





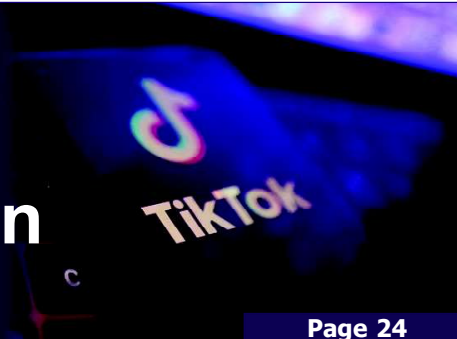
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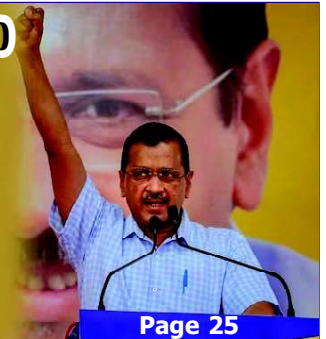
## The world turns on TikTok



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## BUDGET ON HOLD

Why the Centre has issue with New Delhi government's ad spend



Page 25

# India witnessed significant human rights violations in 2022, says US report

India witnessed significant human rights abuses in 2022, including arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings and violence targeting religious and ethnic minorities, a US report said.

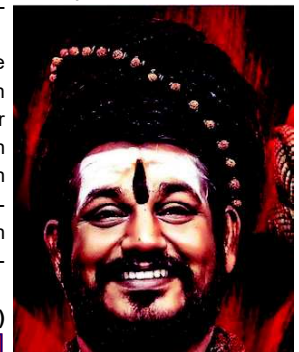


(SAI Bureau) A US report has listed significant human rights issues in India in 2022, including unlawful and arbitrary killings, freedom of press and violence targeting religious and ethnic minorities. The annual report, released by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, mentions human rights violations such as extrajudicial killings, torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by police and prison officials, and harsh and life-threatening prison conditions. Arbitrary arrest and detention, political prisoners or detainees, arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, restrictions on freedom of expression and media, including violence or threats of violence,

(Contd. on page 24)

## Rape-accused Nithyananda's 'fake country' Kailasa cons 30 US cities

According to the website of "United States of Kailasa", there are over 30 American cities that have signed a cultural partnership with the fake nation.



(SAI Bureau) Self-proclaimed godman and fugitive Nithyananda's "United States of Kailasa" has signed a "cultural partnership" with over 30 American cities, a media report said, reported news agency PTI, days after the city of Newark said it rescinded a "sister-city" agreement with the fictional country.

(Contd. on page 25)

## Parents in France will be liable for punishment if they share photos of their children on social media

The bill has been passed by the country's National Assembly and would allow courts to ban parents from posting photos of their children on social media. Even if one parent shares images online, both father and mother would be jointly held responsible for their children's image rights.

(SAI Bureau) A new bill has been passed in France to offer kids better privacy over their photos or videos. It will restrict French parents from sharing photos of their children on social media. The bill, which was represented by MP Bruno Studer, aims to 'empower par-

ents' and make youngsters realize that they have full control over their images and that no one else will have the right to their private photos. The bill has been passed by the country's National Assembly and would

(Contd. on page 25)



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# New York Delegation with Deputy Commissioner Dilip Chauhan makes a mark at the Urban 20/G-20 Inception Meeting Ahmedabad, Gujarat



By our staff reporter (Ahmedabad, India)-

Resonating with India's G20 theme of 'One Earth, One Family, One Future', Ahmedabad hosted the "Urban 20" (U20) Inception meeting in early February. Around hundred delegates representing more than forty cities from around the world and around thirty partner organizations & institutions attended the plenary sessions. The main purpose of U20 was to emphasize that actions taken at the city level can drive lasting positive global outcomes underscoring the interconnectedness of the world and our shared future.

The United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG) recognizes this decade as the 'Decade for Action' to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. This decade is also witnessing those global issues of economy, climate, human settlements, health, and multiple other crises are also issues of urban areas. Given the contribution of cities to the productivity of nations and the world, it is crucial they play a pivotal role in developing effective solutions to pressing and interlinked global issues.

In line with Hon'ble Indian Prime Minister's vision of 'One Earth, One Family, One Future', the U20 engagement meeting proved to be important in realizing the mantra of 'Sarvajna Hitaya, Sarvajana Sukhai' (welfare and prosperity of all sections of society).

The Opening Session of the U20 Inception Meeting was attended by, Mr. Hardeep Singh Puri, Hon'ble Minister, Housing & Urban Affairs, Government of India; Shri Bhupendrabhai Patel, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Gujarat; Shri Amitabh Kant, G20 Sherpa; Shri Kirtikumar J Parmar, Mayor of Ahmedabad; Shri Raj Kumar, Chief Secretary, Gujarat; Shri Manoj Joshi, Secretary, Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs, Government of India; Shri Mukesh Kumar, Principal Secretary, Urban Development & Urban Housing Department, from Government of Gujarat; Shri M. Thennarasanan, Municipal Commissioner, Ahmedabad; Shri Praveen Chaudhary, Ahmedabad City Sherpa, U20 Conveners, U20 City Sherpas, Multilateral Organization and institution's Representatives.

The three day meet also saw top level representatives from various nations. Mr. Dilip Chauhan who coincidentally hails from Ahmedabad in

Gujarat represented the most important city of New York at the U20 meet. Mr. Chauhan is the 1st Indian-American to be appointed as Deputy Commissioner in New York city's commission on International Affairs, Foreign Direct Investment and Innovation in Honorable Mayor Eric Adams administration.

In opening remarks, the Mayor of Ahmedabad, Shri Kirtikumar J Parmar, greeted the delegates to Ahmedabad - a UNESCO World Heritage city and U20 2023 Chair City. He highlighted some of Ahmedabad's, unique urban development initiatives as well as on the priority areas identified for U20 building on this year's G20 theme "One Earth - One Family - One Future" that are critical for inspiring city

level actions to respond to global agendas. Shri Parmar further added the U20 meeting being held in the city of Ahmedabad will provide the best suggestions and plans for urban development and long-term sustainable development worldwide to achieve the goals.

The effort of the sixth U20 was to move from intention to action and to draft a roadmap for a global change that will be driven by cities by minimizing the gaps between policy and practice at all levels of governance. For this, cities must be empowered to achieve the right balance between economic prosperity and environmental impact; increasing densities and sprawl; diversity and social cohesion; technological advancements and digital divide,

and multiple other contradictions faced by urban areas.

Ahmedabad as the Chair city for the sixth U20, invoked the solidarity of cities with the objective to deepen their collaboration amongst one another to collectively find common solutions that are in sync with the overall objectives of the G20.

U20 highlighted six priority areas that are critical for inspiring city level actions to respond to global agendas. These can be further developed by collaborative deliberations among Sherpas and leaders of U20 cities to finalize the communique. These included Encouraging Environmentally Responsible Behaviors, Ensuring Water Security, Accelerating Climate Finance, Championing 'local' identity, Reinventing Frameworks for Urban Governance and Planning and Catalyzing Digital Urban Futures.

The delegates also got the opportunity to explore Gujarat rich and varied handloom and handicraft products at the Crafts Exhibition setup at Hotel Taj Skyline to showcase Live demonstration by Master Artisans was also showcased to the delegates.







# Rise of lawlessness

## State sanctioned rout to blame?

From headlines to footnotes, the leading news channels are filled with the elements of emerging pro-khalistani leader, Amritpal Singh. Singh shot to nationwide notoriety following a conflict between his followers and Punjab Police after one of his aide's arrest in an abduction case. Rewind a year, nobody knew Amritpal's name. Suddenly, he is one of the most wanted lawbreakers from Punjab. A few months before, he was handling his family transportation business in Dubai and all on a sudden 78 of his associates were arrested, 4 of which are being moved to Assam as Singh's growing influence might cause an impediment in the investigation. So much, so that internet services in a considerable part of Punjab are discontinued. Amritpal Singh asserted himself as the latest commander-in-chief of Waris Punjab De after the demise of Deep Sidhu, the founder of the organization.

After Amritpal's emergence as the new leader, Sidhu's family has clarified that Singh is not associated with their family or the organization. Singh, however, is rising faster than a rocket. Initially not a baptized Sikh, Singh previously donned a shorter beard and hairstyle. He was baptized very newly as a Sikh in September 2022. A few days later,

he sported an identical attire as Late Khalistan leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and a turban-binding ritual were observed in presence of thousands of Sikh believers in the ancestral village of Bhindranwale, who was killed in the infamous national security operation in Golden Temple, Punjab.

After Singh's associate was arrested in a kidnapping issue, he and his followers got entangled in a clash with the police. Thousands of policemen remained as bystanders as Singh and his large number of supporters charged the police station with arms, using the Guru Granth Sahib as shields. In fear of provoking a mass agitation from Sikh civilians, the police had to take a step down. Amritpal has escaped.

Punjab Police is conducting a high-priority nationwide hunt for Amritpal though, multiple questions linger around. How did he rise so abruptly and so high? How his preaching did transform from peaceful religious concepts to armed protests? How can he openly talk about overthrowing democratically elected governments by armed combat? Why did the police do nothing when his spiritual agenda shifted toward violent radicalism? More important, when and how did he gain such a massive number of followers?

A similar issue is observed in the case of Lawrence Bishnoi. Bishnoi is a youth hailing from Punjab, whose gang asserts control over Punjab, Haryana, and even Rajasthan. Embellished with more than two dozen criminal lawsuits against him, Bishnoi is allegedly the primary accused behind the killing of Sidhu Moosewala, a Punjabi singer. He evolved into a widespread name on social media platforms after he issued a death threat against a largely celebrated Bollywood actor.

Belonging to a gang associated with 700 sharpshooters across the nation, Bishnoi is currently detained at the Bathinda prison in Punjab. However, his arrest does not appear to scale his gang down as his associates persist to make extortion calls and death threats. With minor girls running away from home to meet him in jail and his back-to-back TV interviews from inside prison, Lawrence Bishnoi's story is rather filmy. The authorities started taking him seriously after he appeared in interviews on national TV from inside the jail. However, Punjab police have explained that the interviews are not carried out inside any state prison.

