FIA Chicago's President



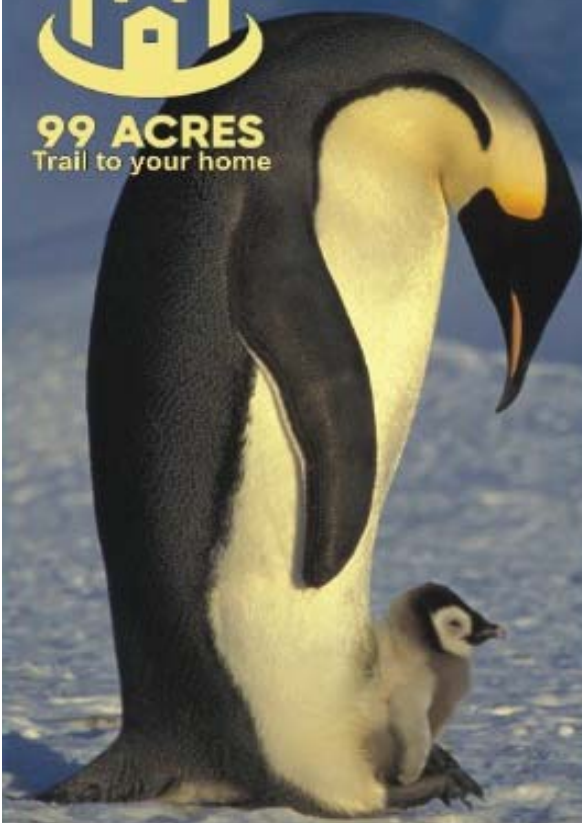
(By our staff reporter) Chicago's eminent physician and renowned hospitality entrepreneur Dr Rashmi Patel has been elected the President of the Federation of Indian Associations (1980) Chicago.





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# India travel: Air Suvidha forms likely to return as Covid cases surge

**Random testing of international passengers arriving at country's airports has already started**

(SAI Bureau) The ministry of health in India is mulling the possibility of re-introducing 'Air Suvidha' forms for international arriving passengers with an aim to protect the country against new variant of Covid-19 that is surging in countries like China and some other countries. Details of RT-PCR test conducted 72 hours prior to travel or complete vaccination proof have to be provided by travellers. A decision on this will be taken after monitoring the situation for a few weeks. The move comes following a meeting chaired by Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Wednesday to review the Covid situation in the country, in view of a sudden spurt in cases in China and some other countries.

India has already begun a 2% random sampling of passengers arriving at the country's international airports as local surveillance has been stepped up.

"The health ministry is examining reintroduction of mandatory 'air suvidha'



forms for international arrivals with details of RT-PCR test conducted 72 hours prior to travel or complete vaccination proof for passengers coming from China and other countries reporting high number of Covid cases," an official source told PTI.

The source said that "a decision in this regard will only be taken after monitoring

the Covid situation in the country for a few weeks and if warranted, as a matter of abundant precaution in view of increasing trajectory of cases globally".

In an earlier meeting, experts and senior officials stressed on the need for continued surveillance. "Covid is not over yet. I have directed all concerned to be alert and strengthen surveillance.

We are prepared to manage any situation," Mandaviya had said. The surveillance system for whole genome sequencing of positive case samples to track variants through the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) network should be strengthened, he had said. States and union territories have been requested to send samples of all Covid positive cases to laboratories on a daily basis for sequencing and track new variants, if any. Besides, implementation of thermal screening is also being explored. India has been witnessing a steady decline in cases with the average daily cases falling to 158 in the week ending December 19, the minister had been briefed in a presentation. However, a consistent rise in global daily average cases has been reported for the last six weeks, he had been informed. India logged 185 new coronavirus infections, while the active cases declined to 3,402, according to health ministry data updated on Thursday.

## Long Island Medical Doctor Charged with Illegally Distributing Oxycodone Pills

### Defendant Baselessly Prescribed Quantities of Oxycodone Pills in Exchange for Cash



(SAI Bureau) Recently, in federal court in Central Islip, an 18-count indictment was returned charging Dr. Roya Jafari-Hassad with illegal distribution of oxycodone and witness tampering. Hassad was arrested this morning and is scheduled to be arraigned this afternoon before United States Magistrate Judge Steven L. Tiscione.

Breon Peace, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, Frank A. Tarentino, Special Agent-in-Charge, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), New York Division and Elysia M. Doherty, Assistant Special Agent-in-Charge, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General's Office of Investigations, New York Region (HHS-OIG) announced the charges.

"As alleged, the defendant abandoned her medical oath to operate a pill mill in Nassau County, illegally dispensing

oxycodone to patients for a cash fee," stated United States Attorney Breon Peace. "This Office will continue to protect our community from bad actors who flood our streets with dangerous drugs, even if they hide behind their prescription pad."

"A prescription pad in the wrong hands can be a deadly weapon," said DEA Special Agent in Charge Frank Tarentino. "The diversion of prescription medication is inexcusable for medical professionals and I applaud the hard work by DEA and our law enforcement partners who brought these charges against Dr. Jafari-Hassad."

"Health care professionals have a duty to prescribe medication responsibly to ensure the well-being of their patients. Failing to do so puts the health and safety of patients at risk and undermines critical measures to address the opioid epidemic," said Susan A. Frisco, Acting Special Agent in Charge with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Inspector General. "HHS-OIG will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to hold accountable bad actors who exploit opioid addiction for personal financial gain."

Specifically, the investigation has disclosed that Hassad operated a medical office in Great Neck, New York, in which she charged

her patients hundreds of dollars in cash in exchange for an illegal monthly oxycodone prescription. These oxycodone prescriptions had no legitimate medical purpose. The cash charge was often in addition to Hassad billing the patient's insurance for a variety of charges, many relating to procedures that never

occurred. It is estimated that Hassad made hundreds of thousands of dollars a year cash solely from the cash payments made by patients to obtain their oxycodone prescriptions.

For example, Hassad prescribed oxycodone to an undercover agent at every visit including the first visit. These visits took place

over a year long period and none of the oxycodone prescriptions had a legitimate medical purpose. In addition, after a search warrant was executed at her medical offices, Hassad reached out to patients and attempted to convince them to alter their testimony about their oxycodone prescriptions.

## 'I am not your servant': IndiGo crew member, passenger get into row over airline meal

(SAI Bureau) SINGAPORE: Flying can be a stressful experience and sometimes, flashpoints occur 20,000 feet in the air. An IndiGo crew member recently ended up in a heated argument with a passenger due to the low-cost airline's meal options. According to The Indian Express, the viral incident took place on Flight 6E 12 from Istanbul to Delhi on Dec 16. British tabloid Daily Mail reported that the passenger had asked for a sandwich and the airline crew informed him that they would check on the availability. The man, however, flew into a rage and began shouting, causing a crew member to cry. A video posted on Twitter showed an air stewardess re-monstrating with the passenger and saying that her colleague was in tears because of him. "You pointed finger at me and you are yelling at me," she said. She added: "Please try to understand, there is a cart and counted meals are uplifted. We can only serve what you're boarding ..." The man then interrupted and asked why she was yelling, to which she shouted: "Because you are

yelling at us." "I am so sorry sir, but you do not talk to the crew like that. I am peacefully listening to you with all due respect, but you have to respect the crew as well." Her colleague tried to calm her down, but the argument continued to escalate, with the man telling the crew member to "shut up".



"You shut up. I'm sorry you cannot talk to me like that ... I'm an employee, I'm not your servant," she responded, as other passengers looked on. Social media users were divided on the incident, with some saying that the crew member tried her best to be patient while others felt that the passenger's point of view should have been

heard. Jet Airways CEO Sanjiv Kapoor empathised with the stewardess, and wrote on Twitter that "crew are human too". "It must have taken a lot to get her to breaking point. Over the years, I have seen crew slapped and abused on board flights, called 'servant' and worse. Hope she is fine despite the pressure she must be under," he added.





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# Punjabi diaspora seeks fast track courts for NRIs for quick disposal of cases

The Punjabi diaspora on Monday sought the setting up of fast track courts for redressal of their issues, including property-related disputes, at their native places in the state.



(South Asian Insider Bureau) Chandigarh The Punjabi diaspora on Monday sought the setting up of fast track courts for redressal of their issues, including property-related disputes, at their native places in the state. Several non-resident Indians hailing from Mohali, Patiala, Fatehgarh Sahib and Rupnagar districts took part in a meeting with the state's NRI Affairs Minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal to address their grievances. The Punjabi NRIs mainly raised issues related to property grabbing and family disputes. The Punjab government had held its first 'NRI Punjabiyan Naal Milni (Punjabi NRIs' meet)' in Jalandhar on December 16. Three more such meetings will be held in Amritsar, Ludhiana and Moga. District and police administration officials also attended the meeting.

Dhaliwal said the state government would try to establish special fast track courts for the NRIs at the earliest so that their cases could be settled in minimum time. He said the government was

drafting a special policy to redress all problems related to social, economic and cultural background of migrant Punjabis in a timely manner. Several non-resident Indians hailing from Mohali, Patiala, Fatehgarh Sahib and Rupnagar

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economic and cultural background of migrant Punjabis in a timely manner. He pointed to the case of an elderly and wheelchair-bound NRI who came from London to raise the issue of his 40-year land dispute. US citizen Harjit Kaur Saini raised the issue of an alleged fraud by a property developer. She said her family had booked three plots 12 years ago but the developer failed to deliver those. Saini, who lives in California, said after lodging a complaint with the NRI Cell, the property developer assured delivery but failed to keep his promise. "We have been harassed by the property developer for several years," claimed Saini. Canadian citizen Kuldeep Singh complained of not getting electricity connection to

instal a water pump on his agricultural land in his native Khosa Randhir village of Moga district. "We have not been given electricity connection despite applying eight years ago," said Singh, who moved to Brampton in 1988.

He said his neighbour, who takes care of the family's ancestral land, charged money to irrigate the crops. Abhay Jain, another UK citizen, raised the issue of an ongoing property dispute with his brother in Ludhiana and demanded that the case be fast-tracked. US citizen Harjinder Singh sought gun licences for OCI (Overseas Citizens of India) cardholders, NRIs to be appointed as advisors to the government and allowance to purchase agricultural land.

## India restores e-visa facility for Canadianb Passport holders

(South Asian Insider Bureau) India has restored e-visa facility for Canadian passport holders, the High Commission of India, Ottawa, Canada, said on Tuesday. "e-Visa facility for Canadian passport-holders has been restored, with effect from 20 December 2022," the Indian High Commission in Ottawa said in a statement. 1) Those Canadian passport-holders who wish to visit India for tourism, business, medical or conference purposes. may apply for e-Visa at <https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/evisa/tvoa.html> and follow instructions contained therein.

2) Canadian passport-holders seeking to travel to India for any purpose, not qualifying for an e-Visa, may apply for



the paper visa at <https://www.bisindia-canada.com/>. 3) The same process is applicable to Laissez-passer travel document holders, the release said.

4) The Indian High Commission said those who have applied for visas through various BLS Centres in Canada are advised to wait for the issuance of the same.

5) "All such applications will be

processed on priority. Those applicants who wish to withdraw their respective visa applications may do so by visiting the website <https://www.bisindia-canada.com/> and choosing the option for Application Withdrawal," the release said. 6) "Those who have booked appointments to apply for tourist, business, medical or conference visa at BLS Centres in Canada and would, now, like to apply for e-Visa instead, are requested to vacate/cancel their appointment slots so that the same becomes available to others seeking visa consular services," it added. The e-visa for India is one of the quickest methods to visit India. The service for India was discontinued due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## India to randomly test 2% of international travellers for COVID-19



(South Asian Insider Bureau) MUMBA: India will start randomly testing 2 per cent of international

passengers arriving at its airports for COVID-19, Mansukh

Mandaviya, the country's health minister, told parliament on Thursday (Dec 22), as the country steps up surveillance for new coronavirus variants. "The global pandemic is not yet over. The virus is changing its face from time to time," Mandaviya told parliament on Thursday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was set to hold a meeting with top officials on Thursday to review the COVID-19 situation in the country.

"Considering the upcoming festival season and New Year, states have been advised to keep up awareness of hand hygiene and

the importance of masking," Mandaviya said.

India's iconic Taj Mahal, which attracts thousands of tourists every day will now require visitors to undergo a COVID-19 test before they enter, Reuters partner ANI reported.

Lawmakers attending the ongoing winter session of parliament were spotted wearing masks. Masks have not been compulsory in most parts of the country for several months. India is reporting an average of 153 cases of COVID-19 every day, Mandaviya said. The country has 3,402 ac-

tive cases of the coronavirus, according to data from the health ministry.

The government earlier this week asked India's states to keep a lookout for any new variants of the coronavirus and urged people to wear masks in crowded areas, citing an increase in COVID-19 cases in China and other parts of the globe. With more than 44 million COVID-19 cases to date, India has reported the most in the world behind the United States. However, its number of confirmed infections has fallen sharply in the past few months.



# Jaishankar at UN says Pakistan can't 'sermonise' on terrorism after hosting bin Laden

**Jaishankar's remarks came after Pak Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto raised the Kashmir issue in the UN Security Council open debate on reformed multilateralism on Wednesday**



Minister Bilawal Bhutto raised the Kashmir issue while speaking in the Council open debate on reformed multilateralism on Wednesday.

Jaishankar said the credibility of the UN depends on its effective response to the key challenges of our times, be it pandemics, climate change, conflicts or terrorism. "We are obviously focused today on the urgency of reforming multilateralism. We will naturally have our particular views, but there is a growing convergence at least that this cannot be delayed any further," said Jaishankar, who is chairing India's signature event on reformed multilateralism.

"While we search for the best solutions, what our discourse must never accept is the normalisation of such threats. The question of justifying what the world regards as unacceptable should not even arise. That certainly applies to state sponsorship of cross-

border terrorism. Nor can hosting Osama bin Laden and attacking a neighbouring Parliament serve as credentials to sermonise before this Council," he said.

Jaishankar arrived here on Tuesday to preside over two signature events on counter-terrorism and reformed multilateralism being held under India's current Presidency of the UN Security Council, before the curtains come down this month on the country's two-year tenure as an elected member of the powerful 15-nation.

He presided over the UN Security Council Open Debate on 'Maintenance of International Peace and Security: New Orientation for Reformed Multilateralism', a signature event held under India's Presidency of the 15-nation Council.

Among the over 60 speakers listed for the debate was Bhutto, who in his remarks to the Council, raised the Kashmir issue. India's

Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj was chairing the debate when Bhutto spoke in the Council.

Later, as Jaishankar presided over the debate, he gave a strong response to Bhutto's comments. He referred to the mastermind behind the September 11 attacks in the US bin Laden, who was living in Pakistan's Abbottabad city and was killed in a raid at his hideout in May 2011 by US Navy seals. Terrorists of the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) had attacked the Indian Parliament complex in 2001, killing nine people. Tensions between India and Pakistan have spiked since New Delhi abrogated Article 370 of the Constitution to revoke the special status of Jammu and Kashmir on August 5, 2019. India's decision evoked strong reactions from Pakistan, which downgraded diplomatic ties and expelled the Indian envoy.

(News Agency) United Nations: India has strongly hit back at Pakistan for raking up the Kashmir issue in the UN Security Council, arguing that a country that hosted slain al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and attacked a neighbouring Parliament does not have the credentials to "sermonise" before the powerful UN organ.

Jaishankar at UN says Pakistan can't 'sermonise' on terrorism after hosting bin Laden

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in the UN Security Council open debate on reformed multilateralism on Wednesday United Nations: India has strongly hit back at Pakistan for raking up the Kashmir issue in the UN Security Council, arguing that a country that hosted slain al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and attacked a neighbouring Parliament does not have the credentials to "sermonise" before the powerful UN organ.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's strong remarks came after Pakistan Foreign



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## Protests ended, but Shaheen Bagh's young Muslim women have been launching daily mutinies

**Shaheen Bagh's long sit-in gave the women a voice against CAA. But they didn't stop at it, now they are questioning everything**

(News Agency) When 25 women from Shaheen Bagh went to protest the hijab ban in Karnataka colleges earlier this year, the police were ready with a deployment three times the size of the demonstrators. They kept a tight watch on the women. That's the alarm that just the name of Shaheen Bagh sets off even today.

The landmark anti-CAA protests by Shaheen Bagh ended almost three years ago. But what has largely gone unnoticed is how the protests fueled a new energy among young Muslim women in the neighbourhood, sparking a million small mutinies every day – from hijab to menstruation to resisting bulldozers. These mini-revolutions have flown under the radar of headlines mostly focused on Shaheen Bagh leaders arrested on UAPA charges.

The long sit-ins and nightlong vigils during the CAA protests have thrown open the public sphere for young teens here. After shouting 'kagaz nahin dikhayenge' (We won't show the NRC papers) slogans, they have now found their voice.

"The Shaheen Bagh movement is not over yet. It is still going

on and is alive in us. Raising our voice against wrong is Shaheen Bagh," said Taiyyaba Razique, a 30-year-old doctor, with pride. She is part of a group of 10 residents of Shaheen Bagh who are fighting for better civic amenities, educating young girls on menstrual hygiene, and holding skill development workshops for the youth. They keep abreast of national events and mobilise quickly to lend their voice, like in the case of the hijab protest.

The women and their families are shunned and stigmatised. Most are denied job opportunities, and others are facing financial ruin. And the police are always watching.

"The administration thinks that we will not get up if we sit," said Shagufta, a 47-year-old former teacher, bursting into laughter. Her anger is tempered with humour.

A few metres from where Taiyyaba works, makeup artist Hena Ahmed (50) carefully applies a layer of foundation for a young bride. As she steps back to make sure the base coat is evenly applied, she recounts the camaraderie among the women protesters,

the food they shared with each other, and the nagging worry about their children, parents, and partners back home.

But within a few minutes, her cheerful demeanour gives way to anger and frustration. The agency that the Shaheen Bagh protest gave them has come at a steep price. "Whenever we try to participate in any demonstration or even gather at one place, the police turn our area into a cantonment," said Hena.

Hena is now a well-known face in the area and an active member of the Shaheen Bagh movement. She claims that her networking skills are so strong that she can gather a group of people with a single phone call. She started her makeup salon in 2015.

On 15 December 2019, the women of Shaheen Bagh started a protest against the CAA-NRC and the brutal police crackdown on students in Jamia Millia Islamia. This movement was 'leaderless', and is often referred to by supporters as the site of modern satyagraha (a policy of passive political resistance). On 24 March 2020, the agitating women left the protest site.

### PIN Code stigma

Depending on who you ask, Shaheen Bagh can evoke pride and hate. The neighbourhood has been valorised and demonised, and the residents know that it will never be easy to be ordinary again. The women feel the stigma every day. Some claim that autos and taxis refuse a ride when they learn that the designation is Shaheen Bagh. If their address is Shaheen Bagh, or their PIN code is 110025, it is held against them. Hena's daughter Hiba, a chef by profession, had to leave her internship at a five-star hotel because of the constant bullying. "She is only 24 years old. People kept pointing out that she lives in 'mini-Pakistan'," said Hena. She tried bringing it up with the senior management, but when attitudes did not change, she quit. The number of clients who come to Hena's makeup studio has reduced from 50-60 a month to 10-15 since the protest. Only local residents, like the young brides, go to her. "As soon as my clients come to know that my makeup studio is in Shaheen Bagh and that I live there, they

cancel their bookings, even after giving their advance," said Hena, who has tried masking the address of her studio. She even removed Shaheen Bagh from her studio's address on Google and changed it to Jasola Extension to counter the slew of negative reviews online. "Earlier, I used to get a lot of client bookings. I was even invited as a guest to their weddings. I used to have so much work that I had to write down. Now, it is such a situation that I have to wait for the client to come," Hena added. When people hear about Shaheen Bagh, they immediately think of agitation, UAPA, police, and stereotypical images of Muslims. But no one talks about the lack of infrastructure in the neighbourhood, the health hazards, below-par education institutions, or congestion. "For the last three years, I have asked many NGOs to set up health awareness camps in Shaheen Bagh. Because most of the girls in this area face problems like PCOD and infertility. But everyone refuses," said Taiyyaba.



# Angry Nitish in the House-Bihar CM's rage over hooch deaths is latest in spate of flare-ups

**CM lashed out at BJP MLAs Wednesday when they raised Saran tragedy in Assembly. Once called a 'role model for MLAs', Nitish has been losing his cool in public more & more**

(SAI Bureau) Patna: On Wednesday, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar lost his cool when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLAs tried to corner his government over the Chhapra hooch deaths inside the Bihar assembly. "Tum log ko kya hogaya? Tum log bhi sath the. Ab tum log bhi sharabi ho gaye. Nahi bardast karne. Bahar nikalo inko (What has happened? You people were also there [when anti-liquor laws were enforced in 2016]. You all have become alcoholics. I will not tolerate this. Throw them out)," Nitish shouted at the BJP MLAs who tramped inside the well of the House. Leader of Opposition, Vijay Kumar Sinha, demanded an apology from Nitish for using offensive language inside the House. When the CM refused to concede, the BJP boycotted the proceedings and later demonstrated outside the Assembly against the "nexus" of the police and illicit liquor traders for the hooch deaths. Incidentally, Sinha himself had faced the CM's wrath in March for "interfering" with the probe in the Lakhisarai case wherein two persons were jailed for violating Covid

protocol. The CM had accused Sinha, then Bihar assembly speaker, of "violating



the Constitution". Nitish's Janata Dal (United) and the BJP were back then sharing power in the state. In the present case, the JD(U) chief's outburst left even members of his ally, the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), stunned. "It was an unfortunate event. It's the role of the opposition to raise a matter of public concern," RJD MLA Sudhakar Singh told Media. Opposition MLA Arun Kumar was less charitable in his observation. "The language used by CM Nitish Kumar is a result of his frustration about losing the electoral battle and also having to play second fiddle to Tejashwi Yadav," the BJP legislator told media.

**Outbursts not new** This is not the first time that Nitish was caught not in the best of his moods while tackling his rivals both inside and outside the assembly. On 27 November, 2020, the Bihar chief minister was furious when then leader of the opposition Tejashwi Yadav attacked him for the second day in a row in the assembly. "Yeh khali jhooth bolta rahta hai (He only speaks lies)," Nitish shouted in the assembly. "I keep listening because he (Tejashwi) is the son of a friend who's like a brother to me. I don't say anything. Who made his father the leader of the legislative party? Who made him Deputy CM?" In March, Nitish attacked RJD MLC Sunil Singh, the chairman of a cooperative body, when he contested the government's response on procurement of foodgrains from farmers. "I know about you and your deeds. I will expose it," the CM said. Later, RJD MLA Mukesh Roshan had entered the assembly with a stethoscope in hand, saying that he wanted to check up on the CM as he was worried about his "blood pressure".

# Facebook Parent Meta Sees Another Big Exit In India: 4th In Nearly 2 Months



(SAI Bureau) New Delhi: WhatsApp Pay's India Vinay Choletti has resigned just after four months he was elevated to the position, according to his details on a professional social media platform. Vinay Choletti's resignation is the fourth high-profile exit in about one and half months from Meta in India after its country head Ajit Mohan stepped down in November. After Ajit Mohan, WhatsApp India head Abhijit Bose and Meta India Public Policy Head Rajiv Aggarwal also resigned from the company last month. Vinay Choletti shared an update on exiting WhatsApp on LinkedIn. "Today was my last day at WhatsApp Pay and as I sign off, I can proudly say that watching the scale and the influence of WhatsApp in India has been a humbling experience," Vinay Choletti said on Wednesday. He joined WhatsApp from Amazon in October 2021 to head Merchant Payments vertical WhatsApp Pay. An email query sent to WhatsApp elicited no immediate reply.