What intrigues our curiosity is how these gangsters and lawbreak-

ers with myriad criminal charges and lawsuits, continue spreading terror and committing crimes. Even inside prison, Bishnoi does not appear to stop. Despite thousands of policemen in his search, Amritpal Singh is nonetheless absconding.

How do the guardians of law allow such incidents that might prove to be a national security issue? As seen in both the cases, the police did not take any measures for fear of offending a segment of society. Meanwhile, the gangsters stayed largely active in social media, gaining followers - both virtual and real-life. Police's fear of upsetting a community resulted in conflicts, armed protests and mass agitation. They refrained from taking any effort when Amritpal Singh was provoking the Sikh youth to be baptized, and take up "kirpan" and other weapons to avoid offending the Sikh community. The same approach rebounded once again when the authorities followed a similar path to avoid provoking the Bishnoi community. The authority's action can be easily termed as "too little too late" because the action was too little when there was a time when it had the possibility to control these outlaws and too late now when there are plenty of measures but the issue is out of control.



# Cops mute spectators as pro-Khalistan supporters heckle Indian-origin journalist in Canada

Sameer Kaushal, an Indian-origin journalist, was heckled by Khalistan supporters in Surrey, Canada on Monday evening. Kaushal told India Today that he was deliberately targeted by the pro-Khalistan protesters.

(SAI Bureau) Sameer Kaushal, an Indian-origin journalist in Canada, was heckled by pro-Khalistan protesters in Surrey, British Columbia on Monday evening. Kaushal, in a Twitter threat, said he was in Surrey to cover the Indian High Commissioner's visit when a pro-Khalistani group threatened and roughed him up.

"The Surrey RCMP [police] remained mute spectators to this whole affair, even as the protest turned violent. Instead of stopping them, the police kept asking me to leave for my own safety," Sameer Kaushal, news director of Radio AM600 tweeted.

Narrating the events, Sameer Kaushal, in an exclusive interview with India Today, said High Commissioner Sanjay Kumar Verma was in the west coast of

Canada to attend an event organised by the Indian diaspora on Monday evening. "When I reached there, they [pro-Khalistan protesters] were blocking all the way. When I told them I had to go in, they refused. When I told them I am here to cover the event, they said no one can go in," Kaushal told India Today. "They were raising slogans, using abusive words and derogatory remarks on the prime minister of India," he said, adding that he was deliberately targeted by the pro-Khalistan protesters. This



comes a day after pro-Khalistan protesters attacked the Indian High

Commission in London and San Francisco, US and protested outside Australian Parliament in Canberra. In London, the Indian flag was pulled down but the High Commission later put up a

giant Indian flag outside after throwing out a Khalistani flag.

The attacks came after the Punjab Police launched a massive crackdown on Khalistani separatist Amritpal Singh and the members of his Waris Punjab De group. Over 100 Amritpal supporters have been arrested, but the separatist managed to evade arrest and is on the run.

It is also to be noted that Canada has seen a rise in anti-India activities recently by Khalistan supporters who have vandalised some Hindu temples. Last September, the Ministry of External Affairs issued a statement condemning the rise of hate crimes against Indians and anti-India activities in Canada, expressing their concern with stern language.

## How CBI Chased Mehul Choksi; What's Its Next Move After Interpol Removes Red Notice Against Fugitive?



(SAI Bureau) The INTERPOL had on March 20 withdrawn the Red Corner Notice against Mehul Choksi, which, the sources in the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) say, will not have any impact on the extradition proceedings against the fugitive jeweller. According to a source, the CBI is in active communication with the Commission for Control of INTERPOL's Files (CCF) and other bodies in INTERPOL on Choksi's case.

It should be noted that an INTERPOL Red Notice is neither a pre-requisite nor a requirement for extradition proceedings.

The Global Operations Centre of CBI continues to monitor the movements of Choksi in close direct coordination with foreign law enforcement agencies and is not just dependent on INTERPOL channels. Extradition

request made by India is under active consideration before authorities in Antigua and Barbuda and is far from having any impact due to the cancellation of Red Notice against Choksi.

The CBI had registered its first case against Choksi in 2018 for defrauding the Punjab National Bank to the tune of Rs 13,500 crore.

The CBI has already filed two charge sheets in the case against Choksi and others under various sections of Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988. Last year, the CBI registered five more criminal cases against him and others for defrauding banks and financial institutions.

### CBI AND CHOKSI

The CBI, as the National Central Bureau for Interpol, had issued a diffusion (a call for cooperation from other member countries) to

locate absconding criminal Choksi in February, 2018. The movements of the criminal were tracked by the CBI in close direct coordination with foreign law

enforcement agencies. He was geo-located to Antigua and Barbuda. Extradition request against Choksi was sent through diplomatic channels to compe-

tent authorities of Antigua and Barbuda in August, 2018. He then approached the CCF making a request for non-publication of Red Notice the same year.

## French Protests Drag on After Macron's Pension Plan Push

(SAI Bureau) French garbage collectors, refinery workers and others were striking again on Tuesday against President Emmanuel Macron's decision to force the divisive bill raising the retirement age from 62 to 64 through without a vote in parliament. Macron's move infuriated many in the country. Paris police said Tuesday that 234 people were arrested overnight in the capital mostly for setting fire to garbage in the streets. Mostly small, scattered protests were held in cities around France, some degenerating into violence late Monday. In Paris, small groups took to the streets to set fire



to piles of trash that have formed because of a strike by garbage collectors in the capital that is in its 16th day. Paris police prefect Laurent Nunez said the violence was caused by groups of up to 300 people quickly moving through the capital. Nunez news broadcaster BFM TV that he ordered an internal investigation after an officer was filmed punching a man who was walking backwards, making him fall to the ground. The video has been widely shared on

French social media. Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne expressed the government's "solidarity" towards 400 police officers who have been injured in recent days, including 42 overnight.

Macron has planned a series of political meetings on Tuesday with the prime minister, parliamentary leaders and lawmakers from his centrist alliance, one day after the government survived to two no-confidence motions. The 45-year-old French president, who made the pension plan a centerpiece of his second term, will speak Wednesday on national television — the first time since he made the

decision last week to use a government's special constitutional power to force the bill through parliament. He's expected to back his government. Speaking at the lower chamber of parliament Tuesday, Borne vowed to continue to work "in the coming months to seek the best responses to the concerns of the French" including through "compromises and work with lawmakers." But leftist lawmaker Mathilde Panot warned Borne that "you will yield."



# CBI Look Out Circular Against Ex-CFO of Nirav Modi's Company Dropped

(News Agency) A Mumbai special court has quashed a look out circular issued by CBI against the former chief financial officer of Nirav Modi's Firestar International Ltd company which is accused in the Rs 6,498 crore scam pulled off by the absconding diamantaire, officials said on Tuesday.

The court agreed with the submission of Ravi Shankar Gupta that he is highly qualified and is required to travel outside the country as he is the executive director of a multinational company. Gupta had said that he had appeared 31 times before the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for

questioning. Seeking the cancellation of the look out circular (LOC), the 53-year-old Noida-based executive said the nature of his job involves travelling outside India, but he is unable to undertake international travel because of the circular. The CBI, however, strongly opposed the plea, saying Gupta was handling the finance of Nirav Modi's company which had siphoned off Rs 6,498.20 crore from the state-run Punjab National Bank (PNB) using 150 fraudulent Letters of Undertaking. It said if the LOC is dropped, Gupta may flee the country like other accused and may not be available for further

investigation. The special court noted that Gupta was neither an accused nor a witness in the case, and had attended the office of the investigation officer over 30 times in connection with the matter. "If the LOC issued against the applicant is not cancelled or recalled, it would hamper his career," the court noted as it quashed the circular. The court, however, directed Gupta not to leave the country without its permission. Nirav Modi and his uncle Mehul Choksi are accused of duping PNB, a public sector bank, of Rs 13,000 crore using Letters of Undertaking (LoUs) and foreign letters of credit (FLCs) by



bringing its officials at the Brady House branch in Mumbai. While authorities arrested him, his uncle Choksi is safely cocooned in Antigua and Barbuda where he had taken citizenship. Modi is contesting his extradition from the United Kingdom where the British

## Zakir Naik to be Deported From Oman, India in Touch With Authorities There: Sources



(News Agency) Radical Islamist preacher Zakir Naik is likely to be deported from Oman. Indian intelligence agencies are already in touch with Oman

authorities to detain Naik during his visit to Oman on March 23. Naik has been invited to deliver two lectures in Oman. His first lecture "The Quran a Global

Necessity" is organized by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs of Oman and scheduled on the first day of Ramadan-March 23.

The second lecture "Prophet Muhammad [PBUH] A Mercy to Humankind" is scheduled at Sultan Qaboos University on March 25 evening. Local Indian embassy is in touch with agencies to detain and eventually deport him under the local laws. Sources in Indian intelligence agencies said that there was strong possibility that local authorities oblige to their request and detain him.

Indian agencies are likely to send a legal team for follow up

after detention. The matter was taken up with the Omani Ambassador by the MEA. Similarly, the Indian Ambassador in Oman has also raised the issue with Omani MFA. Earlier, Qatar had invited Naik to give religious sermons at the FIFA World Cup 2022. Naik, who faces charges of money laundering and hate speech in India, has been living in exile in Malaysia since 2017, as a runaway fugitive. India outlawed Naik's Islamic Research Foundation (IRF) late in 2016, on the charges of encouraging and assisting the group's followers in "promoting or attempting to promote

feelings of enmity, hatred, or ill-will between different religious communities and groups." In March 2022, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) declared IRF an unlawful association and outlawed it for five years. Naik, who shot to fame during the 1990s over his activities of da'wah (an act of inviting or calling people to embrace Islam) through IRF, is also the founder of the 'comparative religion' Peace TV. The channel reportedly has a reach of over 100 million viewers, many of whom regard him as an exponent of the Salafi (a reform moment within the Sunni community) ideology.