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## Trump might look done, but we shouldn't count him – or those he inspired – out

Is Trump done? The Republican party leadership would certainly hope so. When the former president and would-be autocrat announced his third run for the presidency, in the days after the Republican party's paltry and historically anomalous midterm showing, hardly any elected members of his party showed up. Since he left office, civil suits have accrued around Trump and his companies, like a river leaving silt deposits that slowly build up into muddy land. Investigations have proliferated in New York, where the state attorney general has accused Trump of various real estate frauds, and in Fulton county, Georgia, where his threatening phone calls to the state attorney general in the wake of the 2020 election have earned him a criminal inquiry.

Last week, Trump teased a "MAJOR ANNOUNCEMENT" on social media, briefly leading to speculation about what his plans might be, and how they could shake up American politics. Was he announcing a running mate? Was he going to throw his hat in the ring for speaker of the House? But no; instead, he was unveiling a new product: a line of wish-fulfillment greeting cards that depict him as a musclebound superhero. Even worse, the cards were digital only, selling for \$99 a pop in a form that's become the last and most embarrassing refuge of scammers: the NFT. The spectacle was almost sad – tacky and desperate and low-rent, even for him.

Things haven't been going well for Trump lately, and on Monday they got a little bit worse. The House January 6 committee, in its final public meeting before the new Republican majority shutters it, addressed the nation to reiterate its findings, present its final public report and the full transcripts of its more than 1,000 interviews, and formally make its criminal referrals to the justice department.

Ultimately, the committee is recommending that the justice department charge Trump with four federal criminal counts: obstruction of an official proceeding, conspiracy to defraud the US government, conspiracy to make false statements to the US government and incitement of insurrection, a charge which is applicable to anyone who incites, assists or provides "aid and comfort" to a violent rebellion against the authority of the US government.

They're serious charges, commensurate with the seriousness of what Trump tried to do on 6 January 2021. Of course, there's no guarantee the justice department will take the committee up on it. Thus far, Merrick Garland's Department of Justice has been exceedingly slow and unwilling to pursue charges against Trump, an

intransigence in the face of mounting evidence that has come to seem less like caution than like cowardice. Representative Jamie Raskin, in announcing the referrals, said: "Ours is not system of justice where foot soldiers go to jail and masterminds and ringleaders get a pass." But this somewhat optimistic assertion rings hollow to anyone who pays much attention to the actual US legal system, which operates less like a series of fact-finding and fairness-determining endeavors than as a mechanism for enforcing pre-existing hierarchies of race, sex and wealth. It still seems far-fetched and ambitious to imagine that Donald Trump will ever see the inside of a criminal courtroom. No matter how far he falls, he's still too big, it seems, for federal law enforcement to try to catch him. There will be more stories that emerge from the material that the committee releases this week, and in particular there will be much to learn from the deposition transcripts from the more than 1,000 interviews that the committee conducted over the course of its 18-month tenure. What was presented at the committee's public hearings, after all, has been a carefully curated selection of information – that is, the parts that fit the committee's narrative. And its narrative has been curiously focused on Donald Trump, and Donald Trump alone. Over the course of its hearings, the committee has painted a picture of a Trump administration, and a Republican party, held hostage by their president; not so much accomplices to Trump's illegal, extraconstitutional and violent escapades as victims of them. The committee did much to showcase the contributions of its two Republican members; in its meeting on Monday, Liz Cheney, of Wyoming, deemed Trump "unfit for any office". The persistent message of the committee has been that the Republican party is somehow distinct from Trump and his violence, and can be redeemed of him; more, even, than an exercise in informing the public, it has been an effort by Democrats to give Republicans plausible deniability, moral cover, a way out.

If this works – if the public is convinced that Trump, with his greed and narcissism, his petty opportunism, his evils and betrayals great and small, is somehow different from what the Republican party is – then the Democrats will live to regret it. It's true that Trump himself is a much-reduced figure, his ramblings sounding less like those of a plausible dictator and more like those of an embarrassing, drunken uncle – though it seems unwise to count him out just yet, as his whole career has been a series of humiliations and dramatic, uncowed reversals.

## It's Time for the West to Cultivate an Alternative Information Ecosystem in Russia

Among the most consequential side effects of Russia's assault on Ukraine has been a dramatic crackdown on its own already unfree media. For years, Russian journalists and commentators have suffered under a tightening web of restrictions. Even so, the advent of the Ukraine war has been accompanied by extensive new constraints on acceptable speech within Russia, to the point that any coverage at odds with the Kremlin's official narrative is now punishable by extensive prison terms. Additionally, a number of opposition outlets have been blacklisted as "undesirable organizations" under Russian law, making support of their activities — or collaboration with them — tantamount to treason.

The result of these measures has been an exodus of independent and opposition media from Russia. But the emptying of Russia's domestic media sphere has also resulted in the creation of something qualitatively new: an opposition information ecosystem in exile. This network is still small, consisting of roughly half a dozen prominent players. They include Meduza, the well-known multimedia outlet which has long served as a mouthpiece for opposition journalism directed against the Kremlin, as well as Ekho Moskvy, an independent radio station that was taken off the air in March 2022 by Russia's state censor. It also encompasses a quartet of internet investigative outlets: MediaZona, iStories, The Insider and Proekt. (Another outlet, the Dozhd television channel, left Russia in the spring of 2022 and migrated to the Baltics, but has since been shuttered by the Latvian government as a result of political disagreements.)

This emerging dissident media sphere is enormously consequential. Since the start of its war against Ukraine, Putin's Russia has become a significantly harder target for Western messaging, with multiple U.S. and European news outlets evicted from the country. State propaganda, meanwhile, has ramped up significantly, as the Kremlin seeks to maintain domestic support for what has turned into a protracted war effort. Even so, digital platforms like YouTube and Telegram remain operational inside the country, at least for now, and they still provide Russians access to information that isn't controlled by the state. Russia's dissident media is helping fill that need, sharing stories and creating engagement with audiences inside Russia in a way that over time could move the needle on support for Russian President Vladimir Putin's war. In order for them to do that, however, Russia's opposition journalists need help on at least three fronts.

The first is professionalization. As it stands, the emerging dissident media ecosystem is far from impartial; as a result of their strong anti-war and anti-Kremlin sentiments, these actors are closer to opinion journalists or activists. They consequently need professionalization courses, as well as engagement with established Western media institutions, to adapt their skills and focus to work outside of Russia. Such a step is important to their credibility as journalists operating in the West. It can also increase their cachet as faithful transmitters of Western ideas to audiences back in Russia. The second is funding. The emerging ecosystem is fragile in nature, with the outlets in question operating on shoestring budgets and scrambling to secure support.



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# Nitish Kumar is riding a tiger with prohibition in Bihar. Everyone knows it's failed

Last week's hooch tragedy, which killed over 70, has again raised questions on implementation of prohibition law, with many blaming corruption in police & system for easy availability of liquor



voters, but there is criticism from within his own party as well. "The liquor ban in Bihar is a failure," said Janta Dal (United) MLA Dr. Sanjeev Kumar, who represents the Parbatta seat in the Bihar assembly, calling for a review of the law. While the MLA stopped short of directly blaming the Chief Minister, he accused the police of failing to enforce the prohibition.

"Without the help of the administration, how are big trucks carrying liquor entering the state? After this policy, crimes against Dalits are also on the rise. The government is following up, but the director general of police is lax," he alleged. Bihar DGP S.K. Singhal, however, said, "We take action against those who are found to be involved in corruption. Apart from this, it is also the responsibility of the family members and the people of the society to pay attention to this situation."

Bihar excise minister Sunil Kumar did not deny allegations of systemic lapse, but added that the government was trying to address the issues. "There could be black sheep in the system. I am not denying it," he said. Police claim that they have arrested close to 60,000 people till July this year for allegedly violating the prohibition. But that has done little to stem the flow of alcohol into the state. Change has to come from within as well, argued the minister. He added: "We have opened de-addiction centers in many districts. But for this issue, we are conducting a survey, after which better medical facilities can also be made available to the liquor addicts." Meanwhile, CM Nitish Kumar is riding a tiger in trying to make Bihar a dry state. He can neither dismount and abandon it without losing face nor guarantee strict enforcement.

**'Bootleggers use children to supply liquor'**

What most people in the state agreed on is that liquor is freely available. Prohibition has just made alcohol more expensive in the state and allowed bootleggers to operate without any checks and balances. "Both my brother and husband are still drinking. But what they used to get for Rs 50, they are now paying Rs.100 for, and getting sick. Neither the budget of the house, nor quality of life is improving," said Leela Deevi, who had come to see her brother at Chhapra's Sadar Hospital, when ThePrint caught up with her. Devi's brother is among those being treated for alcohol poisoning at the hospital, following last week's hooch tragedy. The steady supply of liquor is guaranteed in two ways, people ThePrint spoke to, alleged. One was at the local level where people illegally brew it in kilns and the other was through porous borders, where checks were allegedly lax and corruption rampant. **(Contd. on page 20)**

Huge posters advertising how prohibition has changed lives for the better line the streets of Bihar's cities and towns. Most display photos of women claiming that they can leave their homes freely and without fear because of the liquor ban law. But for residents of Mashrak area, in the state's Saran district, where over 70 people died after consuming spurious alcohol last week, the posters are a mockery of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's prohibition law. As long as BJP had shared power with JD(U) in

Bihar — till August this year — it had supported the prohibition, but now that it is in the opposition, it is raising questions on the law's efficacy. BJP Bihar general secretary Devesh Kumar told ThePrint that the party has not changed its view. "The BJP remains firm in its stand on supporting the prohibition policy. But the government of the day must implement the policy effectively and honestly," he said. Not only are his political opponents tapping into the outrage and anger among his

## Once Title 42 expires Mexican drug cartels will gain complete control of our southwest border

When Title 42 expires, more than 18,000 illegal aliens could surge across our border. The chaos we've witnessed is about to get much, much worse

Title 42 could end on Wednesday. If this occurs, intelligence reports indicate that arrests of illegal aliens at the border could immediately soar to 14,000 per day on December 21st and then level out at 18,000 per day. Once this happens -- and it will happen -- there will be almost no agents left to patrol our southwest border with Mexico. The cartels will gain complete control.

The consequences of Biden's self-inflicted border crisis have already been disastrous, but as bad as it is now, we're only experiencing the tip of the iceberg. The well-known and widely accepted phrase, "Actions speak louder than words," has never applied to President Joe Biden. And in no area is this truer than border security. Instead, President Biden and the White House rely upon rhetoric, deflection, and in many cases, outright lies. They know the mainstream media will not fact-check them, so when Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre says things like "the border is secure" and "the President has implemented a plan to



secure the border" her lies simply become the truth. If President Biden was graded on actions, he would fail miserably. But as we have seen time and time again, his actions are not judged. Rather, he is graded on rhetoric. If his words fit the media's narrative, he is given an A+. While in many private sector jobs this would simply mean some lost profit, for the American people it has disastrous consequences. And those

consequences are playing out in front of our eyes right now.

For years, ruthless criminal cartels have responded to U.S. policy to maximize profits. The cartels don't thrive in times of tough enforcement policies. They thrive and generate record revenue by efficiently smuggling dangerous drugs, criminal aliens and aliens from countries who wish to do us harm during times of soft enforcement policies like we currently

have.

Never in our history have the cartels generated more revenue than they do now. And it all starts by using illegal immigration to overwhelm Border Patrol resources. And while President Biden's policies have already allowed the cartels to overwhelm resources, the chaos is about to get much, much worse. Historically, the Border Patrol apprehends between an average of 1,000 to 1,200 people daily. When that number climbs to 2,000 resources are stretched thin. When it climbs to 3,000 agents begin being pulled from patrol duties on the border to perform administrative duties such as processing, transport, hospital watch and detention security. For every additional 1,000 people, even more agents are pulled from patrol duties, which leaves huge gaps in border coverage. These gaps are exploited by cartels and deadly drugs like fentanyl make it into our country and on to our streets.

**(Contd. on page 20)**



# Pakistan can't fight its real enemy Taliban so it's turning to politically useful enemy India

The dossier targeting India and PM Modi might win Pakistan's establishment applause from nationalists, but it won't extricate the country from the minefields it has laid for itself



ceasefire negotiated by former Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) chief Lieutenant-General Faiz Hameed, though, TTP terrorists have beheaded, ambushed police personnel, and staged public executions. Khyber-

Pakhtunkhwa residents have been demanding the government act—but Islamabad has chosen to instead turn its fire on an older enemy. Last week, Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah blamed India for attempting to assassinate Lashkar-e-Taiba founder Hafiz Saeed. The dossier claims the Research and Analysis Wing is operating a "vast network of terrorists" through long-incarcerated gangster Omprakash Shrivastava.

Early this month, travelling along the Line of Control, Pakistan's new army chief General Syed Asim Munir vowed to "not only defend every inch of our motherland but to take the fight back to the enemy." Foreign

minister Bilawal Bhutto has

chipped in with invective against India's prime minister Narendra Modi, calling him "the butcher of Gujarat".

Islamabad has been strangely silent, though, on the growing threat to Pakistan from the TTP.

## God's own army

For the most part, military mottos inhabit the semantic space between rousing cliché and platitude. The French 1st Parachute Hussars—not always triumphant through their three centuries of service in wars across the world—philosophically remind soldiers of the Latin aphorism omnia si perdas, famam servare memento, 'even if you have lost everything, there is still honour.' The Swiss special forces more poetically—though just as alarmingly—inform volunteers that the path into the stars is rough.

The Pakistan Army slogan, though, is unusual in invoking an

expressly theocratic conception of Allah, faith in Allah, taqwa, fear of Allah, and jihad-fi-sabillah. This term is explained on the website of Pakistan's military public relations service thus: "The real objective of Islam is to shift the lordship of man to the lordship of Allah on the earth." The Pakistan Army is committed to "staking one's life and everything else to achieve this sacred purpose." There is a higher cause than the constitution.

For centuries, law scholar Oded Bakircioglu explains, classical Islamic theologians struggled with the question of when war was just. The consensus, he suggests, was that "the purpose of each war must be the promotion of Islamic values." Following the Second World War, though, Muslim-majority states signed on to the United Nations charter, which prescribed that "armed force shall not be used save in the common interest."

(Contd on page 19)

The body of the school's office assistant had been doused in kerosene and set alight, still sitting on her chair, blood from her bullet-wounds pooling by her side. "There are so many children beneath the benches," one gunman shouted, "go and get them." Teenager Shahrukh Khan, shot in both knees, stuffed his school tie into his mouth so he would not scream. "The man with big boots kept on looking for students and pumping bullets into their bodies," the schoolboy told journalists. Eight years ago

on Friday, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan jihadists attacked the Army Public School in Peshawar, killing 149 people—132 of them children. The government rolled out a national plan to fight terrorism, centred around setting-up special military courts to prosecute jihadists. Aided by United States drones, Pakistan succeeded in eliminating top jihad commanders and reasserting its authority in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa.

Following the collapse of a

# Chinese are coming for biggest breach in India's defences. Our politics is far from ready for them

None of the actions of the Chinese, their method or subsequent de-escalatory response, suggest that land is what they are after. The territory they most likely want now is in our minds



What are the Chinese up to? Why is it that they are provoking Indian troops and thereby public opinion by activating almost the entire 3,488-km Line of Actual Control, and yet managing the escalation ladder below the firing threshold?

What is their message and objective? Finally, how are we responding to it?

Not militarily. That isn't the question right now. India's armed forces are dealing with this adequately and effectively on the ground. This can't, however, be seen as a series of whimsical, sporadic fistfights or melees on a most lonely frontier.

We need to understand what the Chinese are after. If it were territory, they wouldn't eschew the use of firearms.

They might then try using some of their remote weaponry to try and achieve their territorial objectives with minimal, if any, human casualties.

Would they do this only to "rationalise" the territory along the LAC and create buffer zones, as has been done in Ladakh? They would have to be nuts to employ nearly three divisions and heavy equipment at 5,000 metres and above in the most hostile environment for just this. This won't enhance their security, improve their access to resources, or weaken India's will to defend its territory, by fire if it comes to that.

Yet, almost all the debate in India thus far on China's actions has been about territory. Prime Minister Narendra Modi—who is careful never to name China—spoke on the issue only once, in 2020. This was his much-quoted, "Koi nahin aaya..." (nobody's come in, nobody's squatting on our territory, no post of ours has been occupied) statement.

The criticism from the opposition, and

critics within the strategic commentariat, has all been about territory. Even as this column is being written this Friday, I see news headlines running Rahul Gandhi's statement attacking Modi for keeping mum despite what he calls the "loss of territory" to China. All the other opposition parties, from the Trinamool Congress to Asaduddin Owaisi's AIMIM, are talking of territory. The fact is, none of the actions of the Chinese, their method or subsequent de-escalatory response, suggests that territory on the ground is what they are after. The territory they most likely want now is in our minds. They want to throw India off-balance in terms of its military deployments as well as the strategic rebalancing it's been working on for the three post-Cold War decades—a process that picked up generally after the India-US Civil Nuclear Agreement, and got a new push after Modi's arrival. The Chinese are delivering multiple, complex strategic and political messages to India. We do not serve ourselves well by focussing on territory

and military-tactical issues. It also speaks very poorly of our political and strategic culture. We need to explore this further. The side that loses a war keeps re-fighting the same war over and over again through the generations. In our popular imagination, we keep fighting the 1962 war over and over again. As if to reassure ourselves we would do so much better. The tough truth is, that war was 60 years ago. There have been multiple revolutions in the world since then. Geopolitics has changed, the Cold War is over, China has changed and, for heavens' sake, India has changed. There have also been serial revolutions in military affairs. From massed mechanised power to cyber warfare to drones, robots, and minimisation of human contact. If our popular imagination is still trapped in defending the border outposts (chowkis) as in 1962, I dare say the same mindset prevails in our strategic and political universe, too.

(Contd. on page 19)



# India's 'murder most foul' has a chilling subtext

In recent weeks, India has been gripped by the ghastly murder cases of two women. Yet again, however, the breathless media coverage has lost sight of a bigger picture. The murder of 26-year-old Shraddha Walker has made front page news across the country on account of its gruesome nature. According to police, Walker's partner Aftab Poonawala strangled her, cut her body into pieces and stored them in his fridge, before scattering them across parts of New Delhi. Poonawala confessed in court to killing Walker, reportedly claiming he acted "in the heat of the moment." Since the case came to light, Indian media has prodded it from every possible angle, including using the couple's different faiths to fuel a "love jihad" narrative – the right-wing conspiracy theory that Hindu women are "lured" into relationships by Muslim men.

No stone has been left unturned in the click-bait coverage. Poonawala was apparently "inspired by" the TV series "Dexter," which features a forensic specialist who moonlights as a serial killer. And the couple met on Bumble, a popular dating app. A subsequent piece covered the case from this angle, noting that

the murder has prompted women to delete dating apps while "experts blame [these] platforms." As a single woman, and as a journalist, these brash, un-nuanced takes are incredibly frustrating to read. Why is the onus of women's safety solely on women? Why is it so easy to name and blame everything except the obvious? The issue here is not with the apps, or with the TV series, but with India's deeply patriarchal society, which offers women little to no agency. It is against this backdrop that violent murderers like Poonawala emerge. Walker had previously flagged concerns for her safety with the Mumbai Police in 2020, but withdrew her initial complaint on a follow-up police visit. While such actions are not uncommon among victims of intimate partner violence, this aspect of the case – that Walker was allegedly already a victim of intimate partner violence – has been overshadowed by more sensationalist narratives. According to the British Medical Journal, one in three Indian women is likely to have been subjected to intimate partner violence. But only one in 10 of these women officially report it. India is not alone. Globally, according to UN chief António Guterres, every 11 minutes, a

woman or girl is killed by an intimate partner or family member. Other similar – equally gory – cases have made recent headlines in India too. Aayushi Chaudhary, a 21-year-old Indian woman, was reportedly found murdered with her body stuffed in a suitcase. Police have arrested her parents reportedly in connection to a suspected "honor killing," a term used to describe murders where the victim has brought "shame" to their family, typically by choosing to marry outside their faith or caste. In India, honor killings claimed 145 lives between 2017 and 2019, according to the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs (the actual number is believed to be higher).

But all these stories point to the same underlying issue: control over women through patriarchy. If it takes gruesome headlines to start a conversation about violence against women, how are we ever going to address the role men play in perpetrating this violence? How are we going to discuss the ways violence fluctuates along lines of class, sexual orientation or caste? (In India, 54% of Dalit women, the group of people most oppressed by centuries old caste hierarchy, reported being physically

assaulted and 23% reported being raped.) Will we ever be able to address the minutiae of aggressions women face in the workplace? Even as a single woman with a fair amount of privilege, I'm constantly bewildered by the road bumps I face living in India. When I moved to Mumbai over four years ago, I was shocked at how difficult it was to find and rent a flat because I was single. "The landlord's saying he won't rent to a single girl," my broker told me at the time. "It's seen as... too dangerous." What the danger was or is remains unclear to me till date. But this is an obstacle every single woman faces in this self-branded "city of dreams," exacerbated by factors such as age, faith, caste, sexual orientation and gender expression.

Due to cultural and social beliefs and economic setbacks, most Indians live at home in "joint families." It's common to see a bride leave her parents' and move in with her husband's entire family after marriage, for example. Which is why, for the most part, the freedom to roam continues to be restricted to those women who can afford that privilege. Walker was essentially punished by society for choosing to live life on her own terms, and her choices continue to be dissected by the

press. She chose to find a partner of her own on a dating app; she chose to stay in her interfaith partnership despite her parents' objections; she chose to "live-in" with her partner. The subtext in how this has been covered is clear: serves her right for going against her parents, against the larger values of Indian society. The failed "love marriage" (where a woman has chosen her own partner, instead of an "arranged marriage") is also a cautionary tale whispered by elderly aunties and grandmothers to the younger women in their lives. Women are constantly expected to defend their choice to be single, unmarried and child-free. When I tell married people I've unlearned the idea of settling down with someone as a life milestone, I'm frequently told it's just a phase I'm going through or that I simply haven't found the right person yet. But I'm not alone, with an increasing number of women choosing to be single (both in India and globally). Perhaps if Indian society concerned itself more with how its men are reared than why women are choosing to live life differently today, these conversations wouldn't have to follow the tragic deaths of two young women.

## Elon Musk is running Twitter like dictators run their states

On Thursday, Elon Musk's ownership of Twitter entered a terrifying new phase when he began wielding his power to censor the press. The Twitter accounts of several journalists who have covered Musk critically recently — in other words, done their jobs — were suspended.

In tweets, Musk accused the journalists of violating the platform's policy against doxing — or posting private information online — by sharing his "exact real-time" location. But none of the banished reporters — including CNN's Donie O'Sullivan and The Washington Post's Drew Harwell — appeared to have done so. Musk and Twitter didn't respond to CNN's requests for comment.

If it weren't obvious before, the latest moves make clear that Musk tends to run this company the way dictators run their states: by making decisions that serve his personal interests rather than those of the public, and capriciously getting rid of people who stand in his way. That's why tech workers and journalists who have lost their jobs in the past few weeks should come together to create

non-profit social networks designed to serve the public interest. For years, so many people around the world have relied on Twitter to function as a town square — a space for people to debate issues openly. Of course, only 23% of Americans are on Twitter and of those who use the platform, the top 25% of users by tweet volume produce 97% of tweets, according to the Pew Research Center. Yet the conversations that happen on Twitter seem to heavily influence what reporters and others talk about offline, so these users have an outsize influence on the public debate. But recall that last month, before these journalists were de-platformed, Musk — who describes himself as a free speech absolutist — suggested that he could sue activists who he believes caused advertiser boycotts of Twitter. If users can't hold those in power accountable, then they can't have debates about how to fix the problems with society — including, of course, the issues created by the very platforms they're having those debates on.

A healthy town square should also be a place where people can find reliable information. But researchers at Tufts University recently found that tweets refuting hate and misinformation were "an order of magnitude greater" on Twitter before Musk took over.

Twitter is also a critical platform for grassroots journalists to share their reporting on issues that impact the welfare of people in their communities — especially since so many now work on a shoestring as advertising dollars have moved from local journalism to online platforms. So make no mistake: The fact that reporters can simply be booted from the platform if they cause displeasure to Musk is a danger to us all.

The account suspensions came on the heels of Twitter's announcement on Monday that it was disbanding its Trust and Safety Council — a group of outside experts that advised the company on issues like human rights, child sexual exploitation and mental health. It's clear that we can't rely on Musk's Twitter to provide a safe, open forum. We need new,

non-profit social networks run by boards responsible for considering the public's interest when making critical decisions about things like content moderation and community standards. And many of the people who have these skills have just been laid off from their jobs. In addition to the mass exodus from Twitter since Musk's takeover, there have been layoffs at a number of tech and journalism companies lately, including Facebook and CNN, with more coming at The Washington Post. Some of these professionals should work together to create new social platforms designed to provide the truly open town hall we so desperately need.

Musk's latest power moves are nothing short of dangerous. Recently unemployed tech and journalism workers should take them as a rallying call to unite to create new, healthier online spaces. We have nothing to lose except our dependence on a mercurial, egotistical czar to set the terms of our public debates.



# 100 days of Bharat Jodo Yatra: How Congress proposed and Rahul Gandhi disposed

If Rahul Gandhi can't keep his own party together, his mission to bring the country together may not sound convincing

On the 100th day of the Bharat Jodo Yatra on Friday, there were telling visuals from Rahul Gandhi's foot march in Rajasthan. Walking alongside him were Member of Parliament Pratibha Singh and her two detractors who put paid to her ambitions—newly appointed Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu and his deputy Mukesh Agnihotri. Sachin Pilot, walking right behind Sukhu and Singh in the frame, looked pensive. What was he brooding over? Let me guess. Has Himachal Pradesh set a new template of decision-making in his party, ignoring the Late Virbhadra Singh's family in favour of new leadership? Pilot would know that Gehlot is no Pratibha Singh whose loyalty to the Gandhis was suspect and who enjoyed little support from MLAs. But Pilot may like to remember Sonia Gandhi's words to district Congress presidents several years back. In the Congress, the queue is long but they must know that sooner or later "sabkaa number aata hai (everybody gets a



chance).” Pilot's patience must be running out. Signs of decisiveness in Himachal Pradesh may give him hope. Unlike in Goa and Manipur in 2017 when it was caught flat-footed, the party was swift and decisive in the hill state. It's another thing that Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde may also claim some credit for it. Congress high command's emissaries in Shimla were alerted about some turncoats

approaching potential defectors among party MLAs. “Maharashtra model (Shiv Sena rebel leader, Shinde, becoming the CM with the BJP playing second fiddle in the government) was also under discussion. That's why we decided to seal the deal, instead of returning to Delhi with a one-line resolution (authorising the high command to nominate the CM) as planned,” one of the emissaries told this writer. Be that as it may, the Congress

looks like a stable ship in Himachal for now.

Getting top Himachal leaders and other MLAs to join Rahul Gandhi in his yatra was also a not-very-subtle way of showing who runs the party. There was an unstated message. The Congress may have a new president, Mallikarjun Kharge, and Rahul might not have campaigned in the state, but leaders shouldn't get funny ideas about who should be credited with election victories. And if a section of party leaders saw in Himachal results a stamp of Priyanka Vadra and her team, her absence from the frame last Friday should set the record straight.

Poll strategist Prashant Kishor would often point out that for decades, the Congress didn't launch a single movement. He advocated JP Nadda model for the Congress. Well, the Gandhis have obviously taken his advice. But PK would probably have many reservations about the Bharat Jodo Yatra's format.

(Contd. on page 20)

## Besharam Rang': It's Time Bollywood Stopped Pretending to be Naive While Being Offensive

Bollywood cannot pretend to be naïve, let alone utterly innocent or unaware of the hidden or not so hidden messaging of its themes, images, or lyrics. Take the recent controversy over the song, “Besharam Rang”, from the yet-to-be-released film Pathaan. The movie, starring Shah Rukh Khan and Deepika Padukone, scheduled for release on 25 January 2023, the eve of Republic Day, already finds itself embroiled in a maelstrom of outrage.

The title itself, in typical Bollywood style, stereotypes an entire community. You don't have to refer to Zanjeer (1973) or, more recently, My Name is Khan (2010), or even to see the movie itself to guess that the stereotype is most likely positive. Yes, Bollywood cannot as yet dare to do a film on the horrors unleashed by the Taliban. While we are still guessing at what actually happens in Pathaan, the story line, from what one gathers, seems a rehash of Ek Tha Tiger (2012). Another spy thriller from the same production house, Yash Raj Films. This is hardly surprising because nothing is really new in Bollywood. Most films are based on some well-worn and time-tested “formula.” Both Ek Tha Tiger and Pathaan have Indian intelligence officers, played by Salman and Shah Rukh Khan, who must be shown as utterly loyal to India. In the

former, however, the lady love, played by Katrina Kaif, is a Pakistani spy. The film ends with the couple disappearing in an apparently Middle Eastern foreign country where they can live and love in peace.

But a formula, to succeed, must have some differences too. Else, how to introduce novelty? Tiger's hero was Avinash “Tiger” Singh Rathore, a quintessential Rajput and thus another Bollywood martial stereotype. The hero of Pathaan is — yes, you don't have to be a genius to guess — a Pathan. His father had rescued a Hindu family during Partition. Now the son serves the Indian state. His significant other, played by Padukone, is not a Pakistani spy this time around, but an Indian police officer. “Besharam Rang”, a song from the movie, was recently released, possibly to test the waters and create some publicity. Preferably positive but at least negative publicity, a buzz around the would-be blockbuster before its release. True to expectations, the song has already attracted a ton of controversy, not to mention negative publicity. Even BJP Minister of State for Home, Ajay Kumar Mishra, and UP Chief Minister, Yogi Adityanath, have weighed in against it. But isn't it true that when it comes to the movie market, there is, after all, no such

thing as bad or too much publicity. At least this used to be the standard assumption, or should I say formula? Well, think again. Times have indeed changed. It is now widely accepted that a certain type of bad publicity can ruin a film, well in advance of its release. Aamir Khan's mega flop, Lal Singh Chaddha (2022) is cited as a prime recent example. It is, arguably, a minoritarian remake of Forrest Gump (1994), subtly even if not overtly anti-Hindu. It also has strange improbabilities and possibly negative stereotypes such as a Sikh graduate of Delhi's prestigious Hindu College being unable to speak any other language than Bollywood pidgin Punjabi. Or his best Army buddy, a stereotypically “South Indian” man named Bala (or boy), being not only intellectually challenged but multi-generationally obsessed with making men's hosiery. The string of Bollywood flops, with revenue share of more “authentic” mega hits from beneath the Vindhyas outstripping Bombay cinema, should certainly have been a wake-up call. Perhaps, something is not quite right with Bollywood's “Ganga-Jamuni” formula?

Now let's come to the song itself, starting with its lyrics. The key lines are: “Hamein To Loot Liya Milke/Ishq Waalon

Ne...Nasha Chadha Jo Sharifi Ka/Utaar Feka Hai/Besharam Rang Kahan Dekha/Duniyan Waalon Ne.” A rough and ready translation should suffice: “We've been looted by love makers...we have stripped and discarded the intoxicant of virtue. The world is yet to see our shameless hue.” As if to forestall any further doubts, the actor croons her “wrong” intent: “Hai Jo Sahi Woh Karna Nahin/Ghalat Hone Ki Yehi To Shuruwat Hai.” What is right, that is not done; this is verily the start of being wicked.” Words most parents would find objectionable, especially when it comes to the sexual mores of their wards. Now to the imagery. Some of these lines are pictured on Padukone in a close-to-saffron skimpy dress, which leaves very little to the imagination.

True that the film has passed the Indian Censor Board. So why shouldn't the matter rest there? After all, more supposedly obscene songs have been pictured in the past, including Raj Kapoor revealing respectively, although not necessarily respectfully, both Zeenat Aman's and Mandikini's thighs and bosoms as far back as Satyam Shivam Sundaram (1978) and Ram Teri Gang Maili (1985). And Kapoor was the doyen of the Hindi film industry, feted by the government-given Dada Saheb Phalke Award.



# On Snake Island, the rocky Black Sea outcrop that became a Ukraine war legend



(SAI Bureau) Snake Island has a special place in Ukraine's folklore, now more than ever. Its defiant defense – when a Russian warship was famously told to “go f\*\*\* yourself” – and then reconquest rallied a nation in the early months of the conflict with Russia, puncturing the myth of the invaders' superiority. Now, whipped by winter winds, it remains firmly in Ukrainian hands – a speck of rock that has both symbolic and strategic significance. A CNN team became the first foreign media to visit the island since it was recaptured

in June, and to speak with the commander of the operation that led to its liberation. A few acres of rock and grass, treeless and difficult to access, Snake Island, also known as Zmiinyi Island, lies around 30 miles (48 kilometers) off the Ukrainian coast, near its maritime border with Romania. Getting there proved challenging: An hour being pitched from wave to wave in a small boat, showered with spray, in sub-freezing temperatures. The Black Sea can be unforgiving, and so can its hazardous coastline. On the way back our dirigible boat got stuck on a sandbar, and it took six hours before we were transferred, one-by-one, to another vessel in the darkness. Snake Island is now a desolate place, strewn with wreckage, its few buildings reduced to shells, its half-sunken jetty battered by

the tide. It's a graveyard of expensive military hardware – and is littered with unexploded ordnance and mines. This is not a place to be careless. The CNN team saw at least four different kinds of landmines, Russian Pantsir surface-to-air missile systems, and an almost intact Tor anti-air missile complex. There was also the carcass of a Russian military helicopter that was hit. Wondering among the wreckage, in a surreal scene, were dozens of cats, probably the descendants of the lighthouse pets from a more peaceful time. Ukraine keeps a small military presence on the island as an observation mission. One of that detachment is actually Russian, a volunteer with the Ukrainian forces who goes by the call-sign Fortuna. He'd been living with his family in Ukraine. “And here comes Russia attacking us. If some

other country had attacked us we'd fight too.” Nowadays, he says, the Russians aren't doing much attacking, at least in this corner of Ukraine. At this stage the Russians only perform air strikes,” Fortuna told CNN. “So we can hear them coming. Plus we have observers all along the perimeter and we receive intelligence. So usually we are warned about a possible attack.” Occasionally they will see a Russian warship in the distance. We need to be on guard 24/7 so we never get bored. There is always something to get busy with,” Fortuna says. The troops here can't communicate with their families. Even when there is a signal, turning on your phone invites a strike. The small boats used to ferry supplies are often unable to make the trip, so a rotation here can get extended by the elements, sometimes for a week.

## First images of British banknotes featuring King Charles III unveiled



(SAI Bureau) The first images of banknotes featuring Britain's King Charles III were unveiled on Tuesday by the Bank of England. Charles' portrait will appear on English notes of £5, £10, £20 and £50. Meanwhile, the rest of the design will remain the same as the current notes that feature the late Queen Elizabeth II on the front. The cameo in the transparent security window will also feature the current monarch, the United Kingdom's central bank said in a press release. The new banknotes are expected to enter circulation by mid-2024 and will co-circulate with notes featuring the Queen's portrait, which will remain legal tender in the UK, according to the bank. “This is a significant moment, as The King is only the second monarch to feature on our banknotes,” Bank of England Governor Andrew Bailey said ahead of the release. The reverse side of the notes will remain unchanged – the current designs feature portraits of Winston Churchill, Jane Austen, JMW Turner and Alan Turing on the reverse of the £5, £10, £20 and £50 notes, respectively. “To minimize the environmental and financial impact of this change, new notes will only be printed to replace worn banknotes and to meet any overall increase in demand for banknotes,” the Bank of England added. Earlier this month, the first coins bearing the official effigy of King Charles III entered circulation. The 4.9 million 50 pence coins feature the King's portrait, and on the reverse, a design symbolizing the “life and legacy” of the late Queen, according to the Royal Mint.

## Why people in China are panic buying canned yellow peaches as Covid surges

(SAI Bureau) Hong Kong : An unprecedented wave of Covid cases in China has sparked panic buying of fever medicines, pain killers, and even home remedies such as canned peaches, leading to shortages online and in stores. Authorities said Wednesday they had detected 2,249 symptomatic Covid-19 cases nationally through nucleic acid testing, 20% of which were detected in the capital Beijing. CNN reporting from the city indicates the case count in the Chinese capital could be much higher than recorded.

Demand for fever and cold medicines, such as Tylenol and Advil, is surging nationally as people rush to stockpile drugs amid fears they may contract the virus. Canned yellow peaches, considered a particularly nutritious delicacy in many parts of China, have been snapped up by people looking for ways to fight Covid. The product is currently sold out on many online shops. Its sudden surge in popularity prompted Dalian Leasun Food, one of the country's largest canned food manufacturers, to clarify in a Weibo post that canned yellow peaches don't have any medicinal effect. “Canned yellow peaches ? medicines!” the company said in the post published Friday. “There is enough supply, so there is no need to panic. There is no rush to buy.” he People's Daily, the mouthpiece of the Communist Party, also tried to set the record straight. It published a long

Weibo post on Sunday urging the public not to stockpile the peaches, calling them “useless in alleviating symptoms of illness.” Authorities also pleaded with the public not to stockpile medical supplies. On Monday, the Beijing city government warned residents that it was facing “great pressure” to meet demand for drug and medical services because of panic buying and an influx of patients at clinics. It urged the public not to hoard drugs

and fever. It is also known as Advil, Brufen, or Fenbid. The drug shortage has spread from mainland China to Hong Kong, a special administrative region which has a separate system of local government. On Sunday, the city's health chief urged the public to refrain from panic buying cold medicines they do not need and urged residents “not to overact.” In some Hong Kong drugstores, fever drugs such as Panadol, the local brand name for Tylenol, have sold out.

Most of the buyers were sending the medicines to their families and friends in the mainland, sales representatives told CNN. A worker in a protective suit sprays disinfectant as residents stand in line for their routine Covid-19 tests at a coronavirus testing site



or call emergency services if they have no symptoms.

### Stock frenzy

The rising demand and shortage of supply of Covid remedies have fueled bets on drugmakers. Shares of Hong Kong-listed Xinhua Pharmaceutical, China's largest manufacturer of ibuprofen, have gained 60% in the past five days. The stock has so far jumped by 147% in the first two weeks of this month. “Our company's production lines are operating at full capacity, and we are working overtime to produce urgently needed medicines, such as ibuprofen tablets,” Xinhua Pharmaceutical said Monday. Ibuprofen is an anti-inflammatory drug used to treat pain

in Beijing on Thursday, November 24, 2022. China's cities are running out of cash to pay huge Covid lockdown bills. Shares of Shenzhen-listed Guizhou Bailing Group Pharmaceuticals, known for making cough syrup, have gained 21% this week and risen 51% so far this month. Yiling Pharmaceutical, the sole producer of Lianhua Qingwen, a traditional Chinese medicine recommended by the government for treating Covid, has also jumped more than 30% in the past month. Even providers of funeral services and burial plots have gotten a huge boost. Shares in Hong Kong-traded Fu Shou Yuan International, China's largest burial service company, have soared more than 50% since last month.



# Taliban suspend university education for women in Afghanistan

(SAI Bureau) The Taliban government has suspended university education for all female students in Afghanistan, the latest step in its brutal clampdown on the rights and freedoms of Afghan women. A spokesman for the Afghan Ministry of Higher Education confirmed the suspension to CNN on Tuesday. A letter published by the education ministry said the decision was made in a cabinet meeting and the order will go into effect immediately. Girls were barred from returning to secondary schools in March, after the Taliban ordered schools for girls to shut just hours after they were due to reopen following months long closures imposed after the Taliban takeover in August 2021. Human Rights Watch criticized the ban on Tuesday, calling it a "shameful decision that violates the right to education for women and girls in Afghanistan."

"The Taliban are making it clear every day that they don't respect the fundamental rights of Afghans, especially women," the rights watchdog said in a statement. The US condemns "the Taliban's indefensible decision to ban women from universities," State



Department spokesperson Ned Price said during a Tuesday briefing. The Taliban's recent decision, he said, will "have significant consequences for the Taliban and will further alienate the Taliban from the international community and deny them the legitimacy they desire." The March closure of secondary schools to girls had a "significant impact" on US engagement with Taliban representatives, Price added. "With the implementation of this decree, half of the Afghan population

will soon be unable to access education beyond primary school," he said. US Ambassador Robert Wood, the alternate representative for special political affairs, earlier reiterated those criticisms, telling a United Nations' Security Council briefing that the "Taliban cannot expect to be a legitimate member of the international community until they respect the rights of all Afghans, especially the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women and girls." The Taliban, which ruled over

Afghanistan from 1996 until 2001, when the US-led invasion forced the group from power, have historically treated women as second-class citizens, subjecting them to violence, forced marriages and a near-invisible presence in the country. After seizing power in Afghanistan last year, the Taliban attempted to project a more moderate image to gain international support. But while it has made numerous promises to the international community that it would protect the rights of women and girls, the Taliban has been doing the opposite, systematically clamping down on their rights and freedoms. Women in Afghanistan can no longer work in most sectors, require a male guardian for long-distance travel and have been ordered to cover their faces in public. They have also imposed limits on girls' education, banning women from certain workplaces as they stripped away rights they had fought tirelessly for over the last two decades. In November, Afghan women prevented from entering amusement parks in Kabul as the government announced restrictions on women being able to access public parks, Reuters reports.

## Pakistan's Bilawal Bhutto Pleads For Flood Aid After "Cameras Have Gone"

Pakistan's unprecedented floods in the summer killed more than 1,700 people, inundated third of the nation and cut the nation's growth by half

(News Agency) Pakistan's Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari urged the world to continue to help the South Asian nation recover from devastating floods ahead of a United Nations conference next month to mobilize funding. Pakistan is facing an economic crisis with reserves covering one month of imports, a dollar shortage and a delay in its loan program with the International Monetary Fund. Investors are still concerned about the nation's ability of its debt, with long-term dollar bonds continuing to trade at distressed levels despite the payment of a \$1 billion bond this month. "We find ourselves in this incredibly difficult position where we're trying to manage our macroeconomic indicators with the IMF and provide the imminent relief for the people that is still necessary now in Pakistan, and plan forward for reconstruction and rehabilitation," Zardari, 34, said in an interview with Bloomberg Television in Washington DC. "Unfortunately, the cameras have gone, the attention has disappeared, but there are still floodwaters in many areas of my country." Pakistan's unprecedented floods in the summer killed more than

1,700 people, inundated third of the nation and cut the nation's growth by half. The floods have left about \$32 billion in damages and losses to the nation's economy. The United Nations said the



global community hasn't provided enough funds after the devastating floods in Pakistan and that may lead to the suspension of its food support program next month. The UN and Pakistan's joint appeal garnered only about 30% of the \$816 million funds requested, according to Julien Harneis, UN resident and humanitarian coordinator in Pakistan. They will seek more funds at a conference in Geneva, Switzerland, scheduled for Jan. 9. Pakistan has seen a delay in its latest IMF loan tranche amid prolonged discussions with the global body, which

has asked for details on how much the nation will be spending this year for rehabilitation after the devastating floods. The IMF indicated that talks have been productive to revise the macroeconomic outlook after the floods, resident representative in Pakistan Esther Perez Ruiz said in a statement this month. "The entire unity government agrees that it's important for us to deal with international financial institutions - we want to see the fundamental reform that's required for the overall health of our economy," Zardari said. "But at the moment, our number one priority has to be helping these people who are in extreme, extreme distress in the short, medium and long term." 'Eight-Month Tantrum' Pakistan is also facing renewed political uncertainty, with opposition member Imran Khan planning to dissolve two of the four provincial assemblies later this week to push the government to announce fresh elections. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's government, which came to power in April after removing Khan through a no-confidence vote in the federal parliament, has in retaliation filed a no-confidence motion in the provincial assembly of Punjab.

## Fuel tanker tunnel blast kills at least 19 in Afghanistan



(News Agency) KABUL, Afghanistan — At least 19 people were killed and 32 injured when a fuel tanker exploded in a tunnel north of the Afghan capital Kabul, a local official said Sunday. The Salang Tunnel, which is around 80 miles north of Kabul, was originally built in the 1960s to assist the Soviet invasion. It is a key link between the country's north and south.

A spokesman for Parwan province, Said Himatullah Shamim, said Saturday night's tunnel explosion killed at least 19 people, including women and children. He said survivors remain trapped under rubble and that the number of casualties could rise. It was not immediately clear what caused the incident, which happened at around 8.30 p.m. Parwan's health department has received 14 dead and 24 injured so far, according to local official Dr. Abdullah Afghan. There are five women and two children among the dead, he said, and the rest are men who are severely burnt and cannot be recognized. A spokesman for the Ministry of Public Works, Molvi Hamidullah Misbah, said earlier Sunday that the fire was extinguished and that teams were still working to clear the tunnel.



# Pakistan hostages: 33 militants killed at police station

(News Agency) Pakistani security forces have retaken a police station that was captured, killing all 33 hostage-takers, the defence minister has said. Islamist militants from the Pakistani Taliban seized the centre in the remote north-western Bannu district on Sunday. Several people, including security officials, were inside at the time.

Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif said all hostages were freed, two special forces killed, and 10 to 15 members of the military injured. The Pakistani Taliban - also known as the TTP - confirmed it was behind the attack, according to a statement reported by local media. The group stepped up its attacks after ending a ceasefire with the government last month. The two sides have been locked in conflict for years.

The group emerged in 2007 and

was suppressed by a military operation in 2014, before re-emerging. It is separate to the Afghan Taliban, though it has been more active since the Afghans agreed a peace deal with the US in 2020, and took control of the country last year. The two groups share a hard-line Islamist ideology. The hostage incident unfolded in a region near the two countries' shared border. Explaining events, Mr Asif told parliament that the 33 militants had links to different groups, and were being held in a counter-terrorism compound.

He said the hostages were

taken after one militant hit a guard on the head with a brick and snatched his



weapon. The militants are said to have requested a safe exit in return for releasing the hostages. A standoff emerged as negotiation efforts failed. Army commandoes are said to have taken the chance to take back the police

station at 12:30 local time (07:30 GMT) after the hostage-takers found themselves arguing among themselves. Witnesses of the siege reported explosions and heavy gunfire.

Mr Asif told parliament that "all the terrorists" had been killed, and all the hostages freed - without specifying what the latter number was. He blamed a "total collapse" of the provincial Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government for the deadly incident. Nearby schools, businesses and roads remained closed on Tuesday, with police checkpoints in place. The incident came amid a wave of deadly attacks in Pakistan - many of these targeting the security forces. Four policemen were killed during a separate attack elsewhere in Bannu on Sunday.