## Reports on Indian students facing deportation from Canada turns spotlight on unscrupulous agents

(News Agency) Amid reports about the Canadian Border Security Agency (CBSA) asking 700 Indian students to return to India allegedly after the documents that they had produced to gain admission to colleges in Canada were found to be fake; consultants and experts on overseas education and students who are planning to apply for admission at Canadian universities are all worried. According to news reports, the scam was carried out by a Punjab based visa agent Brijesh Mishra who took around ?16 lakh from each student towards admission expenses in Canada and generated fake documents. The matter is said to have been unearthed by a CBSA investigation when these students applied for permanent residence and their documents were being checked

and scrutinised. The CBSA, however, has not commented on this case. "The CBSA does not comment or provide details on specific individual cases. An individual's border and immigration information is considered private and protected by the Privacy Act, which outlines very strict parameters concerning what the CBSA may or may not say regarding specific cases or individuals," a spokesperson for the agency told the

Times of India in response to emailed questions.



Though the agency has not commented on the recent case; the CBSA has shared with The Times of India an example of action taken to address the issue of false documentation, announced by CBSA

Quebec region enforcement and operational highlights. In 2022, the CBSA enforcement officers uncovered a scheme whereby subsidised private college programmes were leading foreign students to a post-graduation work permit (for \$25,000) with the sole purpose of acquiring permanent residence.

This investigation led, on June 7, 2022, to the decision by the federal and provincial governments to tighten the criteria for granting post-graduation work permits. The investigation targeted 11 colleges that were implicated in the fraud. The programmes of the federal and provincial governments that issue study permits and then lead to permanent residence have also been re-examined.



# Ratan N. Tata Awarded 2022 Hoover Medal



(SAI Bureau) NEW YORK – Ratan Naval Tata, prominent engineer, entrepreneur, industrialist, and philanthropist of India, has been awarded the 2022 Hoover Medal by a board representing five engineering organizations: the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME); the American Society of Civil Engineers; the American Institute of Mining, Metallurgical and Petroleum Engineers; the American Institute of Chemical Engineers; and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers. Established in 1929, the medal commemorates the civic and humanitarian achievement of engineers and is conferred upon an engineer whose professional achievements and personal endeavors have advanced the well-being of humankind.

Tata was recognized as the 74th recipient of the Hoover Medal in a private award ceremony in January at Somerset House in Mumbai, India. Ponisseril Somasundaran, Ph.D., chair of the Hoover Board of Award and La von Duddleson Krumb Professor in the Columbia University School of Engineering and Applied Science, and Thomas Costabile, executive director/CEO of ASME presented the gold medal to Tata. Natarajan Chandrasekaran, chairman of the board for the Tata

Group, also attended the event.

The board summarized its selection of Tata "for leading the Tata Trusts that have helped millions of under-privileged people directly or indirectly through outstanding improvements in education, medicine, and rural development and for chairing the Tata Group, an innovative company that provides products, business consulting, and services in over 100 countries."

Past recipients of the Hoover

Medal include U.S. Presidents Herbert Hoover, Dwight Eisenhower and Jimmy Carter, Apple Founder Steve Wozniak, Founder of HP David Packard, Moderna Co-Founder Robert Langer, Texas Instruments Co-Founder J. Erik Jonsson, and CEO of General Motors Alfred Sloan. Two of the past recipients of the Hoover Medal are from India: the late President of India A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, who was honored for making state-of-the-art

healthcare affordable; and N. R. Narayana Murthy, the founder of Infosys, who was recognized for establishing a foundation that forged outstanding improvements in health care, social rehabilitation, rural uplift, and education. Murthy provided one of the references for Tata's nomination, saying "Mr. Tata has successfully modernized a philanthropic approach that emphasizes knowledge- and research-based holistic solutions."

## Immigrant Advocates Call for Opportunities for Street Vendors, Not Enforcement

(SAI Bureau) New York, NY—Today, New York City Mayor Eric Adams announced that the City intends to move enforcement of street vending regulations responsibilities from the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection (DCWP) to the Department of Sanitation (DSNY) on April 1, 2023.

Theodore A. Moore, Vice President of Policy & Programs, New York Immigration Coalition:

"The diversity and dedication of New York City's immigrant street vendors are part of what makes New York City so unique. But for too long, the City has hampered this industry with confusing and burdensome rules, enforced by ever-changing agencies. The City should allow the Department of Consumer

and Worker Protection (DCWP) to do what they are charged to do in the first place: protect the City's workers. The Department of Sanitation's (DSNY) purpose is to keep NYC clean; they should be allowed to focus on that, rather than regulating small businesses. We should be recognizing the contributions of our street vendors, and creating systems that support their existence and growth. To start, the City should remove the caps on vending licenses and permits, update its existing street vending regulations to better reflect the reality of available spaces, provide more supportive services to these small businesses, and repeal criminal liability for street vendors currently forced to choose between unlicensed street vending and destitution."

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# Hunted by police, Amritpal Singh escaped on bike with aides

**In an exclusive photo, Waris Punjab De chief and Khalistani leader, Amritpal Singh, was captured fleeing with his aides on a bike. He could be seen wearing a pink turban.**

(News Agency) Fugitive Khalistani leader Amritpal Singh changed vehicles, clothes and escaped on a bike with his aides while being chased by the police last week, the Punjab Police has said. Visuals accessed by India Today show the Waris Punjab De chief fleeing on a motorcycle with two of his aides. According to the police, Amritpal Singh was in a Mercedes while he and his aides were being chased by the cops in Jalandhar on March 18. The police said Amritpal Singh got down from the Mercedes and fled to

Shahkot in a Brezza. Later, the Waris Punjab De chief changed his clothes inside a gurudwara and escaped on a motorbike of one of his aides. In the photo accessed by India Today, Amritpal Singh could be seen wearing a pink turban had his face covered. Police suspect he might have crossed the state borders after his clothes were found in the abandoned Brezza car were found on Monday.

The massive crackdown by the Punjab Police against Waris Punjab De chief has entered the

fourth day but Amritpal Singh is still on the run. His uncle and two other aides were flown to Assam this morning. On Sunday, his other four arrested associates were also taken to Dibrugarh Central jail. The crackdown comes a month after Amritpal Singh and his supporters stormed a police station with swords and guns for the release of one of his aides. During the ongoing crackdown, over 100 associates of Amritpal have been arrested and several arms and ammunition meant for the "Anandpur Khalsa Front" were seized.



## Amritpal Singh has links with proscribed Khalistani terrorist Rinda: Sources

**The Punjab Police have found a connection between Waris De Punjab chief Amritpal Singh and Harvinder Singh Rinda, a proscribed terrorist designated by the Government of India.**

(News Agency) The Punjab Police have found a connection between Khalistani leader Amritpal Singh and Harvinder Singh Rinda, who was recently designated a proscribed terrorist by the Government of India.

A top officer of the Punjab Police told India Today/Aaj Tak that Amritpal Singh is in contact with Harvinder Singh Rinda, a notorious Punjabi gangster currently putting up in Pakistan. Amritpal Singh is on the run after the Punjab Police launched a crackdown against him and his followers last week. He is the chief of Waris Punjab De, a pressure group demanding Khalistan.

According to intelligence sources, Amritpal Singh has been in touch with other Khalistani leaders and Pakistan's spy agency Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

Avtar Singh Khanda -- a UK-based SAD activist and a close associate of Khalistani terrorist Jagtar Singh Tara -- is the main handler of Amritpal Singh and the brain behind his meteoric rise, sources said. Khanda is also close to Paramjit Singh Pamma (associated with Babbar Khalsa international) and is known for holding theoretical radical training classes for Sikh youth and misleading them. Sources said they have a deadly and deliberate aim of

destabilising Punjab by ideological indoctrination and have a big influence on Amritpal Singh.

They have been trying to make improvised explosive devices (IEDs) using common chemicals by giving live demonstrations in Birmingham and Glasgow, sources said.

Amritpal also reportedly has links with Lakhbir Singh Rode, head of the International Sikh Youth Federation, who is wanted in cases of arms smuggling (including RDX explosives), conspiracy to attack government leaders in New Delhi and spreading hatred in Punjab.

Sources said when Amritpal Singh was in Dubai, he was in close touch with Rode's brother Jaswant.

The Punjab Police's crackdown on Amritpal Singh comes after he and his supporters broke into the Ajnala police station demanding the release of his aide Lovepreet Singh Toofan last month. Amritpal Singh had also threatened Home Minister Amit Shah, saying he may meet the same consequences as former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

A massive search operation has been launched for Amritpal Singh, against whom the National Security Act has been invoked. As per



an affidavit of the Jalandhar Police Commissioner, continuously acting in a manner prejudicial to the maintenance of public order, due to which a proposal has been prepared to detain him.

## UP Police arrests Atiq Ahmed's 4 aides from Agra's after raid

**The Uttar Pradesh Special Task Force (STF) arrested mafia-turned-politician Atiq Ahmed's four close aides from Agra's Fatehpur Sikri road.**

(News Agency) Tightening the noose on mafia-turned-politician Atiq Ahmed over the Umesh Pal murder case, UP Special Task Force (STF) on Thursday arrested four of his operatives from Agra's Fatehpur Sikri road.

The four arrested accused are believed to be close aides of Atiq's son Asad Ahmed. According to sources, the four were arrested during a raid conducted to arrest Asad Ahmed and shooters involved in the murder of Umesh Pal. The STF had received information that Atiq's son Asad, who is carrying a reward of Rs 5 lakh and his shooter, and other close associates could be hiding in Agra and surrounding areas. To arrest the accused, the UP STF had deactivated the CCTV cameras at the toll plaza and barring

one lane, all the lanes were closed, and the road was barricaded with trucks and cranes.

In the operation, teams of five police stations and about 200 policemen were deployed. In the past few days, apart from Agra, STF raids were also staged in the neighbouring states of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Umesh



Pal, the prime witness in the 2005 BSP MLA Raju Pal murder case, was shot dead at his residence in Uttar Pradesh's Prayagraj last month.

Raju Pal was murdered months after winning the Allahabad (West) assembly seat in his electoral debut by defeating Former MP Atiq Ahmed's younger brother Khalid Azim.



# Rajasthan passes Right to Health Bill amid massive protests by doctors in Jaipur

**The Rajasthan government passed the Right to Health Bill on Tuesday even as doctors pushed for the rollback of the Bill in Jaipur on Tuesday.**



(NewsAgency) The Right to Health (RTH) Bill, a major flashpoint between agitating doctors and the Ashok Gehlot-led Congress government, was passed in the Rajasthan

Assembly amid massive protests in Jaipur on Tuesday. The Bill, which was tabled in the state assembly by health minister Prasadi Lal Meena, was passed by voice

vote.

On Tuesday, the doctors protesting against the Bill at Janpath were marching towards the Rajasthan Assembly, where the Budget session is underway, to force the government to take back the Right to Health Bill. The police personnel lathicharged the protestors and used water cannons to disperse the agitating doctors and prevent them from marching up to the Assembly. Many of the protestors accused the state police of manhandling doctors.

The protesting doctors threatened to shut down all services, including emergency

services in private hospitals across the state, if the government did not pay heed to their demands. "We will continue our protest if the government goes ahead with its plan of implementing the Right to Health Bill," said a protesting doctor.

"Health services, including emergency services, will be shut down if the government does not pay heed to our demands," said another protestor. Earlier, protesting doctors threatened to go on an indefinite strike against the state government in Jaipur if the Bill was tabled in the Assembly. The doctors

claimed that the Right to Health Bill, which the government claims is meant to bring expensive medical treatments within the reach of economically weaker sections, will lead to deterioration of the quality of health services and bring additional pressure on doctors. The Right to Health Bill, which promises free emergency treatment among other provisions, has been source of major consternation between doctors and the Gehlot government in Rajasthan in the run up to the Assembly elections scheduled for later this year..

## Parrots fly high with opium in Madhya Pradesh, force farmers to go for net change

**Every year, parrots fly away with a large quantity of opium pods in their beaks. After being robbed of their produce for years, farmers in Madhya Pradesh have now found a novel way to tackle the menace.**

(South Asian Insider Bureau) Farmers in Madhya Pradesh are fighting an altogether different kind of bird attack -- parrots flying high with opium.

Every year, parrots fly away with a large quantity of opium pods in their beaks. After being robbed of their produce for years, the farmers have now found a novel way to tackle the menace.

Opium poppy is cultivated in Mandsaur, Neemuch, Ratlam districts of Madhya Pradesh. The Narcotics Control Bureau gives licenses for the cultivation and is responsible for monitoring of

this crop.

Opium poppy is cultivated between January and March. Apart from opium, poppy seeds are also found in it. When the plants are small, they are also sold in vegetable markets. The small poppy seeds are consumed as part of food. The central government buys opium poppy from farmers.

Morphine is derived from opium. Various substances are derived from opium and some are used in making cardiac and blood medicines, and many psychiatric and sleeping medicines. There is

also smuggling of opium. Madhya Pradesh Police keep seizing illegal opium and smack made from it in Mandsaur, Neemuch, Ratlam districts.

In the cases of opium and smack, an NDPS Section is imposed in which the maximum punishment is 10 years and the fine is up to Rs 1 lakh. Most of the accused of opium smuggling are jailed.

But what can police do with robbers with wings?

The attack on opium crop by parrots was quite frequent earlier.

Every year, the parrots



used to fly away with a large quantity of opium pods in their beaks. Then farmers hit upon an idea to save the opium crops from the winged robbers. They started

installing plastic nets. Now, due to the installation of plastic nets, the parrots cannot reach the opium pods and cause damage to the standing crops.

## Kanpur: Devotee alleges Karauli Baba got him thrashed for questioning his 'magic'

**A devotee has alleged that Kanpur's Karauli Baba, Santosh Singh Bhadoria, got him thrashed with the help of his supporters. The devotee said he was beaten up after he complained that Santosh Bhadori's magic on him didn't work.**

(South Asian Insider Bureau) A man has accused religious preacher Santosh Singh Bhadoria of Kanpur's famous Karauli Ashram of getting him assaulted by his supporters. The reason -- the man did not benefit instantaneously by the preacher's chanting and upon complaining, Bhadoria asked his supporters to thrash him, he claimed. Siddharth Chowdhary, a doctor by profession and a devotee of Santosh Singh Bhadoria, filed a complaint with Kanpur's Bidhnu Thana, claiming he used to watch Santosh

Bhadoria's videos on YouTube and was impressed by them. He went to his ashram from Noida with his father and wife. "I told Baba (Santosh Singh Bhadoria) that I was troubled. He blew through the mike and said Namah Shivay twice -- to show magic -- though I did not feel anything. When I complained, he sent his bouncers at me and got me thrashed," said Siddharth Chowdhary. Police have registered cases under sections 323, 504 and 325 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). Meanwhile, Santosh Singh Bhadoria has

refuted the allegation and demanded a fair probe. Speaking about the incident, Santosh Singh Bhadoria said this was a conspiracy and that the doctor was planted to tarnish his image. He said the doctor could be seen thanking him before leaving in the CCTV video. When asked if he had the CCTV footage to support his claim, Bhadoria said that since CCTV data could be stored only for 14 days, he won't be able to provide the recordings.

**BABA'S CRIMINAL HISTORY** There is a

list of criminal cases against Santosh Singh Bhadoria. Between 1992-95, several criminal cases, including murder and consumption of CLA, were registered against him. Santosh Bhadoria became the farmers' leader, supposedly to escape the police before he started illegally occupying the lands. Even in the Kotwali police station area, he faces allegations of illegally occupying church land. He started uploading videos of solving problems with mantras on his YouTube channel Karauli Baba, which has 93,000 subscribers.

# BJP schemes emerge from Bureaucracy, Congress's from people, says Rahul Gandhi

**Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, while interacting with the Congress-led UDF's representatives of the local bodies at Kalpetta in Kerala, criticised the 'centralised' rule of the BJP-led government, comparing it with that of the former UPA governments.**



(News Agency) Taking a dig at the BJP government at the Centre, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday said the previous UPA government's ambitious programmes such as the rural job guarantee scheme emerged from the people, whereas the Narendra Modi-led dispensation's schemes were formulated by bureaucrats.

Gandhi criticised the 'centralised' rule of the BJP-led government, comparing it with that of the former UPA governments. Citing the MGNREGA scheme, which he said had been formulated based on people's inputs during UPA rule, he claimed that the present government's demonetisation decision came from Modi's mind and was implemented without consulting the people or the banking system. He said this while interacting with the Congress-led UDF's representatives of the local bodies in this hill district, at Kalpetta.

While responding to a question from one of the participants, Rahul said, "I completely agree with you. A lot of schemes are done in a centralised manner, and they are actually not effective because panchayat participation in designing the scheme and thinking about the scheme is not there. 'If you look at the Congress party schemes, like MNREGA, and you compare them to BJP schemes, you will find that the Congress party schemes emerged from the people, from the panchayats, and the BJP

schemes emerged from the bureaucracy," the Wayanad MP claimed. Gandhi then went on to elaborate about the launch of the MNREGA scheme, telling people how the idea emerged from a district in Maharashtra and how it was later conceptualised as a national scheme and expanded to the remaining parts of the country.

"MGNREGA emerged from the people of India. People demanded work, and the government responded to that idea. And it took many years for the scheme to be developed after talking to many, many different stakeholders. It was the scheme that emerged from the people of India. It was the wisdom of the people of India that created MGNREGA",

Gandhi said.

He alleged that Modi had ridiculed MGNREGA, but was forced to expand the scheme himself when the country faced the COVID-19 crisis.

"When COVID came, this same Prime Minister, who was ridiculing MNREGA, was forced to expand MNREGA. When the Prime Minister came up with the idea of demonetisation, it came from his mind. He did not consult the people of India. He did not even consult the banking system," the Congress leader said.

During his interaction with the office bearers of local bodies, Gandhi also discussed developmental issues on the ground and matters related to the buffer zone for forests, human-animal conflict, waste management issues, and concerns regarding MNREGA.

The representatives also raised issues regarding the reduction in fund allocation by both Central and State governments, to which Rahul said he had been raising these issues on many occasions both with the Centre and state.

## Measures being taken to protect elephants in Tamil Nadu, says environment secy

**Recently, three elephants that came into contact with an electric fence died, leaving behind two calves. In another incident, a male elephant died while it was trying to cross a bund and came in contact with a low-lying high tension wire and died.**

(News Agency) Days after four elephants were electrocuted in two separate incidents, Tamil Nadu Environment Secretary Supriya Sahu stated such incidents should not have happened. We are working to find a permanent solution to this, she said.

On March 7, three elephants that came into contact with an electric fence died, leaving behind two calves. In another



incident, a male elephant died while it was trying to cross a bund and came in contact with a low-lying high tension wire of the Tamil Nadu electricity board and died. State Environment Secretary Supriya Sahu said, "It is a very sad incident. A farmer had placed high-tension wires for warding off wild boars which killed these

elephants. We have arrested him and will make sure he faces proper punishment. In the other incident, an elephant died after coming in contact with a low-lying high-tension wire. For this, we are working closely with Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation (TANGEDCO). We are also working to find a permanent solution to this." She also said that though instructions are already in place for not permitting unauthorized solar fencing, it

is time to implement it sternly. "It is a very challenging task. We have asked our officials to hold village level meetings in areas prone to such conflicts and to make sure farmers are aware and we have also strengthened our compensatory mechanism which can be effectively used as a conservatory method," Supriya Sahu said. She added, "We are very serious about the conservation of elephants.

We have notified Agasthyamalai as an elephant sanctuary, which has happened after several decades. The government has also announced notification of a new sanctuary called Thanthai Periyar Wildlife sanctuary which will provide clear movement for elephants providing a migratory path."

## Rahul Gandhi convicted under IPC Section 504: What this law says and max punishment under it

(By Staff Reporter) A Surat court on Thursday convicted and sentenced Congress MP Rahul Gandhi to 2 years in jail in a criminal defamation case against him over a remark he made about the Modi surname.

The court found Rahul Gandhi guilty under Indian Penal Court (IPC) Section 504. What does this law say and what is the maximum punishment under it?

Section 504 of IPC defines 'intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of the peace.'

The section states that whoever intentionally insults, and thereby causes provocation to any person, intending to cause provocation or knowing that such provocation would likely cause him to break the public peace, or to commit any other offence, shall be punished

with imprisonment for a term up to two years, or with fine, or with both. The maximum possible punishment under this section is two years. For the unversed, the case was filed against Rahul Gandhi for his



alleged "how come all the thieves have Modi as the common surname?" remark on a complaint lodged by BJP MLA and former Gujarat minister Purnesh Modi. The complainant claimed that the controversial remark was made at a rally at Kolar in Karnataka ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha elections which defamed the entire Modi community.