## Purported audio clip featuring Imran Khan in 'phone sex' goes viral, his party calls it 'fake'

**The two-part audio clip was shared by Pakistani journalist Syed Ali Haider on his YouTube channel. In the audio clip, a man, purportedly Imran Khan, can be heard talking to a woman in lewd language**

(News Agency) Former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, has landed in another controversy after an audio clip, purportedly involving him engaged in phone sex with a woman, went viral. The two-part audio clip was shared by Pakistani journalist Syed Ali Haider on his YouTube channel. In the audio clip, a man, purportedly Imran Khan, can be heard talking to a woman in lewd

personal life but I hope he will stop presenting himself as some kind of role model Muslim leader for the entire Ummah," said journalist Hamza Azhar Salam in a tweet. In a Facebook video, journalist Mansoor Ali Khan claimed that he knows about the anonymous woman in the leaked audio while refraining to name her, according to Daily Pakistan.



Pakistani journalist Naila Inayat said, "In the alleged sex call leak, Imran Khan has become Emraan Hashmi." **IMRAN KHAN'S PARTY CALLS AUDIO 'FAKE'** However, Imran Khan's party, Pakistan Tehreek-

language. The audio clip, which has now gone viral, is the latest in a series of purported leaked conversations attributed to Imran Khan ever since he was ousted from power earlier this year and blamed the incumbent coalition government and the military establishment of conspiring against him.

Some Pakistani news portals claimed that the leaked audio is from Pakistan PMO (Prime Minister's Office). While the authenticity of the audio is still in question, some Pakistani journalists claimed that the voice in the audio actually belonged to Imran Khan. "Khan sb can do whatever he wants in his

i-Insaf (PTI), has termed the audio clip as "fake". PTI leader Dr Arslan Khalid said, "Political opponents of the PTI chairman can't think beyond creating fake audios and videos." In October, an alleged audio of Imran Khan surfaced, featuring him trying to buy the loyalties of lawmakers and also justifying his action before he was ousted in a no-confidence vote in Parliament in April. In another leaked audio clip allegedly featuring the former prime minister, he was heard talking about a cypher message sent by Pakistan's ambassador to Washington in March 2022, entailing plans to oust him from power.

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# Taliban release 2 Americans who were detained in Afghanistan

**The release is not part of a prisoner swap, the State Department said.**

(News Agency) The Taliban on Tuesday released two Americans who had been detained in Afghanistan, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said. The releases were announced as the United Nations Security Council was meeting about Afghanistan. The move was a goodwill gesture — not part of a prisoner swap, he said. "We are providing these two U.S. nationals with all appropriate assistance," Price said. The U.S. citizens, who have not been publicly identified, were flown from Kabul to Doha, Qatar, a senior State Department official said, and the Qatari government was helpful in securing their release.

A senior administration official said: "We are glad these U.S. nationals will reunite with their families soon. Out of respect for the privacy of these individuals and their families, we are not going to confirm names." The release came the same day the Taliban banned women from private and public



universities in Afghanistan. "The irony of them granting us a goodwill gesture on a day where they undertake a gesture like this to the Afghan people, it's not lost on us, but it is a question for the Taliban themselves regarding the timing of this" Price said. The U.S. "condemns in strongest terms the Taliban's indefensible decision to ban women from

universities, girls from secondary schools," Price said. Despite outlining a vision granting rights for Afghan women in accordance with Islamic law, the Taliban have not followed through on their promises. In March, they backtracked when they announced that high schools for girls would remain closed pending a plan drawn up in

accordance with its interpretation of Islamic law.

Teachers and students from three high schools around the capital, Kabul, said girls had returned in excitement to campuses but were ordered to go home. "We all got disappointed, and we all became totally hopeless when the principal told us. She was also crying," said a student at the time, whose name was not disclosed for security reasons. Under the Taliban's rule, girls were banned from middle school and high school and women have been restricted from most employment and must wear head-to-toe clothing in public. When the Taliban ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, they banned female education and most employment. The U.S. has not had a diplomatic presence in Afghanistan since it withdrew the last of its troops in August 2021. Qatar has acted as the protecting power for Americans who remain in Afghanistan.

## Sri Lanka, Russia to use Indian rupee for international trade, more countries in talks

**Sri Lankan banks have reportedly opened special rupee trading account called - Special Vostro rupee accounts, or SVRA - for trading in INR**

(News Agency) New Delhi: Sri Lanka has agreed to use Indian rupee (INR) for international trade. It comes days after the Government of India said it is looking at ways to bring countries that are particularly short of dollars into the ambit of Indian rupee trade settlement mechanism. Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) said it is waiting for RBI's (Reserve Bank of India) approval to designate Indian rupee as foreign currency of Sri Lanka.

Sri Lankan banks have reportedly opened special rupee trading account called — Special Vostro rupee accounts, or SVRA — for trading in INR.

Also, the neighbouring island nation has requested RBI to facilitate and promote trade as well as tourism in the SAARC region.

**How will it benefit Sri Lanka?**

Severe economic crisis and dollar crunch have been weighing on Sri Lanka for almost a year. Designating the Indian rupee as a legal currency will provide the



island nation with much-needed liquidity support.

With the opening of Vostro accounts, people in Sri Lanka can now hold USD 10,000 (Rs 8,26,823) in physical form.

Also, Sri Lankans and Indians can use Indian rupees instead of US dollars for international transactions between each other.

Notably, since July this year, the Indian government has been looking to bring countries that are short of dollars, into its rupee

settlement mechanism.

**Indian rupee trade settlement**

The Indian rupee trade settlement mechanism is a means of using the Indian rupee in all international transactions instead of dollars and other big currencies.

The RBI, on 11 July, announced the setting up of a mechanism to carry out international trade in Indian rupees.

The mechanism will enable all

exports and imports to be denominated and invoiced in the Indian currency, while the exchange rate between the trading partners is settled by the market.

The Finance Ministry of India has also asked the Indian Banks' Association (IBA) and the FIEO to initiate an awareness campaign to sensitise stakeholders about the rupee trade.

Importers in India undertaking imports through the mechanism will be required to

make payment in rupees which must be credited into the Vostro account of the correspondent bank of the partner country, against the invoices for the supply of goods or services from the overseas seller or supplier.

In a similar way, exporters of India exporting goods and services through this mechanism must be paid the export proceeds in the Indian currency from the balance in a designated Vostro account of the correspondent bank of the partner country.

**Russia to trade in Indian rupee**

Russia is also expected to be one the first countries to use the Indian rupee trade settlement mechanism. Not just Sri Lanka and Russia India's rupee trade settlement mechanism is also attracting interest from other countries including Tajikistan, Cuba, Luxembourg and Sudan.

Notably, rupee becoming an international currency would possibly reduce India's trade deficit and will help strengthen it in the global market.



# Pakistan can't fight its real enemy Taliban so it's turning to politically useful enemy India

(Contd from page 13)

The regime of the military ruler General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, however, rebuilt the Pakistani military—enshrining the notion of jihad at its core. General Zia was influenced by Islamist ideologue Abul A'la Maududi, who argued that Islam was more than a “hotchpotch of beliefs, prayers and rituals”. Islam was, in fact, “a revolutionary ideology which seeks to alter the social order of the entire world and rebuild it in conformity with its own tenets and ideals”.

For Zia—concerned with re-establishing the political authority of the Pakistan Army after its defeat in 1971—the attractions of this ideology were obvious. The leaders of the faith had an obligation to “seize political authority so that it may establish the Divine system on earth”. “An evil system takes root and flourishes under the patronage of an evil government,” Maududi asserted, “and a pious cultural order can never be established until the authority of Government is wrested from the wicked.”

The self-imagination of the military is evident in the army's annual collection of essays by serving officers, called The Green Books. In the 1994 Green Book, Brigadier Saifi Naqvi noted that “Pakistan is an ideological state”. The army, he argued, was thus “responsible for the defence of the country, to safeguard [its] integrity [and] territorial boundaries, and the ideological frontiers to which the country owes its existence”.

Later editions of The Green Books, scholar C. Christine Fair has noted, were replete with essays critical of Pakistan's involvement in the war which began after 9/11. The essays speak of the wellsprings of ideological sympathy within the military for the jihadist project.

## Talking to terrorists

Following 9/11, expert Daud Khattak has written, the Pakistan Army repeatedly sought accommodation with terrorists—allowing jihadists to control territory along its borders. The army signed an agreement with jihadist Nek Muhammad Wazir in 2004, who promised his forces would unleash themselves on India like “Pakistan's atomic bomb”. The government even signed a peace deal with Fazlullah—the commander of the jihadists responsible for the school attack—just six months before the carnage.

Even though the peace deals—without exception—disintegrated, support for a rapprochement remained strong across the establishment. This had something to do with pragmatism: The option was a murderous civil war. The Islamic state of the jihadist imagination was, however, one close to the army's own conception of Pakistan.

Two generations of post-Zia officers—who emerged from a pietist middle class that defined itself in opposition to the westernised elite—had been taught to see themselves as a vanguard of new, faith-centred Pakistan. This cohort includes General Munir, the son of a conservative religious family, who memorised the Quran while serving as a Lieutenant-Colonel. Lieutenant-General Ahmad Shuja Pasha, ISI chief from 2008 to 2012, thus described TTP jihadist Fazal Hayat as a “true patriot”. General Ashfaq Kayani, who succeeded Gen Pervez Musharraf as army chief, also backed negotiations. Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, elected in 2013, threw his weight behind dialogue with jihadists. So did former prime minister Imran

Khan, who came to power in 2018.

Following the Army Public School massacre, public engagement with the TTP became difficult—but didn't stop. To the outrage of families of the victims of the massacre, TTP spokesperson Liaquat Ali—also known as Ehsanullah Ehsan—was quietly allowed to escape from prison. Faiz secured the release of top TTP jihadists and began negotiations.

Late summer, as violence inside Pakistan surged, former army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa told lawmakers of the options. The army could launch an offensive against the TTP, he said, but the country would have to be “prepared for the reaction”. Then, two weeks ago, the TTP made the choice for the military, ending its ceasefire.

Islamabad has, predictably, responded by ignoring the threat, and turning on a more politically useful enemy.

## The wrong enemy

Even as the ISI engaged with the TTP, it began accusing India of ties to the jihadist group. In a dossier released in 2020, Pakistan claimed the school attacks had been masterminded

by an Indian-supported terrorist it called Malik Faridoon. There was no mention of Faridoon, though, in the official investigation of the case by Peshawar High Court judge Mohammad Ibrahim Khan. Earlier, in 2016, Pakistan's military identified the mastermind of the attacks as Umar Mansour, who was killed in a drone strike in Afghanistan.

The dossier also misidentified officials and place names. There was no chief of the Research and Analysis Wing named Ajit Chetorvedi; the reference, likely, to Ashok Chaturvedi, who served from 2007-2009. Former spy chief Vikram Sood's surname was misspelt, as was that of ambassador Gautam Mukhopadhyaya. Dehradun, according to the dossier, is in Haryana.

Last year, Pakistan issued another dossier claiming India was training Islamic State jihadists at three camps. Latitude-longitude coordinates for the camps, though, turned out to point to a muddy lake in Jodhpur, and a clump of trees between two parking lots in Gulmarg.

The poorly prepared dossiers did little to dispel international

scepticism about Islamabad's claims. Their real objective, though, was to seize the low ground—domestic politics. By invoking an external threat, the army and Imran Khan sought to rally the public behind the ruling establishment. The dossier was released soon after former prime minister Nawaz went for the army's jugular by publicly indicting General Bajwa for manipulating Pakistani politics. Last week's dossier reads from the same toxic script. This time, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and his new army chief are playing the India card against Imran and his supporters within the military. Even if the tactic works, however, it comes with costs. And the hardening of anti-India feelings legitimises jihadist groups like the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Muhammad. That, in turn, raises the prospect of crisis-inducing terrorism in Kashmir, which would undermine Islamabad's efforts to heal its economy. Even though the dossier might win the ruling establishment some applause from nationalists, it isn't the map Pakistan desperately needs to extricate itself from the minefields it has laid for itself.

## Chinese are coming for biggest breach in India's defences. Our politics is far from ready for them

(Contd from page 13)

That's why the opposition has launched a single-focus attack over the “loss of territory” or patrolling rights. And somewhat indirectly, this same dated thinking is also why the Modi government is shy of allowing a discussion of the crisis in Parliament.

If it's about slivers of land or patrolling rights, it's impossible to settle an argument in domestic politics conclusively unless you're willing to disclose where you were, and where you are. Both of these can be problematic and counter-productive. Why, I'd rather not go into at this point.

What the discussion should be about — the larger political, strategic, and geopolitical dimension — is something the political environment isn't prepared for.

The BJP is shy for two reasons. One, politically, it's loath to see the prime minister's record on national security being questioned or debated in public. He's their only vote-getter. A more muscular approach to national security than ever before in our independent history is projected as his most important Unique Selling Proposition. Xi Jinping has decided to dent it periodically.

The second reason is also political, though not partisan. The nuances that today's global power rebalancing calls for, the game India is playing,

the sensitivities involved, would call for a quality of debate that simply isn't expected. It isn't as if our political class lacks the maturity. Most of the key opposition leaders have been there, done that. They understand national security and fast-changing global equations. It's just that there simply isn't enough trust between them and the ruling party. Never in the eight-and-a-half years since a fully-majority government was sworn in under Narendra Modi has it taken the opposition into confidence, even behind closed doors, on sensitive issues of national security.

This broken politics has become India's greatest strategic vulnerability. This breach in India's defences is what the Chinese are targeting. They do not want any loss of life. The mutually fatal clash at Galwan, if anything, has been the biggest failure of their strategy in the past two years.

See the pattern of their conduct. Every few months, they will do something to embarrass India, Narendra Modi personally, and confuse Indian strategists. The latest two provocations — the clash in the Tawang sector and the cyber-crippling of the Indian state's most significant centre of medical science and education, the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) — have come in the context of Exercise Yudh Abhyas with the US.

If India was making a point by holding this exercise with its Quad partner in a Himalayan

zone abutting Tibet, the Chinese have come back at us saying it's a game two can play. A symbolic move countered by a more damaging one.

This pattern will continue. The Chinese aren't after territory. Their target is our national will, morale, and the sense of autonomy we feel in making our strategic choices. They are attacking India and the Modi government at their weakest point. Our broken politics. It forces the government to not come clean to the people or Parliament, and the more it feels compelled to stay mum, the more territory the Chinese get. Not in the wastes of Ladakh or Arunachal, but in our political mainland. Narendra Modi and his government have to begin shoring up India's defences by mending the political equations at the top, by treating the opposition with respect, and by sharing confidences with them so India can speak as one. If you read all the most respected books on 1962, you will see that it was angry debates in Parliament, condemnation and shaming that pushed Nehru into a war he knew he was going to lose. The critics shaming him weren't all from the opposition. There were many from his party, even in his cabinet. One of the key lessons from 1962 was also the need for better, more mature, more mutually-trusting politics. That's the priority now while the armed forces do their thing quite effectively.



# Nitish Kumar is riding a tiger with prohibition in Bihar. Everyone knows it's failed

**Contd from page 14**

Alcohol entered Bihar in trucks and even via boats, claimed social workers and transport in the state. At the local level — from Patna to Chhapra — bootleggers make home deliveries allegedly using children as couriers, claimed social workers. A social worker from Patna, who did not want to be named, alleged that school children were being pushed into this business.

Much like drug peddlers, suppliers demarcate their respective areas of operation, claimed people in the know. If a supplier moves into another person's 'territory' fights erupt and people lose their lives. Ever since the policy of prohibition was implemented, both crime and the use of drugs have increased in Bihar, alleged politicians across parties.

"Nitish Kumar may have banned it, but there is no dearth of liquor for people in Bihar," claimed Santosh Rai, a truck driver, while drinking tea at a local dhaba in Chhapra. Last week's hooch tragedy has laid bare the class divide in Bihar. The economically weaker sections of society depend on illegal bootleggers and buy cheap unregulated alcohol sold in sachets. Consumption of spurious liquor may lead to death. But the rich source branded alcohol from suppliers, many of whom are on their speed dial. In urban areas like Patna, people

## Once Title 42 expires Mexican drug cartels will gain complete control of our southwest border

**Contd from page 14**

From the first month of the Biden administration, Border Patrol apprehensions surged to five times the manageable level. Today, even before the end of Title 42, apprehensions are eight times higher than manageable. Based upon these numbers, it should be no surprise that the U.S. set records in drug overdose deaths during Biden's first two years in office, and that is just an encore. While everything looks hopeless right now, there is a solution. But only if President Biden is willing to put the American people ahead of politics.

President Biden could re-implement the Migrant Protection Protocols, better known as the Remain in Mexico Program. This

take orders over the phone and deliver liquor, said sources in the hospitality industry. "Call on a number and the liquor is delivered. Almost every brand of liquor is available. But the one who delivers once does not come the second time. People drink while sitting in their rooms," a hotel manager said on condition of anonymity.

### **Allegations of corruption**

Residents and politicians blamed corruption within the rank and file of the police and the local administration for alcohol being so freely available. "Police take money from the liquor mafia. Even children are smuggling liquor in school bags. This policy creates juvenile criminals. No application of mind has been used in the implementation of this policy," alleged Devesh Kumar. JD(U) MLAs, like Sanjeev Kumar, share his concern about the implementation of the liquor law. "Police extort money in the name of prohibition," alleged Sanjeev Kumar. Multiple sources including police officers, politicians and social workers that ThePrint spoke to blamed "corruption" for gaps in the implementation of the law. "From senior officers to junior officers, everyone's monthly income is tied to the illegal supply of alcohol. In the border areas, the station in-charge gets Rs 35-40 lakhs and the DSP gets around 1 crore," alleged an MLA, on the condition of anonymity. Police officers ThePrint spoke to said

program allowed the Border Patrol to get more control of the border than at any time in the history of my 25-year career. Fewer illegal incursions of both people and drugs took place, allowing a very real sense of increased security for the American people. When our border security is abandoned, as it has been over the past two years, our citizens suffer. If there were no solutions the current chaos might be understandable, but there are solutions, and they don't require the re-creation of the wheel. Here's to hoping the Biden administration will finally put the health and safety of Americans above politics. And here's to hoping this White House will finally be judged for its actions instead of being given a pass with its rhetoric.

they didn't have the wherewithal or manpower to keep tabs on all bootleggers. An arrest can often become a contentious issue, one that involved the villagers, they claimed. "It is not easy to keep track of everyone. Even when we arrest someone, the whole community comes to the station. We get calls from political leaders to release them. The pressure is too much," said a senior police officer, on condition of anonymity. District Magistrate of Gopalganj Naval Kishore Chaudhary put the onus on people and accused them of lack of cooperation. "People know that they should not drink alcohol, but still drink it. We have to try to make them more and more aware. That's what we are doing. People know that it is wrong to cross the vehicle limit on the road but do it anyway," he said, adding "We are trying our best".

### **Poor policy implementation**

Meanwhile, CM Nitish Kumar is under pressure to review the state's liquor policy, not just from the Opposition, but from within his own party as well, with some claiming the law was implemented in haste. "Conduct

an internal vote. Not even 10 MLAs (would) vote in favour of Nitish Kumar," said a JD(U) leader on condition of anonymity. At the Bihar Assembly session Friday, Rajya Sabha member Sushil Kumar Modi said that the government has lost revenue to the tune of Rs 35,000 crores and about 1,000 people have died ever since prohibition was implemented in the state in 2016. He, too, called for a review of the policy. Last year the Supreme Court also made comments on Bihar's Liquor policy for the pressure it created on the judiciary. The then Chief Justice of India, N.V. Ramana, had said that the Bihar Prohibition and Excise Act, 2016 was made with a lack of foresight. "Fourteen-fifteen judges of the Patna High Court were kept busy each day with bail hearings in liquor cases," he had said. As a way forward, Devesh Kumar suggested the ban could be eased for non-domiciles the way it was done in Gujarat. "In Gujarat, if you are not a resident, you can get liquor after completing some formalities. We can implement that here in Bihar. But Nitish is not even ready to

review this seriously," he claimed. Many in the state alleged that hasty implementation of the law has also left tribal communities who used to brew toddy without a legal source of income. While Nitish Kumar banned liquor, the CM did not give them any alternative opportunity for income, alleged a social worker in the state. He also pointed to the lack of on-ground support to wean away alcoholics. "There are no rehabilitation centers in Bihar (for alcoholics). Where can one enroll if he wanted to get rid of alcohol addiction? This half-hearted policy and the protection of the administration and the mafia are also reasons for the policy failure," alleged Lok Janshakti party member and MP, Chirag Paswan. According to the figures of the Prohibition Department in the Bihar government, since the enforcement of liquor prohibition i.e. since April 1, 2016, more than six and a half lakh people have been arrested. Questioning the nature of the arrests, Paswan said, "How many of them are smugglers, or is it just the poor who are in jail, while the big gangs are roaming free?"

## 100 days of Bharat Jodo Yatra: How Congress proposed and Rahul Gandhi disposed

### **Rahul Gandhi-centric Yatra**

On the completion of 100 days, Congress' Member of Parliament KC Venugopal said, "The BJP's attempt to demolish his (RG's) image has also been destroyed by us." In pictures from the yatra, one sees Rahul Gandhi tying his mother's shoe laces, hugging old women affectionately, fondly holding children in his lap, displaying football skills — essentially, a kind, caring and warm-hearted person. The entire social media team of the Congress went into overdrive to showcase these images. That shows a basic flaw in the Congress' analysis of Narendra Modi's popularity. It's not because he is seen washing his mother's feet or feeding peacocks. It's because of the vision he showed to the aspirational India, howsoever faulty it might be for many. Has the Bharat Jodo Yatra been able to re-invent Rahul Gandhi as a politician in terms of his vision for the country? He has addressed half-a-dozen press

conferences, given two-three interviews to YouTubers and interviewed former Reserve Bank of India governor Raghuram Rajan on everything that he sees wrong with the economy. It's all about carping criticism of the Modi government's policies, something he has been doing all these years. Essentially, removing Modi is his alternative vision, which people haven't bought since 2014. A Congress leader told me citing his conversation with Rahul Gandhi that the Congress he has at least 10 years left in him to fight against Modi and he would keep doing that. Well, that's not the vision that would cheer up Congress workers and leaders.

### **Need for Congress Jodo Yatra**

Uttar Pradesh BJP chief Bhupendra Singh Chaudhary said that Rahul Gandhi should launch a Congress Jodo Yatra. The Congress leader may want to take it as an advice. Getting Sukhu and Pratibha Singh or Pilot and Ashok Gehlot in a single photo frame is one thing but

getting them together outside is another. Rahul Gandhi was in Telangana a few days back. Knives are now out between Telangana Congress chief Revanth Reddy and his detractors. In Kerala, his confidant Venugopal's group has ensured that Shashi Tharoor's tour of North Kerala last month made more headlines for internal bickering in the party. In Karnataka, DK Shivkumar and Siddaramaiah did their best to ensure a good turnout during Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra in the state. But the yatra did nothing to bring them together. DK Shivkumar and Siddaramaiah working at cross purposes is the single most impediment to the Congress' road to power in Karnataka. Even as Rahul Gandhi's yatra continues in Rajasthan, the war between Gehlot and Sachin casts a big shadow over the Congress' prospects in next year's assembly election. There are similar divisions in every state unit.



# Time for Bharat Ratna for Amitabh ?

New Delhi: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Thursday said actor Amitabh Bachchan should be awarded with the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour, for his contributions to Indian cinema.

"Although not officially, but from Bengal, we will raise this demand to honour Amitabh Bachchan with the Bharat Ratna award for his contributions to Indian cinema, over such a long time," said the Trinamool Congress president at the inaugural ceremony of the 28th Kolkata International Film Festival (KIFF).