## There Will Be Consequences! India Sends Strong Message to UK on Khalistani Attack

By: Utpal Kumar

On Wednesday, India sent a strong message to the UK government as it reduced security outside the British high commission and the envoy's residence: That there would be consequences if India's interests were harmed in the West. The development came in the wake of a violent protest outside the Indian mission in London over the weekend.

The pulling down of the national flag atop the India High Commission in London by Khalistani separatists on Sunday may appear to be a desperate act of vandalism by a few miscreants. But the truth is this is more the case of the State not just refusing to act against a few thousand Khalistani thugs and their sympathisers, but also encouraging them to act the way they did in London this Sunday, hoping this may appease what has become a substantial vote-bank, especially for the Labour Party, but also somehow derail the India Story. Interestingly, the High Commission storming saga has come on the heels of the British government-funded BBC's hitjob documentary that targeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the 2002 Gujarat riots despite the Supreme Court giving him a clean chit after a detailed investigation. The UK in that way is not an exception. Almost all 'First World' nations with substantial stakes in democracy and the democratic way of life — from Canada and the United States

to Germany and Australia — can be accused of looking the other way when such subversive elements work overtime on their soil to dismantle the world's largest democracy. While the West in general has shown utter inaptitude, if not indifference, in containing anti-India forces on its soil, the British record has been the most pathetic and hypocritical of them all. There was, after all, no reason for the British authorities to be caught napping this Sunday when the Modi government had forewarned Whitehall and MI-5 about the planned Khalistani protests on Sunday. That this has happened under the watch of an Indian-origin Prime Minister in Britain makes the story even more interesting. For, it will as much hit the image of new India, which has just overtaken the British economy to become the world's fifth largest economy, as it puts Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on a slippery slope, much to the delight of the British establishment, including the Deep State. This was, however, not the first time that such anti-India forces were given free passes in the UK. In 2019, soon after the abrogation of Article 370, the Indian High Commission in London was attacked by a 10,000-strong mob of British Pakistanis. Then too, the politico-administrative will to deal with these arsonists was sorely missing. Three years later, during the 2022 Leicester violence, Hindus settled in the UK were again selectively targeted by Britain-based Islamists — and the police just refused to intervene.

(Contd. on page 28)

## Amritpal Singh's Bumbling 'Escape' Has Finished Him as a Factor in Punjab

By: Aman Sharma

Punjabis love dare-devilry, many a times a rebellion. While Amritpal Singh may have given a false glimpse of the same over the last six months to endear himself to a small section of Punjabis, his escape from the police has extinguished his flicker of a flame in Punjab. The best thing for the police would have been to arrest him during the raid. But his 'escape' has become the butt of jokes and memes in Punjab, with people wondering if this is the same man who spoke of lofty ideas like 'Khalistan' and claimed of taking on the powers-to-be.

After dumping two SUVs, he hopped on a motorcycle, then put that motorcycle on a cart after the vehicle developed a snag and then was last seen on another motorcycle near Phillaur on the evening of March 18. Such an escape is making Punjabis sneer at him, and his 'swag' of the last six months of moving in SUVs with armed guards coming a cropper when a crisis came upon him. That may also explain the liberal leak of CCTV images and videos of Amritpal Singh's escape for wide public consumption, which is ruining his carefully-cultivated image and exposing him for what he actually is — a person planted by the ISI in Pakistan to fester trouble in Punjab. The

images show Amritpal abandoning his long white robes of a baptised Sikh, making political leaders wonder if a baptised Sikh ever runs in such a fashion. Revelations made by the police and intelligence agencies are also destroying Amritpal's claims of fighting against drugs in Punjab as his cartel is now seen to be involved in the smuggling of drugs through drones and pushing them into Punjab. The talk in Punjab is now more about his criminal connections to the drugs mafia and gun dealers and his attempts to create law and order problems and trying to disturb social harmony. His earlier act of taking the holy book of the Sikhs, the Guru Granth Sahib, to the Ajnala Police station had earned him the displeasure of the Sikh clergy and a committee inquiry by the Akal Takht, the holy seat of the Sikhs. Amritpal had decided to lie low once the Akal Takht stepped in, as censures from there would have derailed efforts of the ISI to use Amritpal Singh as a 'weapon' in Punjab. His escape has further damaged the despicable plan that the ISI had weaved to create trouble. That may explain the efforts being made by Khalistani groups in UK, USA and Canada to stir trouble as Amritpal Singh has got no support back home in Punjab post the raid on him. The law will get to Amritpal Singh sooner than later but for now, his factor is over in Punjab.

## After Xi-Putin meeting, Team Biden still doesn't get what's just happened to the United States

By Rebekah Koffler

Changes are taking place now that haven't happened in a hundred years. When we are together, we drive these changes," proclaimed China's President Xi Jinping as he was saying goodbye to his "dear friend" Vladimir Putin in Moscow this week. "Agreed," responded Russia's president.

Now that the three-day meeting is over what are the implications for the West, Europe and the world? Here's a look at what to expect (and not to expect) going forward.

**Two leaders herald a permanent anti-U.S. bloc with China as global center of gravity**

Before Xi and Putin met in what will have all the hallmarks of a historic meeting, the two leaders published manifestos in their respective state newspapers, outlining their vision for the world that directly challenges the Western-ruled-based democratic order. Throughout the summit-level meeting, both authoritarians signaled their strong anti-U.S. and anti-West sentiment and intention to oppose America's leadership at every turn.

Xi, in a signed article with the headline "Forging Ahead to Open a New Chapter of China-Russia Friendship, Cooperation and Common Development," praised Moscow and Beijing's role in fostering a "new model of major-country relations" based on "mutual trust." The article also ran Monday in Russia's National Gazette.

**Xi and Putin will use the United Nations to push back against the U.S. and the West**

In what appears to be a direct message to the West, Xi reminded readers that China and Russia are permanent members of the U.N. Security Council who pursue "comprehensive strategic partner of coordination" and "uphold an independent foreign policy."

Putin, who authored an article in China's People's Daily Newspaper, highlighted the "special nature of the Russia-China partnership," built on "respect for each other's sovereignty and interests."

In a dig at NATO, he noted that the Moscow-Beijing relationship is of a different quality, having no "Cold War-time military-political alliances" with "no one to constantly order" and to "constantly obey."

It was a clear message that the two authoritarians, both of whom probably will remain heads of state for life, will continue using the United Nations Security Council as a platform to oppose every major action on the Western agenda.

By holding state-level talks with Putin, just days after the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for the Russian dictator for war crimes in Ukraine committed by the Russian forces in there, Xi made it clear to the West that China disregards international law that was built on Western principles.

**Putin's Russia is now playing second fiddle to Xi's China**

China's leader gave his Russian counterpart his strongest support yet by endorsing Putin's prospective 2024 presidential reelection. "Thanks to your strong leadership, Russia has made significant progress in achieving the prosperity of the country in recent years. I am sure that the Russian people will strongly support you in your good endeavors," Xi told Putin. Putin, who has always projected the image of a hardened ruler of a nuclear superpower, gave Xi a clear acknowledgment that China is now the higher-ranking partner in the relationship. In his greeting statement on Monday, the first day of Xi's visit, Putin was effusive and subservient towards Xi. He called him "Esteemed Mister Chairman!" and "Dear Friend!" He observed that China has made a "colossal breakthrough forward in its development, attracting genuine attention across the world," adding that "we [Russia] are even a little jealous."

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Sharanjit Singh Thind

Managing Editor :

Susmita Ghosh

Deputy Managing Editor :

Amaninder Singh Thind

Editor (Political Affairs-India) : Aruna Singh

Special Correspondents: Gagandeep Singh (India)

Editorial Intern: Roubin Singh Thind

Web Coordinator : Harpreet Singh

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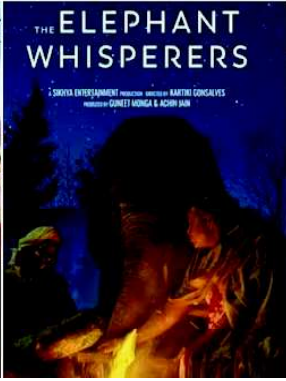
Phone: 917 612 3158

editor@thesouthasianinsider.com, thesouthasianinsider@gmail.com

www.thesouthasianinsider.com

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# The Oscars and Decoloniality: Guilt-Tripping Indians Celebrating International Success



By: Sreejit Datta

"We speak of world movements and have a fair acquaintance with the principles and details of Western life and thought, but we do not always sufficiently realise where we actually stand today and how to apply our bookish principles to our situation in life. [...]"

We talk – a little too glibly perhaps – of a conflict of the ideas and ideals of the West with our traditional ideas and ideals. In many cases, it is confusion, rather than a conflict, and the real problem is to clear up the

confusion and to make it develop in the first instance into a definite conflict. The danger is in the complacent acquiescence in the confusion. The realisation of a conflict of ideals implies a deepening of the soul. There is conflict proper only when one is really serious about ideals, and feels each ideal to be a matter of life and death. We sometimes sentimentally indulge in the thought of a conflict before we are really serious with either ideal." – "Swaraj in Ideas" (1929), Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya. Nearly a hundred years ago,

Acharya Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya, India's pre-eminent modern philosopher from the early 20th century, had given a discourse named "Swaraj in Ideas" before his pupils at Hooghly College. In this discourse, he warned us of several pitfalls in the business of intellectually navigating through a modern world, where ideas and ideals of one's own national identity are bound to interact with those from the world outside. In the process of showing where such pitfalls may lurk in, in a language and in a style that is strikingly lucid and persuasive, the Acharya especially highlighted two things: first, the danger of not sufficiently realising how and where to apply certain principles or ideas that we may have learned in our schools; and second, the folly of indulging in glib talk about a conflict between the ideas and ideals of the West and those of our own tradition, when in reality there may not be a real conflict but only confusion regarding the ideas and ideals involved. The Acharya's warnings

proved prophetic in a recent predicament involving an international film awards event and our mixed reactions to its outcomes where India was concerned.

Not one, but two Indian entries clinched the winner's title at this year's Annual Academy Awards, which is popularly known as the Oscars. At this 95th edition of the Oscars, held in Los Angeles, USA, the Telugu song 'Naatu Naatu' from S.S. Rajamouli's 2022 blockbuster nationalist drama 'RRR' made it to the top in the 'Best Original Song' category, and so did Kartiki Gonsalves' 'The Elephant Whisperers' in the category of 'Best Documentary Short'. Naturally, many Indians found themselves elated at the newsbreak of this double success.

That elation is hardly a matter of surprise. But what is indeed a little surprising is that some Indians are expressing disgruntlement over the celebratory mood displayed by their fellow countrymen. And the

reason why they're disgruntled over this turn of events is – you're in for another surprise – not their disagreement over the award choices made by the Academy's voting members. Instead, it is a concept that this disgruntled section has turned into a slogan by adopting a crude reductionist approach to understand and apply. It is a concept that has only recently gained traction among this unhappy section, which consists mainly of social media commentators and a few writers, who claim to be speaking/writing from a 'Hindu standpoint'.

As is the wont of social media opinion peddling, users find slogans to be a useful tool – because they're simplistic, they don't invite or even require people to do much thinking (or any thinking at all); and thus, social media users, relieved of the necessity to use their mental faculties, can quickly conjure around them a virtual mob of followers who may hit 'like', 'share', and 'subscribe' at the drop of a hat. (Contd. on page 26)

## What Xi Jinping's West Asia Forays Mean for India, US and the World

By: N Sathya Moorthy

Taken in context, China brokering a truce/peace between Saudi Arabia and Tehran may impact wider political geography, including India. If nothing else, it may ensure that much of West Asia/Middle East proclaims neutrality in any future geopolitical stand-off between China and the US, and also between China and India. It may not be good from a historic Indian socio-political perspective, whatever be the geo-strategic benefits accruing from the relatively recent geostrategic overtures between India and the US, whose limitations the Ukraine War has already exposed.

Going beyond the provocative American behaviour over the 'Khashoggi affair' in 2018, China's twin Saudi-centric initiatives were waiting to happen. Unlike the US and its Western allies, China does not concern itself with human rights issues in third nations. Over the past decades, Gulf-Arab sheikhdoms have been perturbed by the region-wide fallout of the anti-establishment 'Iranian Revolution' of 1979-80. To them all, the Taliban and the

Al-Qaeda combo in Afghanistan and then Pakistan, both before and after 9/11, were unwelcome. Even more so was the 'Arab Spring' kind of 'orchestrated' anti-establishment mass protests, where they saw a hidden American hand, for instance, in the dehumanised death of Libya's Gaddafi. In between, the second American war against the purported 'Axis of Evil' on Saddam Hussein's Iraq in the name of non-existent weapons of mass destruction (WMD) opened their eyes to possibilities. They needed a new ally in the new century/millennia, and China with its non-interference political policy and mutually supportive economic outreach suits them fine. Like the US in the Cold War era, but not anymore, China sees it all as a political investment for the future. From a Chinese perspective, Beijing might have neutralised the overwhelming US presence in inter- and intra- Gulf policy, without actually expecting them to take its side in any future face-off with the US. Though still dependent on the US in the UN fora, Israel, on the other side

of the Gulf's socio-political gulf, too has been striking it on its own for a few years now.

West Asia, starting with long-time friends, allies and strategic partners of the US has sent out a message that the US cannot take them for granted anymore. Through long years of association, the US has taught them the term and meaning of 'supreme national self-interest'. India, a quick learner of American political idioms, has taught them through its Russia policy on the Ukraine War. China, too, took the same line but it had little choice.

As if not to lose time after deciding to resume bilateral relations, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia has invited Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to visit Riyadh. Raisi, according to Iranian reports, has accepted the invitation. The visit, when it takes place, has the potential to rewrite political equations all across West Asia/Middle East. It may evolve a contemporary dynamic of its own, where China, at times, might be made to feel like an 'outsider' as much as the US from now on. Of course, Is-



rael may be concerned even as other regional nations like Egypt are maintaining silence.

**TWO 'COUPS' IN FOUR MONTHS**  
For China, it is two Saudi-centric diplomatic coups in four months. In December, Riyadh hosted and facilitated President Xi Jinping getting a foothold in the 22-member Arab League. He has since given himself a third-term inauguration gift in March by getting Saudi Arabia and Iran to restore diplomatic ties after a six-year break. US President Joe Biden had the opportunity to do it, but he toed Republican predecessor Donald Trump's antagonistic ap-

proach to Iran, rather than his former Democratic boss, Barack Obama, who sought to set things right on the bilateral plane but could not complete the process. The more the US has been painting China as the aggressor in Taiwan, the slower Beijing has been to bite the bait. When the US sent former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan, offering a strategic distraction from the war in Europe and following it up by sending a naval vessel to those waters, China did not react as much. Nor did it wholly side with Russia in the European war. (Contd. on page 27)



# Why air pollution in India is a public health crisis and demands urgent action

**We cannot afford to subject future generations to air pollution that will subject them to lifelong medical dependence and reduce their quality of life. So, it's high time that it is given a prominent seat in the public policy discourse and debate.**

By Dr K Madan Gopal

With the recently released fifth annual World Air Quality Report 2022, India became the world's eighth most polluted country, with an annual average PM2.5 concentration of 53.3 micrograms per cubic meter, more than 10 times the WHO's recommended levels. Delhi has been ranked the fourth most polluted city and the second most polluted capital city globally, with an annual average PM2.5 concentration of 92.6 micrograms per cubic meter. The pace at which air pollution in India has grown is concerning. We have the National Ambient Air Quality Standards in place, as recommended by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), to monitor and control air pollution in India. Yet, they are nowhere close to the global air pollution standards. As a result,



many Indian cities are engulfed in toxic pollutant clouds, exacerbating the country's public health crisis.

## Impact of Air Pollution: Public Health and Beyond

The impact of air pollution on public health seems graver than earlier envisaged. It is a significant and growing risk factor for ill health in India. Second only to child and maternal malnutrition and ranking above unsafe water and unsanitary conditions that contribute significantly to the

country's total burden of diseases. As per the Lancet 2022 study, air pollution is estimated to have caused around 1.7 million premature deaths in India in 2019, accounting for nearly 17.8 per cent of the total deaths recorded in the country that year, the highest in the world. Nearly 40 million disability-adjusted life-years (DALYs), comprising 11.5 per cent of the total DALYs, are lost due to air pollution. Further, as per a study by the environmental think tank the Centre for

Science and Environment (CSE), life expectancy in India has decreased by 2.6 years due to the diseases brought on by air pollution. Moreover, it has emerged as the most significant risk factor for non-communicable diseases. While the more recognised effects of air pollution are known, including lung cancer, respiratory obstructions, cardiovascular diseases, stroke, and acute respiratory infections, new epidemiological studies suggest that it can have a much broader impact on

health, including those on birth weight, child development and cognition, insomnia, fertility, cerebral health, and increased vulnerability to various forms of cancer. Since these effects are not currently considered when estimating the disease burden, the overall effects of air pollution are vastly understated in India.

Other consequences of poor air quality include lower labour productivity, employee absenteeism, lower asset productivity, and higher health-care costs. Welfare losses remain unrecognised and unquantified while calculating the total impact of air pollution. If estimates are to be believed, air pollution costs about \$95 billion annually, i.e., almost 7 lakh crore, forming around 3.3 per cent of India's total GDP.

(Contd. on page 27)

## Eknath Shinde's Biggest Worry - It's Not Just About Supreme Court

By Amitabh Tiwari

Maharashtra has entered a zone of uncertainty as the Supreme Court constitution bench has reserved its judgment on a batch of petitions relating to the feud between the Uddhav Thackeray and the Eknath Shinde factions of the Shiv Sena.

Will Eknath Shinde continue as Maharashtra Chief Minister? Will the status quo as demanded by Uddhav Thackeray be restored, facilitating his comeback as Chief Minister? Will the Shinde faction MLAs face disqualification? Will the house be dissolved and early polls be held? Or will the current situation prevail? Can the Supreme Court remove a Chief Minister?

The answer to the last question is - yes, it has happened in the past.

In 2016, the Supreme Court removed Kalikho Pul, who was Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh for 145 days (five months), and restored status quo ante. All his decisions were rendered null and void.

This is a very complex case, which has turned the Tenth

Schedule, which deals with anti-defection, on its head. MLAs from the Shinde camp didn't defect to or merge with any other party and claimed to be the real Shiv Sena.

With the help of a pliable Governor (as alleged by the Uddhav faction) they managed to secure a majority along with the BJP in a trust vote and appointed their own Speaker.

The Chief Justice of India, DY Chandrachud, has punched holes in key arguments put forth by both the factions and the Governor. And in my opinion the judgment hinges on these two points.

Uddhav Thackeray resigned before the trust vote, so how can he be reinstated?

Staring at defeat, Uddhav Thackeray didn't face the trust vote and resigned before it. This could be his biggest blunder. At the time, he was speaking on Facebook Lives and telling the people of Maharashtra that Shinde betrayed the Thackeray family. Even if defeat was inevitable, how could Uddhav Thackeray lose a golden opportunity to

make his case before the people? That too, in assembly proceedings telecast live. Those who used the opportunity to their advantage were Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 1996 in Lok Sabha and more recently, BS Yediyurappa in 2018 in Karnataka's Vidhan Soudha. Further Shinde faction MLAs would have voted against Uddhav, thus powering his disqualification plea, not following the whip is a stronger case for disqualification than anti-party activities.

On Uddhav Thackeray's request to set aside the June 2022 Governor order to the Chief Minister to take a floor test, the Chief Justice quipped. "So, according to you, we do what? Re-instate you? But you resigned. That's like the court being asked to reinstate a government which has resigned before the floor test." "...status quo ante would have been a logical thing to do provided that you had lost the trust vote on the floor of the House. Because, then clearly you have been ousted from power based on the trust vote, which could be set aside. Look

at the intellectual conundrum .... You chose not to face the floor test." Shinde faction's strength becomes its weakness

The MLAs led by Eknath Shinde claimed from the start that they never left the party, that they are still in the Shiv Sena, and that they have not split or merged with any political party. They did not adopt the resignation route like Congress MLAs did in Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka or merge with the rival party like the Congress MLAs in Goa. This may ultimately allow them to escape disqualification. However, it has now become their Achilles' Heel. The Chief Justice said the Shinde faction's loss of faith in the leadership of Uddhav Thackeray was "an internal party matter" over which the Governor has no jurisdiction.