Amitabh and actor Jaya Bachchan were present at the ceremony. The event was also attended by actors Shah Rukh Khan, Rani Mukherjee and director Mahesh Bhatt. Speaking at the ceremony, Amitabh said, "The festival (KIFF) has always celebrated the inclusive spirit of cinema beyond the confines of what Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore called 'narrow domestic walls'. I salute you Kolkata for giving me my first job and giving Jaya her first film but most of all, I salute you for your artistic temperament that embraces the essence of plurality and

equality. This is what makes Bengal so special." He also commented on freedom of expression and said, "Even now, questions are being raised on civil liberties and freedom of expression." This was the second time that Banerjee made such a demand. "The Padma Vibhushan to Amitabh Bachchan is not enough. He is a legend in his lifetime. He deserves a Bharat Ratna," she had said on her official Facebook handle in 2015. The veteran actor had then responded saying, "@MamataOfficial Mamata di... I am not deserving of such recognition... Most

humbled and honoured by what the Nation has given me...!!." The West Bengal CM has also made other statements in favour of the actor. In 2015, she supported his views on intolerance.

"Today Amitabhji has spoken on the issue of intolerance. Everyone has spoken on this. Unity in diversity, irrespective of caste, creed and religion, is our strength. Tolerance is life. Intolerance is not acceptable. Every religion has spoken about tolerance. It is also written in the Vedas," she said at the 21st edition of the KIFF.

# Politicians Publicity funded by Taxpayers

If by spending hundreds of crores of public money on advertising, political leaders could guarantee their own popularity, then they would never lose elections.

Do you want to know where your tax money goes? Well, earlier this week, the Narendra Modi government told the Lok Sabha that ever since it came to power, Bharatiya Janata Party had spent Rs 6,491.56 crore on advertising. Of this, Rs 3,260.79 crore went on ads in the electronic media and Rs 3,230.77 crore in print media. It is not my intention to target the BJP alone for this expenditure: taken on a per capita basis, many non-BJP state governments have also been spending huge amounts on ads. Nor is this the first government at the Centre to spend hundreds of crores on advertising. Besides, taken on a year-by-year basis, the Centre has been reducing its expenses in recent years.

State governments, however, continue to charge ahead. Everyone in Delhi knows

that for many years, Arvind Kejriwal was the city's biggest TV star. Even when there were legal complications about his paid-for stardom, the great man continued to make TV appearances, some of which only featured his back: so recognisable had his body become to the city's TV viewers that perhaps some were actually glad to see the back of him. An RTI (Right to Information Act) response earlier this year revealed that the Delhi government spent Rs 488.97 crore on advertising in the financial year 2021-22. Of this, a staggering Rs 125 crore was spent in a single month (March). Obviously, they like the idea of spending public money on promoting themselves.

**Do govt ads serve a public purpose?**

I mention the Centre and Delhi examples because I live in the capital and see the

expenditure first-hand. But the same is true of nearly every other state. Hundreds of crores of public money are spent on banal hoardings carrying the chief minister's face, and taxpayers' funds are used to purchase full-page ads (sometimes even the front page) in newspapers.

Often, there is no public purpose to these ads. A Congress-ruled state government will spend crores on ads in other states on Rajiv Gandhi's birth anniversary. When J. Jayalithaa was Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, she plastered her face on nearly every hoarding and newspaper.

To be fair, some of this does serve a public purpose. If a government spends money on public health advertising (which the Centre, to its credit, did during the Covid-19 pandemic), then I can understand the

logic. And yes, it is often the duty of information departments at the Centre and in the states to put out ads that convey public service messages. (Though why it is necessary to include pictures of ministers in public service ads is less clear.)

My concern is with unnecessary advertising done mostly to promote individual politicians. You will have noticed that just before an election, ads featuring the state's political leaders or boasting about the government's achievements begin appearing with terrifying regularity. Usually, the ads stop just before the Model Code of Conduct kicks in, but it is quite clear that the government in power has used our money to try and improve its own prospects.

# Biden's refusal to act on Title 42 creates 'state of emergency' at border, and Nationwide

Our Nation's sovereignty is on a collision course with an unprecedented surge of illegal aliens that recent drone footage reveals is mobilizing on the Mexican side of the U.S. southern border. On December 21, the government's ability to immediately turn away illegal aliens at the southern border ends. When this expulsion authority, known as Title 42, ends there will be no policies in place to deter aliens from crossing the border unlawfully. That is a remarkably sad, but true statement. And the cartels, traffickers, and smugglers know it and will be poised to exploit our lack of border security enforcement to new heights. Today's border crisis is about to become a catastrophe.

For those who don't follow border security issues daily, it is hard to express just how bad things have been during the last 23-months and how much worse they are expected to get. More illegal aliens were apprehended at the southern border last year than during the entire Trump administration. Most of them have been allowed into the country because they make dubious asylum

claims, and very few—if any—are actually removed when those asylum claims are denied.

The Biden administration's Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is predicting 9,000-14,000 per day beginning tomorrow. This is like pouring gasoline on an already raging fire. If DHS's prediction holds up, between December 21 and Christmas Day, approximately 70,000 illegal aliens could make it into the country, enough to fill SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles that currently houses the LA Rams, LA Chargers, and hosted last season's Super Bowl. Within two months, the number of new illegal aliens crossing our border could surpass the population of El Paso (678,415). This is unsustainable. Which is why the Democrat mayor of El Paso, Texas just declared a "state of emergency." While border towns and states will be impacted first, the enormity of this problem will be felt Nationwide. Our entire country is in a 'state of emergency' because of today's failed approach border security.

The most outrageous aspect of the situation

unfolding at the border is that the Biden administration has failed for 23 months to implement effective deterrent policies. This stands in contrast to almost every prior administration, Democrat or Republican, who understood the critical nature of enforcing our laws to have some resemblance of order along the border.

During the presidential transition following the 2020 election, my team handed over our playbook of successful border security policies like Remain in Mexico, the Asylum Cooperative Agreements, and streamlining the removal of aliens when their asylum claims are denied. Title 42 was always intended to be a temporary measure to deal with COVID-19 and phasing it out would have had a minimal impact at the border if DHS had continued to follow our playbook.

Instead, the Biden administration promptly dismissed that playbook, set about dismantling every single one of those policies, sidelining career Border Patrol experts, and offering up no new solutions. This administration's partial continuation of Title 42

served as a crutch to create the illusion that not every illegal alien who shows up at the border will be allowed in. The ramifications of this failed strategy are about to be felt to an unimaginable degree.

As the border catastrophe rages on in the coming weeks, the American people and Congress should reject the disinformation excuses being offered up to deflect accountability. DHS does not need new laws to secure the border, there are sufficient authorities to get the job done but, unfortunately, they are not being used. It is not possible to manage our way out of this crisis and there is nothing "safe, humane, and orderly" about the mass human trafficking event our current strategy and policies are encouraging.

Lastly, the problem at the border is a policy problem, not a money problem. Congress should not fund the Biden administration's border policies and, instead, should use the purse strings to compel DHS to institute a new strategy that secures the border, ends human trafficking, and defeats the cartels.



# Crypto is out of control. FTX is just the latest example

Friendly legislators, regulators and celebrities granted former FTX CEO Sam Bankman-Fried legitimacy, but all the while, he was reportedly moving clients' funds to prop up his related trading house, allowing him and the company to rise so high, and collapse so quickly. And it was smoke and mirrors that hid how quickly the crypto industry had become part of the offshoring economy, and how easily traditional offshore havens have made that possible. If anything, FTX's stupendous collapse shines a light on just how symbiotic the entire crypto industry now is with the world of offshore finance – and how open the entire industry is to fraudsters and scammers, with offshore havens racing to offer crooks the kinds of allowances, and lack of regulation, they need to thrive. On Wednesday, during a virtual interview at the New York Times' DealBook Summit, Bankman-Fried said he "screwed up" and accepted responsibility for the failure of his company, but denied that he tried to defraud investors and clients. But Bankman-Fried's and FTX's implosion is something that the crypto industry, and even those broadly familiar with the financial world, could have – and likely should have – foreseen. Not only were there all kinds of red flags about FTX's

background, but Bankman-Fried also decided to base his operations in the Bahamas, one of the world's most notorious offshore havens.

An "offshore haven" can be something of a nebulous term, but, in short, it is any jurisdiction that offers its clients enough anonymity that they can freely hide their wealth, or create entire financial operations that aren't subject to oversight. The Bahamas emerged in the early 20th century as a place for wealthy Westerners to hide their finances – and financial fraud – from anyone investigating. And while it may not be the center of the offshoring world that it once was, it has recently re-emerged as a tax haven. Most importantly, "offshore" doesn't need to mean just banking – instead, as we saw when Bankman-Fried said he moved headquarters to the Bahamas because of its crypto-friendly reputation, it can extend to other industries, too. So when crypto emerged as a major player in its own right, it was the Bahamas that stepped up. The Bahamian government made a conscious choice to recruit as much of the rising crypto industry as possible, with Prime Minister Philip Davis hoping to make the Bahamas an "ideal destination for [crypto] operations." Davis landed his

biggest client last year when FTX announced it would headquarter in the Bahamas, helping the islands in their efforts to recruit crypto business.

Now, the Bahamas is reeling – and many surely have questions about the country's regulatory oversight, or lack thereof. In a national address late last month, the nation's attorney general defended its regulatory practices and noted the government's shock at the "ignorance of those who assert that FTX came to the Bahamas because they did not want to submit to regulatory scrutiny." And at long last, questions are also being asked about the relationship between crypto and the broader world of offshore finance itself. It's a relationship that has seen surprisingly little attention compared to things like real estate, luxury yachts and artwork – thanks in large part to the oligarchs surrounding Russian President Vladimir Putin, and how they've used these offshore services to hide their wealth. And there's actually been fantastic progress in trying to close down some of these offshoring services over the past year, from the US passing legislation to ban anonymous shell companies to the United Kingdom finally moving to target the kleptocrats who park their wealth in London real estate. But

crypto, oddly, hasn't seen nearly as much attention – or as much concern. Maybe it was all of the excitement surrounding the new technology. Maybe it was all of the get-rich-quick promise associated with early crypto entrepreneurs. Maybe it was just the fact that various celebrities endorsed FTX. Whatever it was, investigators and legislators apparently missed the fact that crypto had become as enmeshed in the world of offshore finance as any other industry. Amidst its meteoric rise, the crypto market has been something of a financial free-for-all. A complete dearth of regulation compared to the rest of the financial world has allowed the industry to spin out of control, ending up in the kinds of Ponzi-scheme affairs FTX illustrates. Which is why the FTX affair won't be seen as just a watershed for finally linking crypto with the world of offshore finance, but for what finally brought the regulatory hammer down on the entire industry. It remains to be seen what form those regulations will take, but figures like Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen have already called for greater regulatory oversight. But now, the billion-dollar bill is coming due – a bill that Bankman-Fried's depositors, still looking for their money, won't be able to pay.

# "Thermonuclear Bad" Expert Says 60% Of China May Get Infected In 3 Months

Beijing: After the easing of Covid-19 restrictions, China is experiencing a massive surge in coronavirus cases. Hospitals are completely overwhelmed in China, reported Eric Feigl-Ding, an epidemiologist and health economist. The epidemiologist estimates that more than 60 per cent of China and 10 per cent of Earth's population are likely to be infected over the next 90 days with deaths likely in the millions. One of Beijing's designated crematoria for Covid-19 patients has been flooded with dead bodies in recent days as the virus sweeps through the Chinese capital, offering an early hint at the human cost of the country's abrupt loosening of pandemic restrictions, reported Wall Street Journal (WSJ). According to Feigl-Ding, the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) goal is "let whoever needs to be infected, infected, let whoever needs to die, die. Early infections, early deaths, early peak, early resumption of production."

China has reported no Covid deaths in Beijing since the authorities announced four deaths between November 19 and 23. The information office for China's cabinet, the State Council, didn't immediately respond to a request for comment sent late on Friday.

Beijing Dongjiao Crematory, on the eastern edge of the Chinese capital,

has experienced a jump in requests for cremation and other funerary services, according to people who work at the compound, reported WSJ. "Since the Covid reopening, we've been overloaded with work," said a woman who answered the phone at the crematorium on Friday, adding, "Right now, it's 24 hours a day. We can't keep up."

The woman said Dongjiao Crematory, which is operated by Beijing municipality and which the National Health Commission has designated to handle Covid-positive cases, was receiving so many bodies that it was conducting cremations in the predawn hours and in the middle of the night. "There's no other way," she said.

She estimated that there were roughly 200 bodies arriving each day at the crematorium, from 30 or 40 bodies on a typical day. The increased workload has taxed the crematorium staff, many of whom have become infected with the fast-spreading virus in recent days, she said.

Men who work at the compound, which in addition to a funeral hall includes a small complex of shops selling burial attire, flowers, caskets, urns and other funerary items, said the number of corpses had risen markedly in recent days, though none would offer an estimate of the magnitude of the increase, reported

WSJ.

Doubling time in China may not be days anymore. Doubling time now possibly "hours" says some experts -- let that sink in. R is hard to calculate if doubling is less than 1 day because it's hard to PCR test that fast. The point is China & the world is in deep trouble, said Feigl-Ding. Moreover, the deaths in mainland China is being hugely underreported. Through a survey of hospitals, funeral parlors and related funeral industry chains in Beijing--there is a recent explosion in funeral services caused by the sharp increase in deaths.

According to the epidemiologist, the cremation in Beijing is nonstop. Morgues are overloaded. Refrigerated containers needed. 24/7 funerals. 2000 bodies backlogged for cremations. Sound familiar? It is spring 2020 all over again-- but this time for China, emulating more Western-mass infection approach. People rushed to a pharmaceutical factory to buy ibuprofen because it is completely sold out elsewhere.

One said that, typically, all the day's corpses would be cremated by midday. But the recent increase in the number of bodies has meant that cremations are now taking place long after nightfall.

In a series of abrupt moves this month, China dismantled much of the

lockdown, testing and quarantine regimes that underpinned its 'Zero Covid' approach for the past three years to suppress even small outbreaks of the virus.

Because of the lifting of testing requirements, the scale of China's coronavirus surge has been hard to measure. Daily national case counts have steadily fallen as fewer people test themselves at public facilities, and health authorities earlier this week stopped releasing daily tallies of asymptomatic cases for the first time since the pandemic began.

Earlier this month, the Beijing Emergency Medical Centre urged only critically ill patients to call for ambulances, saying that emergency requests had jumped to 30,000 a day from an average of about 5,000, straining the capacity of paramedics to respond, reported WSJ.

According to National Health Commission regulations, corpses diagnosed as Covid-positive or suspected of being Covid-positive must be cremated immediately in specially designated furnaces, with no dressing of bodies or memorial services. But many of China's 1.4 billion people remain vulnerable to the virus because of limited exposure, low vaccination rates and poor investment in emergency care.



# PM Modi chairs review meeting on Covid, stresses on masking up, more tests

Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired a high-level meeting today to assess the Covid-19 situation in the country, the preparedness of health infrastructure and logistics, the status of the vaccination campaign and the emergence of the new Covid-19 variants and their public health implications for the country. The high-level review meeting comes against the backdrop of an alarming spike in Covid-19 cases in some countries, especially in neighbouring China. The meeting was attended by Amit Shah, Mansukh

Mandaviya, Jyotiraditya Scindia, Dr S Jaishankar, Dr VK Paul, member (Health) NITI Aayog and others. PM Modi cautioned against complacency and advised strict vigil as he reiterated that the Covid is not over yet. The prime minister also directed officials to strengthen the ongoing surveillance measures, especially at international airports.

The PM stressed the need to ensure that the entire Covid infrastructure at all levels is maintained at a high level of preparedness in

terms of equipment, processes and human resources and advised states to audit Covid-specific facilities to ensure operational readiness of hospital infrastructure, including oxygen cylinders, ventilators and human resources. Officials have been asked to ramp up testing and genomic sequencing efforts. States have been asked to share a larger number of samples with the designated INSACOG Genome Sequencing Laboratories (IGSLs) for genome sequencing on a daily basis. This will

support timely detection of newer variants circulating in the country and facilitate undertaking requisite public health measures. They were also advised to regularly monitor the availability and prices of essential medicines. Covid-appropriate behaviour must be followed at all times, especially in view of the upcoming festive season, including wearing masks in crowded public places, the prime minister said, urging precautionary doses may be encouraged, especially for the vulnerable and the elderly.

## The legend of Charles Sobhraj

**From petty crimes, Sobhraj graduated to robbing and murdering Western backpackers. As the Nepal Supreme Court orders his release from jail, here's a glimpse into his dark history.**

The serial "Bikini Killer", the "Serpent" and the murderer of backpackers on 1970s "Hippi" trail could be set free soon as the Nepal Supreme Court has ordered his release after he served 95% of his jail term in that country. Charles Sobhraj's middle name is "notorious". But his notoriety also has a suave ring to it. It springs from his unique style statement, the way he dressed, his ability to speak different languages eloquently and his refined demeanour. He used these to lure and trap Western tourists in Asia, mostly women backpackers, while masquerading as a gemstone trader. Using their passports, he travelled across countries – from France to Thailand – and changed his mannerisms and appearance like a serpent does to disguise people.

### HIS MODUS OPERANDI

His modus operandi was befriending backpackers, charming them with his sophisticated looks, cosying up, hanging out, and drugging the victims before robbing and killing them and then burning their bodies beyond recognition. In the 1970s, he went on a murder spree and killed 15 to 20 people. In the mid-1970s, Sobhraj was issued an arrest warrant after six women were found dead on a beach in Pattaya in Thailand. He earned the moniker "Bikini Killer" from here on, as all these six women were clad only in bikinis when their bodies were recovered. He was put behind bars in Tihar before he could stand trial in Thailand. Sobhraj was arrested in Delhi during a trip for drugging French students in a city hotel. He used the 'drugging' technique to flee from the high-security Tihar Jail in 1986. Sobhraj threw a bash making the jail staff believe that it was his birthday. The unsuspecting security guards were treated to sweets and cakes laced with sleeping pills and Sobhraj quietly made good his brazen es-

cape. However, the freedom lasted just 22 days, when he was pounced upon by a police inspector Madhukar Zende at O' Coqueiro restaurant in Goa. Years later, when Zende was invited by O' Coqueiro, he was surprised to find a dish named "Zende platter" which was made of tandoori chicken and lamb. Sobhraj was caught similarly at a Nepal casino in 2003 after he went to France following his release from India in 1997. He led an ostentatious life there, squandering away money and charging vast sums for his interviews and sharing his outrageous stories. One wonders why he came back to Kathmandu. In Nepal, he was convicted of killing American backpacker Connie Jo Bronzich and also found guilty of murdering Bronzich's Canadian friend, Laurent Carriere. For more than 17 years, he spent his time in Kathmandu jail. But his life behind

bars in Kathmandu was as eventful as it was outside. He married Nihita Biswas, the daughter of his Nepalese lawyer, at a quiet ceremony in prison in 2008. Nihita is 44 years younger than Sobhraj.

### A TROUBLED CHILDHOOD

Born on April 6, 1944, to an Indian businessman and Vietnamese shop assistant, Sobhraj had a troubled childhood. He was reportedly abandoned by his father, who denied paternity; his mother later married a French soldier. Sobhraj felt neglected as the couple's later children got more attention, and he could never adjust to the changed environment. Sobhraj reportedly had a romantic relationship with a Parisian woman, to whom he proposed. However, the day he proposed, Sobhraj was nabbed for driving a stolen vehicle and evading police. He first went to prison for a burglary carried out in Paris in 1963.

From petty crimes like fraud and car thefts, he graduated to smuggling, robbing and killing people. Apart from Nepal, India and Thailand, he also committed crimes in Greece, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Malaysia. An Australian scribe, who had interviewed Sobhraj, said the conman and killer considered himself to be a "criminal hero". His crimes have been dramatised in 'The Serpent', a TV series produced by the BBC and Netflix. 'Main Aur Charles', a 2015 Bollywood film, portrays Sobhraj and tells the story from the perspective of the Indian cop, Amod Kanth, who handled the case of Sobhraj. He has also been a subject of many non-fiction books, including *Serpentine* (1979) and *The Life and Crime of Charles Sobhraj* (1980). The 78-year-old's blood-stained legacy will prompt many more explorations into his criminal mind.

## India's visa temples attract devotees aspiring to go abroad

professional was waiting outside the temple, the size of a small closet – barely enough room for the lone priest to stand and perform puja or rituals for the beloved elephant-headed deity, believed to be the remover of obstacles. Viswanathan was among about a dozen visitors, most of them there for the same purpose: To offer prayers so their US visa interviews would go smoothly and successfully. Viswanathan came the day before his interview for an employment visa. "I came here to pray for my brother's UK visa 10 years ago and for my wife's US visa two years ago," he said. "They were both successful. So I have faith." The Sri Lakshmi Visa Ganapathy Temple is a few miles north of the airport in Chennai (formerly Madras), a bustling metropolis on the Coromandel Coast in southeast India – known for its iconic cuisine, ancient temples and churches, silk saris, classical music, dance and sculptures. This "visa temple" has surged in popularity among US visa seekers over the past decade;

they can be found in almost any Indian city with a US consulate. They typically gain a following through word of mouth or social media. A mile away from the Ganesh temple is the Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Navaneetha Krishnan Temple, where an idol of Hanuman – a deity who has a human body and the face of a monkey – is believed to possess the power to secure visas. Also known as "Anjaneya," this God stands for strength, wisdom and devotion. In this temple, he has earned the monikers "America Anjaneya" and "Visa Anjaneya." The temple's longtime secretary, GC Srinivasan, said it wasn't until 2016 that this temple became a "visa temple." "It was around that time that a few people who prayed for a visa spread the word around that they were successful, and it's continued," he said. A month ago, Srinivasan said he met someone who got news of his visa approval even as he was circumambulating the Anjaneya idol – a common Hindu practice of walking

around a sacred object or site. On a recent Saturday night, devotees decorated the idol with garlands made of betel leaves. S Pradeep, who placed a garland on the deity, said he was not there to pray for a visa, but believes in the god's unique power. "He is my favourite God," he said. "If you genuinely pray – not just for visa – it will come true." At the Ganesh temple, some devotees had success stories to share. Jyothi Bontha said her visa interview at the US Consulate in Chennai went without a hitch, and that she had returned to offer thanks. "They barely asked me a couple of questions," she said. "I was pleasantly surprised." Bontha's friend, Phani Veeranki, stood nearby, nervously clutching an envelope containing her visa application and supporting documents. Bontha and Veeranki, both computer science students from the neighboring state of Andhra Pradesh and childhood friends, are headed to Ohio.



# Seven reasons to be cheerful about the Amazon in 2023 – and three to be terrified

The defeat of the ultra-right former army captain, who unleashed a wave of forest burning and river poisoning during his four years in office, was arguably the world's best environmental news of 2022. As he is replaced by Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, here are seven reasons to be cheerful about the Amazon in 2023, and three reminders of why that's no excuse for anyone to drop their guard.

## 1. The only way is up

Anyone would feel a relief after the firestorm that was Bolsonaro. Here is the baseline the outgoing president leaves. Data from Brazil's space agency confirms no other leader has overseen such a sharp increase in deforestation – 59.5% over a presidential term – since satellite records began in 1988. Bolsonaro, who tried his hand at gold prospecting before he was in the army, has also overseen invasions of tens of thousands of illegal miners into the lands of the Yanomami, Mundurucu, Kayapo and other Indigenous peoples, leading to violence, disease, wrecked landscapes and mercury contamination of the Amazon's greatest waterways. His ministers trashed the government agencies responsible for protecting the forest, nature reserves and indigenous territories. Criminals enjoy a culture of impunity. Environmental fines are down 38%. The first job of the new government will be to glue back together the broken pieces of the environmental institutions Bolsonaro shattered.

## 2. Marina Silva is back

Marina Silva was arguably the world's most effective environment minister during the first Lula administration from 2003 to 2006. As a former rubber tapper and union activist, she struck exactly the right balance between livelihood support and nature protection. She introduced policies that led to an 80% fall in Amazon deforestation, opposed agrotoxins and biofuels, and tried to block roads, dams and other infrastructure projects that threatened important areas of nature. Her problem was that she was so effective she made powerful enemies in the construction and agriculture sectors.

Lula backed them instead of her, prompting Silva's resignation. However, she is favourite to be the next environment minister, despite lobbying against her by



the agribusiness and financial sectors. As the choice of conservationists and the candidate with the strongest international profile, anyone else would be a blow to the environmental credibility of the new government.

## 3. Lula now gets it

Or so his public speeches suggest. After the election results were announced, Lula used his victory speech to emphasise the need to fight for the environment, indigenous rights and zero deforestation by 2030. This was a big advance on his previous commitment to halt only illegal deforestation. For his first overseas trip as president-elect, he attended the Cop27 climate summit in Egypt. Silva says she agreed to rejoin him because Lula now realises the severity of the climate crisis and that the old models of national development are no longer sustainable. She has persuaded him that zero deforestation goals must apply not only to the Amazon, but to other globally important biomes such as the Pantanal wetlands and the Cerrado savanna.

## 4. An environment ministry with more cash and muscle

The transition team has asked for 536m reais (£83m) additional cash. The money would be used for field operations against illegal miners and loggers, firefighting units, and a resumption of bolsa verde (green grant) incentives for smallholders to maintain forests and rivers. In addition, the environment ministry would take back control over waterways and forest services, which were hived off to the agriculture ministry and development agency under Bolsonaro. To finance

reforestation projects, the government would redirect environmental fines under a system that proved effective during the administration of Michel Temer, who was president between 2016 and 2018. The ministry also plans greater coordination with subnational governments, an important bureaucratic step that would help the federal authorities to close local loopholes. The toughest ask, however, is for 2,000 additional staff, which is essential to launch more investigations and put officers in the field. But no budget has been allocated yet for this.

## 5. Deforestation profiteers face penalties and prison.

The new administration will have to send a strong early signal that the years of impunity are over for land grabbers. This is expected to come in the form of a mass embargo of thousands of companies and landowners involved in illegal deforestation. Silva proved the effectiveness of this last time she was environment minister by tracking down the money-men who finance Amazonian land thefts and punishing them with business embargos, credit withdrawal, blacklisting and fines. Whether or not she gets the post again, expect much more of the same between January and April. These punitive measures are much easier now because hi-tech satellite monitoring by groups such as MapBiomas can quickly and accurately tell where land is being cleared and who owns the land. There is no longer any need to put boots on the ground. Embargo notices can be automatically sent out like

speeding fines. The federal police will also be tasked with investigating shell companies so the real investors – often dentists, graphic designers and car salesmen in the south of Brazil – are caught and punished. Contrary to the myth peddled by Bolsonaro, the vast majority of deforestation can be traced to a small, wealthy elite.

## 6. Police and the army will drive out (some) invaders

One of the media blitzes in the first weeks or months of the new government will be a big operation or series of operations against illegal mining camps inside indigenous Yanomami, Mundurucu or Kayapo territory. Expect Hollywood-esque images of forest protection agents swooping down in military helicopters, rounding up criminals, and then burning all the equipment in sight. Again, this will be largely about sending signals. A real solution will take much more time and be much more complex because illegal mining camps are scattered all over the Amazon, often co-opt Indigenous people and will leave thousands of poor, untrained people out of work and in need of relocation and state support to start different lives. All of this will signal the state is back in the Amazon. And the Amazon will be more in the state than before thanks to the creation of an Indigenous ministry, which is likely to be headed by Sônia Guajajara.

## 7. The outside world has started to step up

The fate of the rainforest is not decided in the Amazon, but in the overseas markets that buy its beef, wood, soy and iron ore. So another piece of good news in

2022 was the European Union's decision to adopt new regulations on deforestation-free trade. The new rules impose strict traceability requirements on forest products and will block those that are sourced in areas of unsustainable deforestation or degradation. This is a big step forward from the previous approach, which relied on voluntary actions, and it is hoped the Amazon's two other main customers – China and the United States – will adopt similar measures. Brazilian beef and soy companies would then have a strong incentive to increase productivity by rehabilitating degraded land rather than by clearing forest. Add to this the new global deal on biodiversity just agreed in Montreal, which promises \$30bn (£25bn) to ensure 30% of nature is protected by 2030, and it looks likely the Amazon will be getting more support from outside. More important still is for overseas campaigners to continue to put pressure on Brazil to maintain high environmental standards. This will help Lula in the coming battles with the agriculture lobby and dam builders.

All of this is likely to result in a substantial drop in Amazon deforestation next year, although it will not show up fully in the annual results until 2024. However, this is not guaranteed and the situation remains perilous. Here are three sobering reminders why a change of government is not enough by itself to save the planet's greatest concentration of terrestrial life.

1. Dangerous divisions Splits inside Brazil make everything more difficult and dangerous. Lula's election victory by just 1.8 percentage points shows the split in national opinion, and in Congress, Bolsonaristas made major gains. Pushing through budgets and legislation will be difficult without compromising with the powerful ruralista caucus of agribusiness-backed politicians, some of whom supported Lula and will expect favours in return. The right wing, meanwhile, will continue to push existing bills that aim to legitimise earlier land grabs, weaken environmental licensing and permit mining in indigenous land. Some of the fiercest opposition is in Amazonian towns on the "arc of deforestation", where loggers and ranchers have blocked roads.





# The irony behind this word of the year

William Carlos Williams is perhaps best known for the red wheelbarrow on which so much depends, but “Spring and All” – the 1923 book which includes that poem – is a manifesto on how language, through its own slow renewal, can recreate the world. “It is the imagination on which reality rides,” Williams wrote. “To whom then am I addressed? To the imagination.”

In 2012, the Library of Congress cited “Spring and All” as one of 88 “books that shaped America,” which feels, as we prepare to take on 2023, like a prescient gesture, one that anticipated the power of imagination to create change and the role of culture in efforts to attend to the present while staying connected to the past and committed to transforming the future. Sometimes the past speaks directly from the page. As Laura Beers wrote, George Orwell’s perspective following the Second World War forecast the realities of 2022: disinformation, “reality control,” and freedom of expression as the bedrock of all other freedoms – making it the most important, and also the most vulnerable to attack and suppression. For Issac Bailey, a free copy of Mark Twain’s “A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court” opened his imagination in ways a childhood stutter had kept locked inside – and prompted him to speak out against ongoing efforts to ban books.

Or it’s a single word. Take Merriam-Webster’s word of the year: gaslighting. Its selection was a statement on the precarity of truth in our lives, but Nicole Hemmer, who wrote one of the first pieces connecting the term to then-candidate Donald Trump in 2016, objected to synonymizing “gaslighting” with lying without emphasizing

its origins as a form of psychological abuse against women. “This loss of context for a single word might not feel urgently important – after all, words evolve as they work their way from novel to commonplace to, eventually, trite (as the word ‘gaslighting’ now feels after years of overuse). But in a culture where histories of abuse are regularly erased – even five years into the #MeToo movement – the erasure feels significant,” insisted Hemmer. Changing one word’s meaning can empower women to claim their experiences and take one more step toward justice and equality.

Consider also how cultural figures have loomed large this year in our most painful moments. As Peniel E. Joseph reminded us, cultural icons including basketball coach Steve Kerr and actor Matthew McConaughey spoke out after the massacre of 19 schoolchildren in Uvalde, Texas, serving in Joseph’s words “as courageous models for a progressive White male identity that challenges systems of oppression, speaks truth to power and confronts the divisions of our current moment by publicly highlighting the gap between the

nation’s professed values and a more bitter reality that allows 19 children to be killed in such grotesque fashion.”

And during the Jackson water crisis, W. Ralph Eubanks recounted how the richness of Mississippi’s literary and cultural heritage informed his conviction that “Mississippi has something to say ... Mississippi matters.” And yet, while in Jackson to celebrate that heritage, he instead encountered “a new way the past and the present are colliding in Mississippi. Instead of the cultural charm and pull of this place that I love so much, I was confronted by the remnants of Jim Crow Mississippi living on in the present.” But if I might borrow and riff on Williams’ formulation to look back at 2022 in cultural commentary, another part of the reason reality rides the back of imagination is because the latter functions as a source of joy and revelation that can invigorate the former. After the last few years, don’t we deserve a little more of that? In March, absurdist dramedy “Everything Everywhere All at Once” – led by Michelle Yeoh playing Evelyn Wang – took the screen by storm, offering what Jeff Yang described as a “perfect

metaphor for this thing we call Asian America.” In the film, Yeoh’s character “can conjure up any reality she imagines, bringing substance to the outrageous worlds of her imagination by drawing power from the infinite diversity of her myriad selves – making many into one, sometimes by chance, sometimes by choice. And we, as Asian Americans, are in the process of doing the same, building a cultural collage out of mixed media and lived experiences,” wrote Yang.

Summer romance took an unconventionally sexy (and equally dramedic) turn with Emma Thompson’s “Good Luck to You, Leo Grande,” which chronicled her recently-widowed protagonist’s quest for sexual pleasure and her first orgasm – with a sex worker. This is a new kind of romance, affirmed Sara Stewart – a romance between Thompson’s Nancy and her own post-60 body: “Talk about a message at odds with our current political moment, where women’s bodily and autonomy and power are under siege.”

Come fall, noted Stewart, it was time to be served some “eat the rich” satire in “The Menu” and “Triangle of Sadness.” Predictable, perhaps, given a pandemic “in which billionaires got richer while millions died,” she wrote. But while investing any film with “single-handedly dismantling capitalism seems too heavy a lift ... Mark Twain said, ‘the human race has only one really effective weapon and that is laughter.’ We can at least capitalize, so to speak, on these films’ painting their ultra-rich subjects as inherently ridiculous. We can begin to puncture the idea that obscene wealth is the ultimate American aspiration,” argued Stewart.





# Lessons From Delhi, Gujarat & Himachal: Congress Needs Strong Organisation, Not Gandhis And Their Sycophants



The question now arises as to what the Congress was awaiting. The answer is quite simple: the party expected Rahul Gandhi to perform a miracle. Along with the problems of over-reliance on Gandhi, it is also a disgrace that the grand old party is filled with sycophants and no real critics. Mallikarjun Kharge, who is not from the Gandhi family and is now the president of the party, had the opportunity to streamline Gujarat's campaigning. However, he did not do so. Politically, the Congress party and Rahul Gandhi can attempt to project a different ideology against the BJP, while also projecting Narendra Modi as their primary adversary. But Indian political history tells a different tale. Congress's boots were not removed by the BJP, but rather by other regional parties or factions of Congress. In West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee of the Trinamool Congress (TMC), which is a faction of Congress, stole the entire Congress vote. Similarly, NCP, YSRCP, BJD, SP, and now AAP are the political parties that have stolen Congress party voters. In Gujarat, for instance, around 39 percent of

votes were cast against the BJP, which is only 2 percent less than last year. However, these votes were split between the Congress with 27 percent and the Aam Aadmi Party with 12 percent. It is the Congress party's inability to maintain control over these voter segments. Similar conditions were observed in Delhi. The Congress party, led by Sheila Dikshit as chief minister, ruled Delhi for fifteen years. But since Dikshit's defeat and the formation of the Aam Aadmi Party, the Congress has been declining. Sheila Dikshit was sidelined because the party could not control its infighting, but when it realised that it had no chance of winning the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, it brought the ailing Dikshit back to lead the party. Even the most ardent Congress karyakarta will be unable to identify the Delhi Congress president's name. It is not intended to belittle the work of the individual in question, but rather to highlight the state of the party. This time, the Congress received only about nine seats in Delhi MCD. The top leadership of the BJP, including the central cabinet ministers, chief leader,

and other organisational leaders, were appointed to campaign in Delhi. However, Congress was simply non-existent.

Numerous factors contributed to the victory of the Congress in Himachal, but one of the most significant was strong local leadership. To organise their campaign, the local leadership did not rely on the high command or the Gandhi family. On the basis of the Himachal electorate's tendency to elect alternative parties to power, the state's most pressing issues were prioritised by the local leadership. The state leadership and grassroots organisations detected the discontent among Himachal voters regarding the new pension scheme, Agneepath, the rising price of apples, and other issues. The local leadership also recognised the internecine conflict within the BJP and shrewdly capitalised on it. Priyanka Gandhi participated in a few rallies, but the agenda was determined by the local leadership via elites, goodwill, grassroots campaigning, and so on. In addition to fighting against the machinery of the BJP, the Congress also opposes its strong ideology.

In the recent elections in Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh and Delhi, the Congress could perform well in the Himalayan state alone. At the time of these elections, former Congress president Rahul Gandhi was leading the Bharat Jodo Yatra across numerous states. The success of the Congress in Himachal demonstrates the importance of a strong grassroots organisation in the state, something the party has lacked in most states for a long time. Congress can win elections without the Gandhis or sycophants surrounding them, a fact that the party will likely refuse to acknowledge. The Congress' excessive dependence on the Gandhi family is becoming counterproductive.

This time, the Gujarat election was the most important, but the Congress party put its entire energies on the Bharat Jodo Yatra. Rahul Gandhi held just a few rallies, and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge was present for a short time. In the Gujarat Assembly elections in 2012, Congress received approximately 38 percent of the votes, followed by 41 percent in 2017 — in 2022, it received 27 percent votes. In the 2012 Assembly elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) received 47 percent votes, followed by 49 percent in 2017 and 52 percent in 2022. Significantly, in the Gujarat elections of 2022, Congress did not lose votes to the BJP, but rather to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). This demonstrates that Congress' poor strategy has the greatest impact on the party in the states.

Jignesh Mevani, a young Dalit Congress leader from Gujarat, stated in an interview with The Indian Express, "Congress did

not use me enough; I do not know why." This demonstrates what is wrong with the Congress party's strategy. The party, under the leadership of the Gandhi family, has been eroding state-by-state local leadership. This has led to the party's current deplorable condition. Hardik Patel, the leader of the Young Patidars, and Alpesh Thakor, the leader of the Other Backward Classes, who joined the Congress party before the 2017 elections and helped it reach the top electoral position in the state, were neglected by the Congress. Both leaders eventually left the Congress and joined the BJP.

## US Tech Layoffs Cruel For Indians on H-1B Visas

The tech industry has long relied on skilled foreign workers to fill IT and engineering jobs. The majority are employed through the H-1B visa programmes

A wave of layoffs at US technology companies has forced scores of skilled immigrants on temporary visas to find new jobs within 60 days or leave the country. Their predicament underscores how a flawed system is jeopardizing America's ability to attract and retain the foreign-born talent it needs. The tech industry has long relied on skilled foreign workers to fill IT and engineering jobs. The majority are employed through the H-1B visa program, which brings 85,000 workers to the US each year. The visas last a maximum of six years, during which time workers can apply for legal permanent residence, if sponsored by their employer. Of the estimated 580,000 current H-1B holders, more than half have had an employer petition for them to get a green card. Due to the system's arbitrariness and inefficiency, however, the process for actually obtaining one lasts years; many immigrants from India - which contributes the largest share of applicants - can expect to wait for decades. This backlog leaves H-1B holders

vulnerable to corporate downsizing - as tens of thousands have recently learned the hard



way, including those at Twitter Inc. and Meta Platforms Inc. Under rules put in place during President Barack Obama's administration, workers who lose their jobs have 60 days to find a new employer to sponsor them or they will have their visas cancelled. At Meta and Twitter alone, at least 350 laid-off visa holders are now racing to secure new jobs before the grace period expires. Even those who do find work may have to relocate their

families, sell their homes or settle for less desirable work just to stay in the country. Forcing skilled immigrants to endure such upheaval is not only cruel but self-defeating. Among America's greatest strengths is its ability to lure and assimilate such talent, thereby boosting growth, entrepreneurship and innovation. H-1B workers also create opportunities for US citizens, by enabling companies to invest in domestic operations instead of sending jobs overseas.

Yet rather than expanding the pipeline for skilled foreign workers, the US's onerous policies are increasingly pushing them away, with pro-immigration countries like Canada and Australia becoming more attractive destinations for global talent. The number of US noncitizen residents moving to Canada annually has increased 128% from 2017 to 2019, due partly to a program there that expedites employment visas and allows some skilled workers to obtain permanent residence within six months.



# How Saudi Arabia is using China to grow its influence, hedge the US

For China, the current squabble between the US and Saudi Arabia is an opportunity

As China's President landed in Riyadh this past week amidst much fanfare, Saudi Arabia announced a bumper budget surplus owing to high oil prices, putting the kingdom forward as the fastest-growing G20 economy, and giving a boost to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's (MBS) grand plans to re-design the region's economy for the future. To achieve this, Saudi Arabia is not only going through an economic renaissance but also a geopolitical one as well. Riyadh's traditional geopolitical posture has predominantly had a western compass, with close ties between the House of Saud and Washington over decades. Both the internal and external security of Saudi Arabia has been critical for a long time for the United States (US) for its and the West's energy security. This strategy has had two major parts to it: First, consistent and uninterrupted supply of oil and gas; second, influence over energy pricing, especially with regard to, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)— the producers' cartel. The former is now challenged by a climate change-pushed global energy transition towards renewables; however, the latter, remains critical with the said transition being politically volatile, as being witnessed currently in Europe on the sidelines of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The other driving aspect of increasing change in posture is an expected coming of great power competition between the US and China, one that countries in the Gulf are looking to sidestep and not get embroiled in. Riyadh's decision to expand its influence on oil pricing by developing the OPEC+ mechanism, which includes Moscow, has added further layers of tension between the US and the Saudis. During these critical geopolitical moments that are currently unfurling, MBS is looking to implement some of the most drastic political and societal changes in the kingdom's history. These include opening the economy, attempting to move away from oil, adopting a more moderate take on Islam, and so on. While a widely supported initiative globally, the risks attached to it remain significant, despite a view that the country's young population backs MBS and his initiatives.

For China, the current squabble between the US and Saudi Arabia is an opportunity. While Beijing would know that Riyadh would in all probability not align fully with its interests, pulling them more towards a central, and "independent" line of thinking would be



sufficient. For the US, recent attempts by President Joe Biden to pacify MBS and make attempts to apply a band-aid to the frayed bilateral seem to have not gone according to plan. For Biden, the fact that MBS teamed up with Moscow and cut oil production before the US midterm elections leading to volatile inflation left a bad taste in the mouth. Biden, who had called Saudi a pariah state earlier, and the US being slow institutionally to mount a response when refineries in the country were attacked by drones operated by Iran-backed Houthi rebels, has fallen out of favour with the Crown Prince who believes a Republican White House is more aligned with their interests. The botched US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 has only added to the anxieties in capitals such as Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.

The 2019 attack against the oil facilities in Saudi Arabia is perhaps an underplayed event in how Riyadh calculates security today, and the perception of Beijing being a 'replacement' big power in place of the US in the region is an overplayed one. China's outreach to the Arab states is not a zero-sum game for Xi Jinping. A significant reason behind the depression in US-Saudi ties is the issue of Iran, a country with whom China signed a 25-year-long strategic cooperation partnership in March 2021, which by some estimates is placed at around US\$400 billion. This deal, perhaps automatically, to a large extent, nullifies any argument that China is the country that will come to the aid of the Arab world militarily. While there is a palpable feeling of a waning US influence in the region, Washington is still expected to remain a critical external kinetic operator.

However, the above does not mean China is not in the fray. Beijing's increasing influence is real, and something to watch out for. While it may be limited in its strategic presence, China's predominant use of its eco-

nomie muscle to make space for itself is noteworthy. Technology is one of the frontlines where multiple states are increasingly taking a hard stance against Beijing. A part of the US\$30-billion worth of agreements between Riyadh and Beijing is a significant component going to Huawei, giving China deeper access to critical tech in the region, specifically the development of 5G infrastructure, raising unease in Washington over the proximity of Chinese tech to American military tech stationed across the region. While the US has managed to use its leverage

with Israel to push it away from getting too close to Beijing, not much success has been achieved with the Gulf states. China's inroads in the region also offer a fundamental challenge for new 'minilaterals' such as the I2U2 grouping (India-Israel-US-UAE). While a country such as India that has more extensive and expansive joint military exercises programme with the region than China, the geoeconomics component of geopolitics today is significant. For example, within the I2U2, while India has banned dozens of Chinese apps and keeps the likes of Huawei at a distance, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) embraces it. These divisions of interest are what Beijing hopes to achieve in the short term as it looks to build its long-term power. Finally, the visit of Xi Jinping to Saudi Arabia is not a story of China's growing influence. It is, for now, the story of Saudi Arabia's hedging of interest, seeking a more independent foreign policy, and looking towards more equity in its bilateral with the US. Beijing is the capital Riyadh is working through to increase its regional and international play, to China's delight and US's dismay.

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## ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਦੁਨੀਆ

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## ਕੀ ਸੱਚਮੁੱਚ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਨੂੰ ਅਮਰੀਕਾ ਵਿਚ ਕੀਤਾ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ ਗ੍ਰਿਫਤਾਰ ?

ਭਾਰਤੀ ਮੀਡੀਆ ਨੇ ਕੀਤੀ ਪੁਸ਼ਟੀ ਪਰ ਅਮਰੀਕੀ ਮੀਡੀਆ ਨੇ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਦੇ ਮਾਮਲੇ ਵਿਚ ਬਿਲਕੁਲ ਚੁੱਪ ਕਿਉਂ ?