"The letter of 34 MLAs to the governor cannot be construed that they have withdrawn the support. Now, if 34 MLAs are part of the Shiv Sena, what is the cogent material before the governor that calls for the floor test? Governors have to exercise their

powers with the greatest circumspection,"

CJI Chandrachud said. The Constitutional Conundrum... So, then Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari may not have been right in calling for a trust vote on the basis of a letter of discontent from the Shinde faction. But the ousted Chief Minister, who wants to be reinstated, didn't face the trust vote.

## The Practical Considerations

There are many practical difficulties in restoring status quo. Let us assume that it is restored and Uddhav becomes Chief Minister but he doesn't have a clear majority. The Speaker is from his camp, so 39 MLAs of the Shinde faction could be disqualified. This will be challenged in courts. The NCP and the Congress may question Uddhav Thackeray's claim on the Chief Minister's post (he becomes a junior partner). The BJP could again approach the Governor claiming Uddhav has lost his majority in a truncated house of 249. The Governor may order a floor test. Uddhav may face it or resign again before the floor test.

# For 2024, Rahul Gandhi Must Open Talks With These 3 Leaders

By Ashutosh

The meeting between Akhilesh Yadav and Mamata Banerjee is definitely not good news for opposition unity. If anything, it will most certainly impede the process of unity. This might also deflate the Congress's campaign to nail the Modi government on the Adani issue. If Mamata Banerjee and Akhilesh Yadav had said they are coming together to defeat Narendra Modi, then it would have added a different flavour to the unity process. But the two being openly critical of the Congress and trying to keep their distance from the grand old party smacks of short-sightedness and parochialism. I have been saying for a long time that regional leaders today lack a national vision and ideological conviction, unlike opposition politicians of the Congress era, who belonged to small parties but were tall in national stature. Those leaders had a national perspective and were willing to sacrifice their small interests for a larger national goal.

It is no wonder that in 1977, all opposition parties except a few merged to form the Janata Party. They were driven by the conviction that Indira Gandhi's dictatorial regime had to be defeated to save democracy.

Today, that conviction is missing and self-interest is the prime mover. This is the single most important challenge that the opposition today is facing in its fight



against Modi and the BJP. Since the Congress is the biggest party in the opposition, it is duty-bound to constantly be in talks with opposition leaders and make them understand the urgency of opposition unity. Since Rahul Gandhi is the leader of the Congress, it will be a test of his leadership skills to corral the opposition despite these impediments.

The Congress, which has been accused of arrogance while dealing with opposition parties, offered a major climb-down when Mallikarjun Kharge said in Chennai that the Congress was not stuck on leading the opposition front. Kharge, while replying to Farooq Abdullah's statement that the Congress should not insist on the post of prime minister, said

that opposition parties should sink their differences and be united to defeat the BJP at the Centre.

A similar sentiment was expressed by Priyanka Gandhi at the Raipur session of the Congress when she said, "The world is looking at us (opposition) and opposition unity is needed to defeat BJP." Rahul Gandhi, during his London visit said, "A lot of coordination is going on with opposition parties and conversation is also happening among them." He further said, "There are complications in many states, but the opposition is very much capable of having this discussion and resolving it."

These three statements by the three top leaders of the Congress are indica-

tive of the fact that the Congress, as a party which has ruled country for more than five decades, is aware of its weakness and knows that it cannot defeat the BJP on its own; like the anti-Congressism of the past, anti-BJP-ism can be the only glue for opposition unity.

This political clarity was absent in the Congress thought process during the 2019 general election. The opposition was a divided house. Every party was pulling in different directions. Rahul Gandhi was the president of the Congress, which had just won assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. Rahul Gandhi was confident that the Congress alone could give a tough fight to Modi, and he proved to be dead wrong.

Not only the opposition but even the Congress was divided into factions. Big and older leaders had no faith in Rahul Gandhi's leadership skills. In fact, Rahul Gandhi said the same in his resignation letter after the election defeat - he was "fighting alone".

It is also said that more than the BJP and the Modi government, it is Congress leaders who were instrumental in the whisper campaign that rose to a crescendo about Rahul as "Pappu" (good for nothing). But now, Rahul Gandhi is a changed person and the Congress is no longer a fractured house. **(Contd. on page 24)**

## Don't Postpone Your Joy, Now Is The Time To Be Happy

By: Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

We have a tendency to postpone our happiness. A child thinks he will be happy when he goes to college. Those in college think happiness is in finding the dream job. Ask someone who has a job and they will tell you they are waiting for the perfect life partner. Ask the retirees if they are happy, they might tell you they miss the old days. It is like preparing your bed to sleep all night and never getting to sleep! What are you waiting for to be content?

### WORRYING TAKES YOU AWAY FROM YOURSELF

The creation wants you to be happy. God wants to see you full of enthusiasm, joy, compassion, and happiness. But we keep worrying about this or that. Don't judge and don't worry about what others think of you. Whatever they think, it is not permanent. Your own opinion of things should matter as people keep changing all the time. So why worry about what others think of you? Worrying takes a lot of toll on the body, mind, intellect, and alertness. It is like an obstruction that takes us far

away from ourselves. It brings us fear. Fear is nothing but a lack of love. It is an intense sense of isolation.

This can be handled by relaxing and doing some breathing exercises. Then you will realise that "I am loved, I am part of everybody and I am part of the whole universe." This will liberate you and the mind will take a complete shift. You will then find so much harmony around you. Every day make a resolution — "Today, I am just going to be happy. I will not let anything disturb my happiness. I am going to be contented, happy."

### MOVE FROM CONTENTMENT TO CONTENTMENT

Normally, people move from frustration to frustration, lack of fulfilment to lack of fulfilment, but on the spiritual path, one moves from fulfilment to fulfilment. But it's important not becoming lethargic



in the name of fulfilment. Usually, fulfilled people just become lethargic, which is not right. Fulfilment and dynamism go together. When frustration and dynamism combine, it becomes destructive for society. People who are frustrated become dynamic and that is why the world is in chaos.

On the other hand, those who are fulfilled but lethargic do not contribute either. There needs to be a delicate balance.

### BEING HAPPY AND YET ALERT

A wise one is happy even in bad times. And a foolish one is unhappy even in good times. Usually, when you are happy, you become spaced out and lose focus. When you are unhappy, you are very focused. Whenever you are only thinking about yourself, your mind shrinks. Whenever the mind shrinks, it is bound to bring unhappiness. And

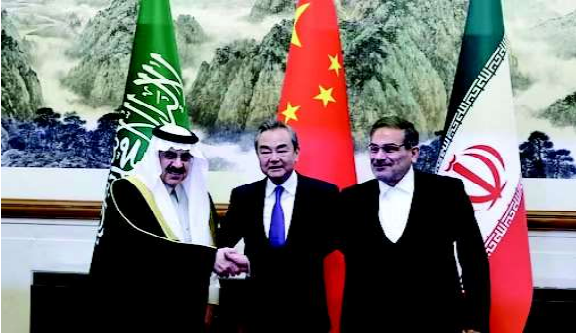
when the mind expands, it brings joy. But a beautiful combination — of being happy and alert and focused at the same time — can be experienced in spiritual life.

### GOING BACK TO THE SELF TO DEAL WITH LONELINESS

Happiness does not come from a talent or skill that you develop. Unless you realize who you are, and what the nature of consciousness is through your own introspection, happiness remains a far-fetched reality. The spirit of self-inquiry in the true sense leads to meditation and is absolutely essential in this quest for happiness. The 6th century Indian philosopher and thinker Adi Shankaracharya has said that it is dispassion towards the ephemeral and connection with the eternal that brings true joy. In fact, he goes further and asks, "What joy does detachment not bring?" The word for solitude in Sanskrit is 'ekant', meaning 'the end of loneliness'. Loneliness cannot end by changing company, even if it is more sympathetic and understanding. It can only end when you discover your real nature for yourself.



# Saudi-Iran Patch-up: Can New Hegemon Fix Ancient Rivalry?



The Iran-Saudi Arabia peace agreement brokered by China is being seen by many analysts as a game-changing development in West Asia. While some expect a major realignment of forces taking place and a new order emerging in the region, others are convinced that a new, wannabe hegemon — China — is trying to occupy the space vacated by the old, distracted, somewhat confused hegemon — USA. While there is no denying that China playing peacemaker between the Saudis and Iranians is a significant development whose potential impact cannot be ignored or understated, it is important to also not overstate and over-hype its importance. West Asia is nothing if not an unending story of false dawns — remember the

excitement over the US-Iran thaw nearly 10 years ago?

The agreement in and of itself is not earth shattering. It only restores bilateral diplomatic relations which had last been severed in 2016. The agreement also seeks to restore old security and economic cooperation agreements between the two countries. All of this is pretty standard stuff. What is, however, extraordinary is that both the protagonists have undertaken to respect the 'sovereignty of states' and not interfere in internal affairs of states. This formulation is interesting because it doesn't talk of interfering in or respecting each other's sovereignty but that of 'states'. Presumably this alludes to ending the intervention by and proxy wars between Saudi Arabia and Iran in

the various active theatres in the region — Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq. But seriously, does anyone really believe that both sides will pull back and stay squeaky clean in adherence to this agreement by ending their involvement in these 'small wars'?

The thing is that the rivalry, even enmity, between the Saudis and Iranians is as old as Islam itself. It is not just a sectarian issue, but also a civilisational and cultural battle. It is an ideological struggle for the control of Islam which is manifested in the geo-political power games in the region and beyond. On top of all this, it is becoming a tussle between the transformational efforts of the Saudi leadership to embrace a radically different worldview from the one that the antediluvian Ayatollahs of Iran represent. This 1,500-year-old rivalry isn't going to go away just because there is a new wannabe sheriff in town. In fact, even when the US was the undisputed hegemon and had excellent relations with both Saudi Arabia and pre-Islamic revolution Iran, relations between the two ebbed and flowed and were often testy.