ਸਿੱਧੂ ਮੁਸੇਵਾਲਾ ਕਤਲ ਕਾਂਡ ਤੋਂ ਬਾਅਦ ਸੁਰਖੀਆਂ ਵਿਚ ਆਇਆ ਸੀ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ



## ਪੁਲਿਸ ਰਿਕਾਰਡ 'ਚ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਬਾਰੇ ਕੀ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਹੈ

ਇਹ ਰਿਪੋਰਟ ਪੁਲਿਸ ਦੇ ਸੀਨੀਅਰ ਅਧਿਕਾਰੀਆਂ, ਸਿੱਧੂ ਮੁਸੇਵਾਲਾ ਕੇਸ ਵਿਚ ਦਾਇਰ ਚਾਰਜਸ਼ੀਟ ਅਤੇ ਬਰਾੜ ਦੇ ਨਾਂ 'ਤੇ ਜਾਰੀ ਫੋਡ ਕਾਰਡ ਨੋਟਿਸ 'ਤੇ ਅਧਾਰਤ ਹੈ। ਬੀਬੀਸੀ ਸੁਤੰਤਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ ਇਸ ਦੀ ਪੁਸ਼ਟੀ ਨਹੀਂ ਕਰਦਾ। ਭਾਵੇਂ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ (ਅਸਲੀ ਨਾਂ ਸਤਿਦਰਸ਼ੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ) ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਕਾਇਮ ਸਿੱਧੂ ਮੁਸੇਵਾਲਾ ਦੇ ਕਤਲ ਤੋਂ ਬਾਅਦ ਸੁਰਖੀਆਂ ਵਿਚ ਆਇਆ ਸੀ। ਜਦੋਂ ਮੁਸੇਵਾਲਾ ਦਾ ਕਤਲ ਹੋਇਆ ਤਾਂ ਉਸ ਦੇ ਭਰਾ ਦੇਰ ਬਾਅਦ ਹੀ ਸੋਲਨ ਮੀਡੀਆ ਉੱਤੇ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਨਾਂ ਦੇ ਸ਼ਬਦ ਨੇ ਕਤਲਕਾਂਡ ਨੂੰ ਅੱਜਾਮ ਦੇਣ ਦੀ ਜਾਂ ਮਿਥਾਈ ਲਈ ਸੀ। ਪੰਜਾਬ ਪੁਲਿਸ ਦੇ ਸੁਰਾ ਮੁਰਾਬਕ ਬਰਾੜ ਨੇ ਲਗਭਗ 10 ਸਾਲ ਪਹਿਲਾਂ ਅਫ਼ਗਾਨ ਦੀ ਦੁਨੀਆਂ ਵਿਚ ਪਰ ਪਹਿਲਾਂ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਅਤੇ ਚੰਡੀਗੜ੍ਹ ਪੁਲਿਸ ਦੀਆਂ ਨਜ਼ਰਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ 'ਤੇ ਅਕਤੂਬਰ 2020 ਵਿਚ ਆਇਆ।

ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਦੇ ਰਿਕਾਰਡ ਗੁਰਮਲ ਬਰਾੜ ਦਾ ਚੰਡੀਗੜ੍ਹ ਵਿਚ ਕਬਜ਼ਾ ਤੋੜ 'ਤੇ ਬੀਬੀਸੀ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਕਰ ਦਿੱਤਾ ਗਿਆ ਸੀ। ਗੁਰਮਲ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਦੁਨੀਵਰਸਿਟੀ ਦੇ ਵਿਦਿਆਰਥੀ ਸੋਨਾਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਦਾ ਸਾਥਕ ਸੁਭਾ ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨ ਸੀ। ਸਿੱਧੂ ਮੁਸੇਵਾਲਾ ਕੇਸ ਵਿਚ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਨੂੰ ਸੋਨਾਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਿੱਧੂ ਮੁਸੇਵਾਲਾ ਦੇ ਕਤਲ ਦੇ ਮੁੱਖ ਸ਼ਰਫਨਾ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਨੂੰ ਅਮਰੀਕੀ ਪੁਲਿਸ ਨੇ ਗ੍ਰਿਫਤਾਰ ਕਰ ਲਿਆ ਹੈ, ਇਸ ਗੱਲ ਦੀ ਪੁਸ਼ਟੀ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਦੇ ਮੁੱਖ ਮੰਤਰੀ ਭਗਵੰਤ ਮਾਨ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਵੀ ਕਰ ਦਿੱਤੀ ਗਈ ਹੈ, ਪਰ ਕੀ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਨੂੰ ਸੱਚਮੁੱਚ ਗ੍ਰਿਫਤਾਰ ਕਰ ਲਿਆ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ? ਇਸ ਬਾਰੇ ਹਾਲੇ ਤੱਕ ਅਧਿਕਾਰਤ ਤੌਰ 'ਤੇ ਅਮਰੀਕਾ ਦੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਵੀ ਜਾਚ ਏਜੰਸੀ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਪੁਸ਼ਟੀ ਨਹੀਂ ਕੀਤੀ ਗਈ ਹੈ। ਇਸ ਗੱਲ 'ਤੇ ਸ਼ੱਕ ਵੀ ਕੀਤੀ ਜਾ ਸਕਦੀ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਸੱਚਮੁੱਚੀ ਸਿੱਧੂ ਮੁਸੇਵਾਲਾ ਕਤਲ ਦੇ ਮਾਮਲੇ ਵਿਚ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਨੂੰ ਅਮਰੀਕਾ ਦੀ ਪੁਲਿਸ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਗ੍ਰਿਫਤਾਰ ਕੀਤਾ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ। ਇਸ ਸਬੰਧੀ ਜਦੋਂ ਸਾਰੇ ਪ੍ਰਤੀਨਿਧੀ ਨੇ ਅਮਰੀਕਾ ਦੇ ਜਾਚ ਏਜੰਸੀਆਂ ਦੇ ਰਿਕਾਰਡ ਵਰਲੋਂ ਤਾਂ ਉਥੇ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਦੀ ਗ੍ਰਿਫਤਾਰੀ ਬਾਰੇ ਕਿਸੇ ਵੀ ਤਰ੍ਹਾਂ ਦੀ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਨਹੀਂ ਸੀ। ਇਸ ਮੰਨਣਾ ਬਦਲਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਦੇ ਮਾਮਲੇ ਵਿਚ ਅਮਰੀਕੀ ਦੀਆਂ ਸਾਰੀਆਂ ਜਾਚ ਏਜੰਸੀਆਂ ਦਾ ਰਿਕਾਰਡ ਅਨਾਲਾਈਨ ਨਿਆ ਹੈ।

ਸੁਰਾ ਕੀ ਕੀ ਹਰੇ ?

ਨਿਊਯਾਰਕ (ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਦੁਨੀਆਂ ਵਿੱਚ) ਪੰਜਾਬ ਦੇ ਮਸ਼ਹੂਰ ਸਿੱਧੂ ਮੁਸੇਵਾਲਾ ਦੇ ਕਤਲ ਦੇ ਮੁੱਖ ਸ਼ਰਫਨਾ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਨੂੰ ਅਮਰੀਕੀ ਪੁਲਿਸ ਨੇ ਗ੍ਰਿਫਤਾਰ ਕਰ ਲਿਆ ਹੈ, ਇਸ ਗੱਲ ਦੀ ਪੁਸ਼ਟੀ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਦੇ ਮੁੱਖ ਮੰਤਰੀ ਭਗਵੰਤ ਮਾਨ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਵੀ ਕਰ ਦਿੱਤੀ ਗਈ ਹੈ, ਪਰ ਕੀ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਨੂੰ ਸੱਚਮੁੱਚ ਗ੍ਰਿਫਤਾਰ ਕਰ ਲਿਆ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ? ਇਸ ਬਾਰੇ ਹਾਲੇ ਤੱਕ ਅਧਿਕਾਰਤ ਤੌਰ 'ਤੇ ਅਮਰੀਕਾ ਦੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਵੀ ਜਾਚ ਏਜੰਸੀ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਪੁਸ਼ਟੀ ਨਹੀਂ ਕੀਤੀ ਗਈ ਹੈ। ਇਸ ਗੱਲ 'ਤੇ ਸ਼ੱਕ ਵੀ ਕੀਤੀ ਜਾ ਸਕਦੀ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਸੱਚਮੁੱਚੀ ਸਿੱਧੂ ਮੁਸੇਵਾਲਾ ਕਤਲ ਦੇ ਮਾਮਲੇ ਵਿਚ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਨੂੰ ਅਮਰੀਕਾ ਦੀ ਪੁਲਿਸ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਗ੍ਰਿਫਤਾਰ ਕੀਤਾ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ। ਇਸ ਸਬੰਧੀ ਜਦੋਂ ਸਾਰੇ ਪ੍ਰਤੀਨਿਧੀ ਨੇ ਅਮਰੀਕਾ ਦੇ ਜਾਚ ਏਜੰਸੀਆਂ ਦੇ ਰਿਕਾਰਡ ਵਰਲੋਂ ਤਾਂ ਉਥੇ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਦੀ ਗ੍ਰਿਫਤਾਰੀ ਬਾਰੇ ਕਿਸੇ ਵੀ ਤਰ੍ਹਾਂ ਦੀ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਨਹੀਂ ਸੀ। ਇਸ ਮੰਨਣਾ ਬਦਲਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਦੇ ਮਾਮਲੇ ਵਿਚ ਅਮਰੀਕੀ ਦੀਆਂ ਸਾਰੀਆਂ ਜਾਚ ਏਜੰਸੀਆਂ ਦਾ ਰਿਕਾਰਡ ਅਨਾਲਾਈਨ ਨਿਆ ਹੈ।



ਕੋਰੀ ਪਹਿਲਾਂ ਮਾਲਵਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਸੀ ਜਿਸ ਵਿਚ ਉਸਦਾ ਨਾਂ ਆਇਆ। ਪੁਲਿਸ ਸੁਰਾ ਦਾ ਕਹਿਣਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਗੁਰਮਲ ਪੰਡਰਾਲ ਦੇ ਕਤਲ ਤੋਂ ਬਾਅਦ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਨੇ ਫ਼ੀਦਕੋਟ ਅਤੇ ਮੁਕਤਸਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਖੇਤਰਾਂ ਦੇ ਵੱਖ-ਵੱਖ ਵਿਅਕਤੀਆਂ ਨੂੰ ਗ੍ਰਿਫਤਾਰ ਤੋੜ 'ਤੇ ਫਿਰੀ ਲਈ ਕਾਲ ਕਰਨੀਆਂ ਸ਼ੁਰੂ ਕਰ ਦਿੱਤੀਆਂ ਸਨ।

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# Tawang Clash: How India Can Deal With Land-Hungry China

The attempted intrusion in Yangtze in the Tawang sector of Arunachal Pradesh by a large, well-prepared and armed with handheld weapons Chinese PLA group, late in the night of 9-10 December 2022, was a coordinated action, intending to exploit adverse weather conditions to grab crucial Indian territory. The aim was to alter the status quo of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) by taking control of a peak which could provide it with observation into depth areas and also deny Indians observation into China. Yangtze is one of the 25 recognised disputed points between the two countries, though China has been claiming complete Arunachal Pradesh as a part of southern Tibet. These regions have been identified through either working group dialogues, the exchange of maps or Chinese PLA actions. Yangtze, located 25 km from Tawang, has remained a major friction point between the two nations. The Chinese build-up, exploiting its border villages in the vicinity, was observed by Indian troops who moved reserves close to the location to counter any possible misadventure, keeping them hidden from Chinese observation. When Chinese troops crossed the LAC and attempted to assault Indian sentries, Indian reserves quickly mobilised and counter-attacked the Chinese. Hand-to-hand combat ensued and the Chinese were forced back with large numbers of physical casualties. Indian troops also suffered a few injuries which, as per the defence minister, were 'not serious.' While Indian figures are available, China, as expected, continues to hide its casualty figures. It would, a month or two down the line, mention one or two injured. It has been the Chinese norm to downplay its losses, solely to protect the image of the PLA. The next day there was a 'flag meeting' between the two commanders and normalcy was restored. It was another planned Chinese assault failing. This was the first serious physical clash after Galwan. Yangtze is an important height held by India and it provides good observation into the Chinese bowl. In case occupied by China, it would open observation onto the Indian side. There is also a spring on the Chinese side of the LAC, which is sacred to Buddhists and has been closed to all, Indian and Chinese citizens, for the past few years.

Every year, China attempts to invade the region to stake its claim, exploiting differing perceptions of the LAC. There was a standoff in October 2021, when a Chinese patrol similarly crossed the LAC. It was diffused within a few hours. The Chinese strength then was around 100 but was 300 this time and better armed. The last physical clash in this region was in 2016. In winters, India reduces its deployment in the region due to maintenance issues, which the Chinese attempted to take advantage of. However, it was not to be. Not only were the Chinese pushed

back but Indian soldiers followed the Chinese into their territory, causing panic. While the Indian media broke the news on 12 December, three days after the incident, the Chinese media maintained silence. It was only after a statement was issued by the defence minister in both houses of Parliament were the Chinese forced to react. The Chinese military spokesperson stated, 'PLA was carrying out a regular patrol in Dongzhong area and was blocked by Indian Army illegally crossing the LAC.' The Chinese foreign office spokesperson added that the 'situation has stabilised'.

This implies that China may have attempted to exploit the reduced Indian deployment, which it could then convert into a victory, but the pushing back of its troops forced it into an embarrassed silence. Had India not announced the incident, China would have maintained ignorance. China has, despite larger losses and pullback, been projecting Galwan as a victory. It continues to blame India for the incident as it has done in the case of Yangtze, not that it matters as India strictly adheres to the LAC. Chinese offensive moves towards grabbing Indian territory

have been ongoing for years. There have been standoffs and minor clashes whenever the patrols have come into contact. However, most cases were resolved either through diplomatic parleys or local commander-level talks.



General Bipin Rawat had stated in September 2017, 'As far as the Northern adversary is concerned, flexing of muscles has started. Salami slicing, taking over territory in a very gradual manner, testing our limits or threshold is something we have to be wary about.' The Chinese philosophy appears to be to occupy disputed land, prolong discussions, refuse to withdraw, develop infrastructure and finally alter the status quo. India has, as a precaution, enhanced its troop density in the region. It is almost similar to the scenario in Ladakh, where our troop deploy-

ment is high as the scenario remains tense and uncertain. The question to consider is whether additional deployment in regions where clashes occur is the new norm. This is not a logical solution for the long term. While the Chinese have built habitat and also border villages, which act as staging points, Indian troops would initially be at an administrative disadvantage till habitat is constructed. India needs to understand the Chinese motive and plan similar actions on the Chinese side. Further, employing 300 troops, armed with weapons, deployed in two waves, to grab a peak or project their claim line would require clearance from Beijing. It would be beyond the power of the Chinese Western Theatre commander. This implies that Beijing continues to display an offensive mindset aimed at pushing India to move its troops outwards and also altering the LAC. The fact remains that for China, India is an adversary that it must embarrass and display in poor light if it seeks to project itself as the sole power in Asia. The troops armed with drones to video film their operation only justifies that their intent was to embarrass India. Reduction in India-China diplomatic engagement has had no impact in changing Chinese behaviour. India needs to move beyond, possibly on the economic front or enhance its role in the Quad to send a message that it will continue to stand up to China.

## Taliban stands divided. Why it has implications for the world and India

From the Kabul hotel blast to ex-president Hamid Karzai's UAE trip, what Taliban power struggle means for the world

A Suicide bomber in Kabul Monday blew himself up at a hotel popular among visiting Chinese nationals, giving rise to speculation that the Taliban was losing control over its suicide squads. The Kabul hotel attack came one day after clashes between the Taliban security forces and the Pakistani military across the Durand Line, between Spin Boldak and Chaman, in which seven Pakistanis lost their lives. The Pakistan embassy in Kabul was attacked only a fortnight ago, and a senior Pakistani diplomat was targeted.

At about the same time, former Afghan president Hamid Karzai, under house arrest in Kabul since the Taliban seized power on 15 August last year, was finally allowed to leave for a visit to the UAE and Germany with his close aide and confidante, Omar Zakhilwal.

So, what's going on in Afghanistan? Why are the Taliban, said to be protégés of the Pakistan military establishment, turning on their masters? Why, indeed, is Karzai being allowed to fly out to Germany after meeting with the US Special envoy to Afghanistan, Thomas West, in the UAE? Internal differences out in the open

Clearly, the long-suspected rift between the senior Taliban leadership seems to

be finally out in the open. Afghan analysts who spoke to ThePrint on the condition of anonymity said that differences of opinion on leading the country are surfacing between Taliban supreme leader Haibatullah Akhundzada and Mullah Yaqoob, acting defence minister and son of Mullah Omar, the powerful founder of the terror group.

The analyst said that Mullah Yaqoob—who had fancied himself as a contender for the post when the previous Taliban Amir, Mullah Mansoor, was killed in a US drone strike in 2016—was beaten to the game when Ayman Al-Zawahiri, the Egyptian-born close confidante of Osama bin Laden, threw his weight behind Haibatullah.

Now it seems both have clear differences on the future of Afghanistan. While Haibatullah favours a seriously conservative, puritanical approach to the Sharia, Yaqoob says that the pursuit of Sharia should coexist with basic norms followed by the international community: meaning Afghanistan cannot regress into its earlier incarnation but must learn to rejoin the world.

The Kabul hotel blast—in which two foreigners were injured but none killed—and Karzai's journey to Germany are two manifestations of this struggle for power

in the heart of the Taliban today.

Karzai's travels abroad are most significant. His wife and three daughters were recently allowed to go to Tehran and Istanbul for a short holiday, but Karzai was not allowed to leave. The fact that he is now using his passport is a good sign. It is said that Yaqoob pushed for Karzai to go abroad—like he had insisted last year that Abdullah Abdullah, CEO and second only to Karzai in political importance, be allowed to fly to Delhi occasionally. A tense power tussle. Could this constitute an ice-breaker between Afghanistan and the US-led Western nations, which have so far resisted opening a dialogue with the Taliban? The fact that Thomas West happened to be in the UAE when Karzai landed and that he met with other Taliban leaders is undoubtedly significant. Haibatullah, on the other hand, is believed to strongly support the Ministry of Vice and Virtue, which has said that girls should not be allowed to study after Class 6, or more recently, that women cannot use public parks and playgrounds. The flogging of three women in Logar province, an hour outside of Kabul, is also said to have been done to please the ultraconservative head of the Taliban.





## Tawang to AIIMS, Chinese intrusion has a pattern-to keep India in a reactive mode

**After every diplomatic engagement with India, China seems to read the tea leaves far better than New Delhi does.**

A deadly cyberattack that worked as a test mule, then a physical lunge across high-altitude icy features are part of China's strategy to constantly keep India in a reactive mode. First, it was the cyberattack on 23 November, which paralysed the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in Delhi. And now, it is the unilateral actions across the McMahon Line in Arunachal Pradesh's Tawang district. New Delhi's unwillingness, or inability, to take the initiative has allowed Beijing to run amok with changing rules of engagement as and where it deems fit. This pattern is likely to continue, given the fondness to adopt the ostrich posture at the highest level in India.

This is in stark contrast to other Asian neighbours of China or even those who identify Beijing as the principal national security threat globally. India's continued timidity vis-a-vis China emboldens Beijing policymakers to keep pushing the red lines of acceptable behaviour. So, despite incontrovertible evidence of elements in China hacking into AIIMS Delhi servers, India's unwillingness to officially pin a name on the culprit further motivates the country to meddle with the undeclared boundary line in western Arunachal Pradesh. There is nothing unusual about the intrusion attempt in Tawang other than that it happened in December.

Beijing tracks New Delhi's moves

What makes little sense is that the first official acknowledgement about an altercation in Tawang was

made on 9 December, when the terrain would have required many more days for preparation and execution. The basic sense of high-altitude mobilisation and logistics suggests China was embarking on this provocative adventure as India was focused on its latest series of state assembly elections. Given India's penchant for electoral fortunes over policy, China timed its attempted assault to maximise benefits. Beijing analyses India's obsession with elections as a critical flaw in its ability to pursue policies. It seems to know New Delhi better than India does. This is part of China's strategy to keep India engaged in a diplomatic dialogue while honing its own military skills and infrastructure. The talks buy time

by giving news-hungry India tidbits of information about being busy with diplomatic progress. Even if it hasn't amounted to much in the end, as more than 15 rounds of China-India talks suggest over Ladakh, Beijing hasn't moved positions on the ground to accommodate India. It has only further consolidated control over its acquired territory since April 2020. Where India gained from a military perspective, it, unfortunately, gave away diplomatically.

After every diplomatic engagement with India, China seems to read the tea leaves far better than New Delhi does. It has clearly concluded that India is not ready for a fight as it simply doesn't have the money. That it doesn't have a stomach is given from the silence at the

highest level. Indian policymakers have declared their inability to fight because of financial constraints, which is not lost on China. For nothing else explains the compulsions of the armed forces to implement a recruitment scheme—Agnipath—that only exacerbates the deep shortages in troop numbers. At the same time, India dithers over sanctioning a third aircraft carrier after INS Vikrant, even as analysts and geography declare that it is the best bet to keep a check on Chinese expansionism. The reluctance to sanction the third aircraft carrier—INS Vishal—project flies in the face of India's indigenisation programme, where it was supposed to have embarked on a journey of self-sufficiency. This third carrier is

supposed to be India's safety bet, both in terms of training opportunities as well as operational deployment. But India is unwilling, or unable, to sanction the project, even as the country continues to engage China diplomatically and economically. The fact that India continues to engage China economically and that the relationship grows at an astronomical pace is not lost on Chinese policymakers. They understand that India seeks economic substance over political or military progress. Nothing else explains the simple arithmetic of India's trade figures with China, even when it is known to have renege on agreements, intruded into Indian territory and defied international norms of military-diplomatic exchanges.



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# The Making of A Nation: How Sardar Patel Integrated 562 Princely States

Present-day India owes an immeasurable debt of gratitude to the vision, tact, diplomacy and pragmatic approach of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the indomitable man who integrated 562 princely states with the Union of India and prevented the Balkanisation of the newly-independent country.

Back in 1947, India had finally gained a hard-fought independence but it had come with besetting problems — partition, communal riots and a refugee crisis. Add to that crippling resource constraint, fledgeling institutions and an ill-equipped colonial machinery and it's not difficult to understand why India's new government found the integration of more than 500 princely states a tough nut to crack. Having made his mark in the Kheda and Bardoli satyagrahas (during which he earned the title of 'Sardar'), by 1946, Vallabhbhai Patel had already become one of the most popular leaders of the freedom struggle. Stoic and simple in his habits, he was a man of few words but when he did talk, people listened.

Which is why he was given the formidable task of integrating the princely states as India's first deputy prime minister and home minister. With the swiftness of a military commander and skill of an innate diplomat, he got to work, ably assisted by V.P. Menon (then the Constitutional Adviser to Lord Mountbatten and later, the secretary of the Ministry of the States ). The Indian Independence Act of 1947 (based on the Mountbatten Plan) provided for the lapse of paramountcy of the British Crown over the Indian states. It also gave each of these rulers the option to accede to the newly born dominions India or Pakistan or continue as an independent sovereign state.

Realising the need to get these 500-odd chiefdoms to accede to India before the day of independence, Patel and Menon began using all the tricks in the bag — including the use of both force and friendly advice — to achieve their integration with the Indian dominion.

But the process was far from simple. Mollycoddled as well as exploited by the British for de-



cadecades, many of the rulers saw the departure of the British as the ideal moment to declare autonomy and announce their independent statehood on the world map. [copied link icon](#)

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Present-day India owes an immeasurable debt of gratitude to the vision, tact, diplomacy and pragmatic approach of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the indomitable man who integrated 562 princely states with the Union of India and prevented the Balkanisation of the newly-independent country. Back in 1947, India had finally gained a hard-fought independence but it had come with besetting problems — partition, communal riots and a refugee crisis. Add to that crippling resource constraint, fledgeling institutions and an ill-equipped colonial machinery and it's not difficult to understand why India's new government found the integration of more than 500 princely states a tough nut to crack.

Patel, India's first deputy prime minister and the minister of home affairs, would not just handle these problems with deftness and dexterity but would go on to truly become the "Architect of Modern India".

Here's the story of how the visionary leader shaped India's destiny with single-minded devotion.

Having made his mark in the Kheda and Bardoli satyagrahas (during which he earned the title of 'Sardar'), by 1946, Vallabhbhai Patel had already become one of the most popular leaders of the freedom struggle. Stoic and simple in his habits, he was a man of few words but when he

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Back then, the princely states covered 48% of the area of pre-Independent India and constituted 28% of its population. While these kingdoms were not legally a part of British India, in reality, they were completely subordinate to the British Crown.

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But the process was far from simple. Mollycoddled as well as exploited by the British for decades, many of the rulers saw the departure of the British as the ideal moment to declare autonomy and announce their independent statehood on the world map.

From invoking the patriotism of the princes to reminding them of the possibility of anarchy on event of their refusal to join, he kept trying to convince them to join India. He also introduced the concept of "privy purses" — a payment to be made to royal families for their agreement to merge with India. "Through the spring of 1947, Patel threw a series of lunch parties, where he urged his princely guests to help the Congress in framing a new constitution of India," writes historian Ramachandra Guha in his work, "India after Gandhi." Patel's tireless efforts paid off when most of the rulers agreed to the dissolution of their respective states, surrendering control of thousands of villages, jagirs, palaces, institutes, cash balances amounting to crores and a railway system of about 12,000 miles to the Indian government without receiving any compensation. By 15 August 1947, the process of integration of princely states was almost complete except for a few, who held out. Some simply delayed signing the Instrument of Accession — like Piploda, a small state in central India that did not accede to India until March 1948. In June 1947, with the transfer of power looming on the horizon, Maharaja Hanvant Singh ascended the throne of Jodhpur and began faltering in the commitment his predecessor had made about joining India. Young and inexperienced, he reckoned that may get a better "deal" from Pakistan since his state was contiguous with the country. So Hanvant Singh entered into negotiations with Mohammed Ali Jinnah, who is reported to have given the Maharaja

a signed blank sheet of paper to list all his demands. From free access to the Karachi port to arms manufacturing and importing, the princely state was allowed to accede to Pakistan on any terms it chose. After the carrots, came the stick in the form of more important warnings — it was pointed out that the accession of a predominantly Hindu state to Pakistan would violate the basic tenet of the two-nation theory and was very likely to cause communal violence in the State. Thus, Jinnah's blank cheque was quickly negated and Jodhpur acceded to India. Next came Junagadh (now in Gujarat), a kingdom with nearly 80% Hindu population whose Muslim ruler decided to accede to Pakistan on September 15, 1947. The outraged people of Junagadh rose against the Nawab's rule in several parts of the state, forcing the ruler to flee to Karachi with his family and formed a provisional Government there. Patel asked Pakistan to reverse its acceptance of the accession and to hold a plebiscite. When it refused, he sent the Indian Army to annex the princely state on November 1, 1947. As for Kashmir, a princely state with a Hindu king ruling over a predominant Muslim population, it had remained reluctant to join either of the two dominions. The case of this strategically-located kingdom was not just very different but also one of the toughest as it had important international boundaries — to the east was Tibet, to the northeast lay China and to the northwest was Afghanistan.



# Wells Fargo ordered to pay \$3.7 billion for 'illegal activity'



(News Agency) Federal regulators fined Wells Fargo a record \$1.7 billion on Tuesday for "widespread mismanagement" over multiple years that harmed over 16 million consumer accounts. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau said Wells Fargo's "illegal activity" included repeatedly misapplying loan payments, wrongfully foreclosing on homes, illegally repossessing vehicles, incorrectly as-

sessing fees and interest and charging surprise overdraft fees.

The CFPB ordered Wells Fargo (WFC) to pay the \$1.7 billion civil penalty in addition to more than \$2 billion to compensate consumers for a range of "illegal activity." CFPB officials say this is the largest penalty imposed by the agency.

The misconduct described by the CFPB echoes previously reported revelations

that have emerged about Wells Fargo since 2016 when the bank's fake-accounts scandal created a national firestorm.

"Wells Fargo's rinse-repeat cycle of violating the law has harmed millions of American families," Rohit Chopra, the CFPB's director, said in a statement.

Officials also made clear on Tuesday that Wells Fargo is not nearly out of the penalty box with regulators.

## 'Repeat offender'

Chopra described Wells Fargo as a "repeat offender" and a "corporate recidivist," adding that Tuesday's fine is just an "initial step" towards holding the bank accountable. During a call with reporters, Chopra said the new settlement should not be read as a signal that "Wells Fargo has moved past its long-standing problems or

that the CFPB's work is done here."

For instance, Chopra noted that the settlement does not provide immunity for individuals at Wells Fargo, and the agency recognizes the \$3.7 billion in fines and restitution will not fix the bank's problems. Although Chopra credited Wells Fargo with making some progress, he said it's not clear "they are making rapid enough progress" and said the agency is concerned that the bank's product launches, growth initiatives and profit-boosting efforts have "delayed needed reform."

Hinting at further penalties ahead, the CFPB official said regulators "must consider whether additional limitations need to be placed on Wells Fargo" beyond the unprecedented asset cap imposed in 2018. In a state-

ment, Wells Fargo emphasized that the broad-reaching settlement with the CFPB resolves multiple matters, most of which have been "outstanding for several years." The bank said the required actions are "already substantially complete." "We and our regulators have identified a series of unacceptable practices that we have been working systematically to change and provide customer remediation where warranted," Wells Fargo CEO Charlie Scharf said in the statement. "This far-reaching agreement is an important milestone in our work to transform the operating practices at Wells Fargo and to put these issues behind us." Wells Fargo said it expects the CFPB settlement will cost it \$3.5 billion before taxes in the fourth quarter.

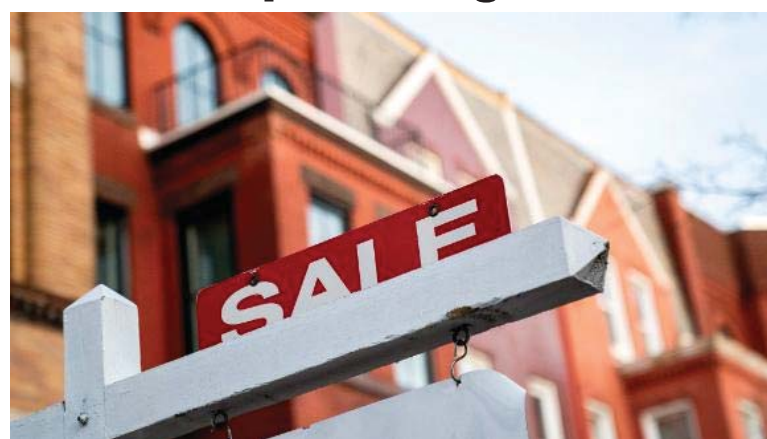
# Housing slump likely to continue but some see hopeful signs ahead

(News Agency) Mortgage rates have ticked down recently, but are still up dramatically from a year ago thanks to the surge in long-term bond yields as the Federal Reserve hiked interest rates. While that's already had a negative impact on the housing market, we'll get more details this week about how

much worse the damage has become.

A long list of housing data is on tap. On Tuesday the US Census Bureau will report housing starts and building permits figures for November, followed by Friday's release of new home sales data for the same month. In between that will be the November

existing home sales numbers from the National Association of Realtors on Wednesday, as well as weekly data on mortgage rates and applications on Thursday. For the past few months, existing and new home sales have been steadily declining because of the spike in rates and the fact that home



## Congress may pass new retirement rules. These changes are on the table

(News Agency) There soon may be new retirement rules in place that could make it easier for Americans to accumulate retirement savings — and make it less costly to withdraw them — if lawmakers pass a major spending package this week.

The retirement savings provisions — known as Secure 2.0 — were drawn from a House-passed bill and bills that were passed by two Senate committees.

Most employers starting new workplace retirement savings plans could be required to automatically enroll employees in the plan. (It is currently optional for employers to do so.) It would then be up to the employee to actively opt out if they don't wish to participate. The Secure 2.0 provision would require employers set a default contribution rate of at least 3% but not more than 10% for the employee plus an automatic contribution escalation of 1% per year up to a maximum contribution rate of at least 10% but not more than 15%.

When you have to pay down student loan debt, it makes it harder to save for retire-

ment. Secure 2.0 would let employers make a matching contribution to an employee's retirement plan based on their qualified student loan payments. That way, it would ensure that the employee is building retirement savings no matter what. It used to be that when you turned 70-1/2 you had to start withdrawing a required minimum amount from your 401(k) or IRA every year. Then, the age moved up to 72. Under the Secure 2.0 package, it would move up to 73 starting in 2023 and then to 75 a decade later. Normally if you tap your 401(k) before age 59-1/2, you must not only pay taxes on that money, but also pay a 10% early-withdrawal penalty. For employees who are dissuaded from saving money in a tax-deferred retirement plan because they are concerned it would be too complicated and costly to access it for emergencies, Secure 2.0 may assuage that fear: It would let employees make a penalty-free withdrawal of up to \$1,000 a year for emergencies. While employees would still owe income tax on that withdrawal in the year it's made, they could get that tax refunded if they repay the withdrawal within three years.

prices remain stubbornly high for first-time buyers. Housing starts and building permits have been choppy on a month-to-month basis, but those figures are both down from a year ago. Still, there are some promising signs that the worst could soon be over. Shares of Lennar (LEN), one of the largest homebuilders in the US, rallied after reporting earnings last week. Revenue topped forecasts and the company's guidance for the number of homes it expected to deliver next year was a little higher than analysts' estimates as well.

Lennar investors "may be looking ahead to 2023, perhaps crossing the valley from recession to potential recovery," according to CFRA Research analyst Kenneth Leon. Others in the industry

are cautiously optimistic as well. According to data from Amherst Group, an investment firm that buys single-family homes to rent out, it's important to put the recent slide in prices in context. Amherst said home prices are still up about 40% from pre-pandemic levels. So even a further drop of about 15% would merely bring them to mid-2021 levels. In other words, this isn't like the mid-2000s real estate bubble bursting. It's also worth noting that the job market is still strong and wages are growing. What's more, many consumers still have decent levels of excess savings thanks to pandemic era government stimulus. That all amounts to a few good reasons why the housing market could avoid a severe and prolonged slump.



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# Study that should arouse concern: Men with low libido are twice as likely to suffer an early death, scientists find



to prospectively examine associations between sexual interest and all-cause mortality, and cardiovascular and cancer mortality in a community-based population.' The study, published in the journal PLOS One, was the first to study the association between libido and mortality. The scientists wrote: 'Although sexual activity and sexual satisfaction are considered of benefit to psychological health and wellbeing in older groups, the association between sexual interest and longevity has not been investigated.' In the sample of 20,969 people - 8,558 males and 12,411 females - the scientists studied the results of people's health check-ins during which they were asked to fill out sexual interest questionnaires. Women in the study were more than twice as likely to report lower libido, yet scientists did not establish a link between that and mortality. People who reported a lack of interest in sex trended older, were more likely to drink more, had diabetes, laughed less, experienced some kind of

psychological distress, and had lower levels of education.

Men with lower sex drive were also more like to report lacking 'ikigai', a Japanese term for a reason for living, or the joy and goal of having a life worth living.

'Based on these results, we speculate that maintaining sexual interest may be related to positive psychological well-being and 'ikigai' especially among men,' scientists wrote.

While they did not pinpoint the reason for the link between longevity and libido, their findings support established science to support the notion that a healthy sex life contributes to better health overall.

The benefits of sex are wide ranging and can improve sleep, bolster the immune system, tamp down depression and anxiety, and improve heart health.

Still, 'further study is required to clarify the mechanisms which underlie the preventive effects of sexual interest on mortality,' the scientists concluded.

The study had a major caveat. It focused on a relatively small

population in a single region of Japan, meaning the findings may not apply to the rest of the globe. While many developed countries such as Canada promote sexual health as a key for seniors to stay healthy, other countries including Japan has 'more prejudice about sex among the elderly than in the Western world'.

'We hope our findings will help promote public health through advocating sexuality in Japan,' they said.



(SAI Bureau) Men with low libido are up to twice as likely to suffer an early death than their peers, a study suggests. Researchers say a persistent lack of sexual interest can be a sign of poor habits like smoking, drinking or overeating - which raise the risk of chronic disease. They looked at the medical records and survey answers of more than 20,000 men and women in Japan for over a decade. Results showed males over 40 who had low libido were nearly twice as likely to die from cancer, while the risk of a heart disease death was one-and-a-half times greater. The findings remained true even after the scientists accounted for smoking, alcohol use, BMI, underlying health conditions, exercise levels and other variables. The scientists speculate that poor lifestyle habits reduced men's sex drives. The study authors from Yamagata University said: 'Although sexual activity and sexual satisfaction are considered of benefit to psychological health and wellbeing in older groups, the association between sexual interest and longevity has not been investigated. 'This study is the first

## Trying to get rid of a cold fast? Experts share 4 simple steps which could help you feel better in just 24 hours

(SAI Bureau) Once you get a cold, you want to get rid of it fast. Especially with it being this close to Christmas. Getting plenty of rest and staying hydrated are two of the best, proven ways to get back to feeling 100 per cent. But, according to experts, there's other, slightly more unusual ways to fight off that runny nose, sore throat and barking cough... A warm bath or shower can relieve aches and pains, one of the nasty side effects of bugs lurking silently this winter.



benefits.


She said: 'If you are breathing in deep from a bowl of water it can make the mucus thinner and help it drain a bit better.' The hot water in a shower or bath also increases blood flow, which relaxes and soothes your muscles - relieving you of those tell-tale aches and pains.

**Go for a brisk walk**


If you are feeling run down, you're probably reluctant to brave the cold outdoors.

And staying warm can actually help reduce cold symptoms, according to Dr Simon Clarke, an infectious disease expert at the University of Reading. He said: 'If you are feeling cold and need to get your body temperature up a bath or a shower is one way of doing it.' Not only does it warm you up, but the steam in a shower also clears your bunged up sinuses by making the mucus thinner. This allows it to drain easier. Pharmacist Thorrun Govind suggests filling a bowl full of hot water and breathing in the steam to get the same

But stumping up the courage to venture outside for a brisk walk really could help, experts say. Dr Clarke adds that taking a walk and getting some fresh air is always good for your health. But wrap up warm at this time of year, he insists. The Mayo Clinic, a US medical research centre, says that exercising may temporarily ease your bunged up nose by opening up your nasal passages. However, not everyone agrees with the logic that going for a walk while ill will help. Ms Govind said: 'You just want to be resting and sleeping and staying warm.'



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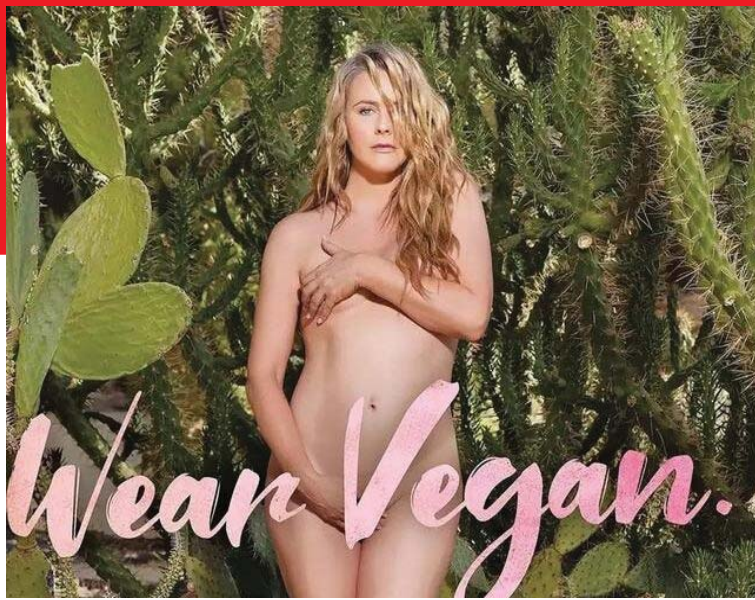
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## Alicia Silverstone poses nude for PETA campaign

nothin', never, nope – but I've done it for PETA because that's how much it matters to me," the actress said in a press release obtained by Fox News Digital. "The amount of resources, water, food, oil for transport, the amount of energy that goes into making leather is extraordinary. It's just not sustainable. The Earth can't handle it." "If it takes me getting naked for you to care about animals then that is what I'm after," the actress

said at the beginning of the video.

After explaining how leather affects the planet, she added, "My dream is to get these vegan, earth-friendly materials into the hands of famous designers. I'd rather go naked than wear animals."

The ad will be featured on a billboard in New York City's Times Square. This isn't the first time Silverstone has gone nude for PETA.

The "Senior Year" star posed sans clothes in 2020 for a

campaign against eating meat. Becoming vegan turned the actress into a "health nut because you feel so good, you feel so different," she explained to Self magazine in 2017.

"Being able to do something that is good for the Earth, good for the animals, and good for you all at the same time seems like such a no-brainer," she continued. "It's like the biggest 'Duh!'" Silverstone has also raised her son Bear as a vegan.

(SAI Bureau) Alicia Silverstone posed nude for a new PETA campaign against the use of leather. The "Clueless" actress wore nothing but cowboy boots as she posed in the desert for the ad. The

PETA ad says, "Wear Vegan. Buy cactus, mushroom or apple leather instead!" Silverstone, 46, explained why she decided to strip down for the camera. "I never, ever, get naked in TV, in film,

## Kylie Jenner gets playful with BFF Anastasia 'Stassie' Karanikolaou as they embrace while posing for a sultry 'Christmas card' together

(SAI Bureau) Kylie Jenner and her best friend Anastasia 'Stassie' Karanikolaou put on a playful show and pretended to kiss during a holiday party for Stassie's vodka brand Sunny, on Saturday.

And on Monday, the lip kit mogul, 25, shared some flirty snaps from the bash, as she embraced her gal pal from behind writing, 'our christmas card' in the caption.

The reality TV star showed off her toned arms in a form-hugging black PVC dress, while Stassie looked incredible in a clingy red top and

matching pants. The makeup entrepreneur looked glamorous as ever for the occasion, highlighting her cheeks with plenty of blush and wearing matte lipstick.

Kylie accessorized her holiday look with two gold hoop earrings. The Instagram model wore similar makeup to her bestie, drawing attention to her magnetic eyes with a touch of black mascara.

Kylie shared a variety of snaps from the occasion, with Stassie writing in the comments 'lomi' which stands for 'love of my life.'

The two gal pals posed together for a number of pictures where they held each other in front of a Christmas tree. In another shot Stassie was seen hugging the makeup mogul's waist. Stassie also shared snaps from the event, featuring Kylie's sister Kendall Jenner, 27, and Justin Bieber's wife Hailey Bieber, 26. Kendall showed off her supermodel legs in a metallic silver mini dress and black stockings. The beauty wore her black tresses in a bun and accessorized with a diamond necklace.



## Busted for nepotism!

Dakota Johnson, Maya Hawke, Zoe Kravitz, and more stars with famous parents are mocked on New York Magazine's The Year of the Nepo Baby cover



(SAI Bureau) Dakota Johnson, Maya Hawke, Zoë Kravitz and more stars with famous parents were mocked on New York Magazine's The Year of the Nepo Baby cover. Celebrity nepotism is nothing new but the insult 'nepo baby' has become increasingly popular as shorthand to deride it. Vulture senior writer Nate Jones spoke with managers and casting directors in the industry, one of whom simply stated: 'A lot of the children of famous people are not good.' 'A big agency will write and say, "This is so-and-so's kid," and you understand that to mean "So you have to see this kid." I have learned to simply say, "Not right for the role. But lovely." There are a number of veiled

responses rather than saying, "Are you guys kidding me?" Like Laura Dern, Michael Douglas, Kate Hudson and Gwyneth Paltrow - Dakota comes from a dynasty of famous actors - her mother is Oscar nominee Melanie Griffith and her grandmother is Golden Globe winner Tippi Hedren. The 33-year-old Independent Spirit Award winner - whose father is Emmy nominee Don Johnson - was famously crowned Miss Golden Globe in 2006, a debutante-style title reserved for the daughters of celebrities. Suspiria director Luca Guadagnino said of casting Johnson as the powerful lead in his 2019 horror remake: 'I can see Tippi Hedren [in her].'



# Tom Cruise, 60, shows fans exactly how the 'greatest stunt in cinema history

(SAI Bureau) Tom Cruise shared a featurette for the latest instalment in his Mission Impossible franchise, Dead Reckoning Part One (aka M:I 7), revealing a behind-the-scenes look at the 'greatest stunt in cinema history.' The scene features a motorcycle jumping off a cliff, which then turns into a base jump - all performed by Cruise instead of a stuntman.

The 60-year-old actor — who just jumped out of a plane to thank fans for the success of his film Top Gun: Maverick — says at the beginning of the video: 'I've wanted to do it since I was a little kid.' In the video, Cruise says: 'This is far and away the most dangerous thing we've ever attempted.'

To prepare for the stunt, the Top Gun actor put together a group of experts in all the disciplines involved in the stunt, to ensure the whole thing happened without a hitch. Miles Daisher, a base jumping coach,



remarked on Cruise's ability: 'You tell him something, and he just locks it in. 'His sense of spatial awareness - he is the most aware person I've ever met.'

In order to perform the stunt on camera, several experts had to work out the best equipment and positioning to use when filming, so that the stunt would be captured in the most effective way possible.



Christopher McQuarrie, the writer and director of the film, which is slated for release next year, noted: 'Even two years ago, the cameras didn't exist that would allow us to do what we are trying to do today.' Cruise also mentioned that he wanted to really involve the audience and give them that thrill.

He performed more than 500 skydives,

and more than 13,000 motocross jumps to prepared for the stunt.

They replicated the ramp they would use for actual filming in a quarry in England, and filled it with cardboard boxes to catch the motorcycle after Cruise drove off.

McQuarrie talked about how they had to calculate where Cruise would be in the air and what trajectory he would be on.

He said: 'We have to be able to consistently predict where Tom will be in three-dimensional space.' When Cruise performed the stunt for real in Norway, he rode the motorcycle off of the cliff and then base jumped successfully - six times in one day. After the suspense-filled jumps, McQuarrie said: 'The only thing that scares me more is what we have planned for Mission [Impossible] 8.' Mission Impossible: Dead Reckoning Part One is set to release in theaters on July 14, 2023.

## Urfi Javed Detained In Dubai? Here's Everything We Know



(SAI Bureau) DIY expert and television actress Urfi Javed has reportedly been detained in Dubai. As reported by India Today, the Bigg Boss OTT fame was shooting a video in Dubai in a revealing outfit that landed her in trouble. The news portal also claimed that Urfi is currently being questioned by the authorities. However, there is no official confirmation to this so far. Meanwhile, a source cited by The Times of India also claimed, "She had shot a video for her Instagram in an outfit made by her, which was revealing as per the people here in Dubai. The fact that there is no problem with the outfit but where she shot the video was an open area

and they don't consider it to be allowed to wear what she wore. She is being questioned by the police. Let's see what happens."

News18 Showsha reached out to Urfi Javed's team but they refrained from commenting on the issue. Last month, Urfi also took to her Instagram stories and expressed concern regarding her UAE travel plans as Air India and AI Express issued a joint circular stating that any passport holder with a single name will not be allowed to travel to UAE. "So my official name is only Uorfi, no surname and now I'm f\*\*ked," she had written. Meanwhile, earlier today, it was also reported that Urfi

has been diagnosed with laryngitis in Dubai. The actress confirmed the same by dropping a video on her Instagram stories in which she said, "This doctor finally diagnosed that I am suffering from laryngitis and tonsillitis."

On the work front, Uorfi Javed was recently seen in SplitsVilla. Prior to this, she also featured in a music video titled Haye Haye Yeh Majboori. Urfi has also worked in several shows including Meri Durga, Bepannaah, Puncch Beat Season 2, Chandra Nandini, Saat Phero Ki Hera Pherie, Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai and Kasautii Zindagii Kay. She also participated in Bigg Boss OTT last year.

## Deepika Padukone on her Louis Vuitton FIFA World Cup 2022 outfit: It is so perfect

(SAI Bureau) Deepika Padukone created history as she became the first Indian to unveil the FIFA World Cup Trophy ahead of the nail-biting match between Argentina and France in Qatar on Sunday. The actress, along with Spanish footballer Iker Casillas, unveiled the official trophy in a Louis Vuitton trunk at the stadium. While it was a proud moment for the country, a section of the internet was not impressed with

her sartorial choice. The actress, however, in her new video said that she found the outfit very comfortable and perfect for the event. Deepika took to Instagram on Monday and gave her fans a behind-the-scenes glimpse of the event. In the clip, the Piku actress talked about how she felt nervous but grateful at the same time for receiving this 'unprecedented opportunity'. She called it a "really proud moment".







The South Asian



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## Seven reasons to be cheerful about the Amazon in 2023 – and three to be terrified

**For anyone who cares about the Amazon rainforest, there will be an extra reason to celebrate the new year countdown in Brazil on 31 December because the first stroke of midnight will mark the last moment in power of Jair Bolsonaro.**



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