Therefore, anyone who thinks

that with China coming in things will be radically different has another thought coming. And yet, there are political, security and diplomatic compulsions and calculations that have paved the way for the recent thaw. But these are more tactical rather than strategic in nature and will at best lead to an uneasy accommodation of each other for as long as it lasts. Of course, for now there will be all sorts of hifalutin statements of peace, cooperation, investment and brotherhood from all sides, which each side will take with a pinch of salt.

At the strategic level, the agreement does add to China's diplomatic heft and raises its profile beyond that of being an economic giant and a burgeoning military power. China has certainly demonstrated its ability to intercede and bridge differences between countries' daggers drawn with each other. But in the process, it could well end up expanding its equities with both sides if it cannot sustain the thaw or ensure that the two sides stick to their side of the bargain. For now, however, China will be entitled to bask in the glory of what many see as a diplomatic coup. But to extrapolate from this

achievement and imagine that the Chinese are the new big daddies of the region and have replaced the US would be a mistake.

The only reason why the Chinese were able to play the role they did was because of shoddy US diplomacy which seemed to leave a sort of vacuum in the region. There has been a growing sense that the US is just not as focused on the region as it used to be in the past. The reason for that, some believe, is the US no longer sees West Asia as being central to its interests in the way it was a couple of decades ago. The American focus has shifted to the contestation with China in the Indo-Pacific and has further been diverted by the Ukraine war. Add to this the fact that the US has virtually no equity with Iran which it could have used to play an honest broker.

Even with the Saudis, the Americans have messed up. The Biden administration has treated the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman (MbS) rather shabbily, especially after the Khashoggi affair. To reduce the entire relationship with Saudis to just this one rather unsavoury incident

(Contd on page 28)

## Why Kejriwal's Personal Attacks on Modi Always Boomerang

For an impulsive man, AAP chief and Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal showed extraordinary patience and political acumen by stopping his rancid personal attacks against his political rival, PM Narendra Modi, for the last couple of years. He had called the PM "a coward and a psychopath" before the pall of civility descended temporarily.

He was advised that attacking the PM did not go down well with his electorate, many of whom vote for the BJP at the national level and for AAP in local elections.

Modi continues to enjoy enviable popularity at home and abroad. He was recently adjudged as the world's most popular leader with an approval rating of 78% among his voters, way ahead of Joe Biden, Emmanuel Macron or Rishi Sunak, according to a survey by US-based consulting firm Morning Consult.

In the time the Delhi CM kept his tongue on leash, those in the Opposition space called AAP the 'B-team of the BJP', 'Hindustva Lite', and suchlike. But he started gaining the trust of Hindus beyond Delhi, and even swept the polls in Punjab.

Now, the personal attacks are back.

He recently called Modi "anpadh" or 'illiterate' Prime Minister for exhorting citizens to come out to clap and bang pots and pans during Covid. But cunningly left out half the truth. Modi had asked people to clap for health workers as a tribute, not as a cure. Nations from the US to Turkey, the UK to Germany, Italy to Korea all paid tribute to their Covid warriors in the same manner.

Kejriwal has again attacked the PM personally after the Centre asked the Delhi government to postpone presenting the state Budget on technical grounds. Delhi and Puducherry are the only two Union Territories with a state legislature. Their Budgets need to be cleared by the MHA before these

can be tabled. Still, Kejriwal asked if Modi had a grudge against the people of Delhi.

Why is Arvind Kejriwal suddenly back to making personal attacks



against Narendra Modi? Here are some probable reasons. First, the arrest of deputy CM and Kejriwal's close aide Manish Sisodia in the liquor scam, months after his finance minister Satyendra Jain was thrown in prison may have got his goat. Losing two most trusted aides in a short time can frustrate the most stable minds.

Second, with two states under his

belt, Kejriwal has ambitions to lead the Opposition into the 2024 general elections. But repeated pot-shots from other Opposition leaders about his growing, newfound Hindutva leaning and perceived understanding with the BJP may be working on his mind. He may want to shake off the 'BJP's B-Team' image by taking on the PM personally. But the third and most interesting factor could be his unease with Punjab CM and his underling Bhagwant Mann's smooth coordination and open communication lines with the Centre. The crackdown on Amritpal Singh-led Khalistani upstart outfit Waris Punjab De has shown that the Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Mann closely planned and monitored the operation. Besides, Mann is rumoured to have pushed out Kejriwal's eyes and ears in Punjab, Raghav Chadha, from all matters of the government. Also, the anti-Khalistan operation has won Mann praise from even his ideological rivals. All this could have thrown Kejriwal's acquired patience towards PM Modi. But if he fits his old tongue back firmly to his mouth, the taste of success among the electorate that respects Modi will elude him.

# Why Nitish Kumar Could Be The Best Bet For Leading The Opposition in 2024

The looming 2024 general elections are imminent and the exchanges and deliberations surrounding potential aspirants for the prime ministerial position have already commenced. Amidst the turbulence of the political sphere, one distinguished name that emerges as a potential contender to spearhead the Opposition alliance is Nitish Kumar, the Chief Minister of Bihar.

Nitish Kumar has enjoyed a prolonged stint in the political limelight and his notoriety and adeptness in leadership have been extensively acknowledged. Kumar's distinct leadership methodology deviates greatly from that of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and it is precisely this disparity that positions him as a robust contender for leading the Opposition coalition.

In this piece, we will analyse the reasons why Nitish Kumar might be the best bet for leading the Opposition alliance in 2024.

## NITISH NEVER COMPROMISES ON HIS IDEOLOGY

Nitish Kumar has always been a staunch believer in his ideology and principles, even while being in an alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the state of Bihar. He has never hesitated to take a stand on crucial issues such as the Gujarat riots, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), the National Register of Citizens (NRC), and Triple Talaq, even if it meant going against the stance of his alliance partner. Kumar's unwavering commitment to his principles has earned him respect from his supporters and critics alike and is a testament to his strong character and conviction.

During PM Modi's rally in Darbhanga in the run-up to the national polls of 2019, Nitish Kumar drew sharp criticism from Hindutva forces for maintaining silence during the Vande Mataram chants raised by PM Modi. In a video that got widely circulated on social media, Nitish was seen staying "silent and calm" on the stage at a time when PM Modi

chanted 'Vande Mataram' waving fists in the air.

## IT'S NITISH'S OBC 'SOCIALIST' VS MODI'S OBC 'CAPITALIST'

Moreover, Kumar's focus on social justice and welfare measures is also noteworthy. He has been a vocal supporter of the backward classes and has implemented several policies to uplift them. He is seen as an OBC socialist who believes in affirmative action and reservations. In contrast, Modi is seen as an OBC capitalist who is more focused on economic growth and development. Kumar's focus on social justice and welfare measures is in line with the ideology of several Opposition parties, and this could help him in rallying their support.

## NITISH KUMAR HAS PROVED THAT BJP IS VINCIBLE

Not just once but twice, Nitish Kumar has demonstrated that BJP is not invincible in the realm of Indian politics post 2014. In the year 2015, he formed a coalition



'Mahagathbandhan' with other parties to defeat the BJP in the state elections. This was especially when Narendra Modi's popularity was at its peak.

Again in the year 2022, he repeated this feat by triumphing over the BJP's strategy of attempting a Maharashtra-style coup by destroying Janata Dal-United (JD-U) from within. Instead, Kumar forged an alliance with his former opponent, the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), overthrowing BJP from the ruling side. This is a testament to Kumar's political acumen and his ability to navi-

gate the complex landscape of Indian politics.

## WHY NITISH KUMAR?

Kumar's leadership style is vastly different from Modi's. Modi is seen as a charismatic, assertive leader who is not afraid to take bold decisions. However, Kumar's leadership style is more subdued and methodical. He is seen as a consensus-builder who takes all stakeholders into consideration before taking a decision. This style of leadership is more inclusive and has helped Kumar in maintaining a stable government in Bihar for a long time. (Contd. on page 24)

# How India can Reboot Urban Mobility to Prepare for the Future



India started with the first-mover advantage in urban mobility in Asia. It got urban rail 170 years ago, trams 150 years ago, cycle rickshaw and cycle 140 years back, urban bus 100 years ago, electric trolley bus 90 years back, auto rickshaw 75 years back and waterborne urban transport in third century BC, if not earlier. It is time to reimagine urban mobility by applying learnings from India's past and the global best.

In the year 2023, in the epochal defining tectonic shift in the global demography, India will overtake China to become the most populous country on Earth. Also, India's urban population is growing much faster than its rural population, making the urban mobility conundrum a key issue to be fixed.

In this three-part series on India's Urban Mobility Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow, I trace the growth of the country's urbanization and explain how Indian cities started with the first mover advantage in urban mobility (both rail-based and road-based public transit) and how the momentum was lost thereafter, as the country embraced motorization, first slowly, then in a rapid-fire manner.

I then take a detour to examine how urban mobility got neglected in the first six decades

of independence before exploring how cities are reimagining their urban mobility with the train of the dogged pursuit of rail and bus-based mass transit.

Lastly, I examine the existing gap in the urban mobility infrastructure, including the lack of multimodal integration. I also touch upon the yawning gap in the first-mile and last-mile connectivity services and the poor state of infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists. And I conclude with why the country, though on the right path, has to move much faster along with the critically needed course correction. The context first- 'Urbanization on the Uptick' Before I delve into the problems and solutions to urban mobility, it is contextually relevant that I first provide a bird's eye view- Urbanization in India at the Inflection Point.

## URBANIZATION AT THE INFLEXION POINT

In the recent decades, contrary to the traditional dominant governance paradigm, 'India lives in its villages,' the country has urbanized fast, with the population growing from 16.0 crore in 1981 to 21.7 crore in 1991 to 28.5 crore in 2001 and 37.7 crore in

2011, and likely 48 crore in 2021.

## Following are defining traits of Indian urbanization-

One, recent decades have witnessed a spurt in the rate of growth of the urban population - 36.44 percent (1981-1991), 31.51 percent (1991-2001) and 31.8 percent (2001-2011). This is partly owing to the organic population growth, in part due to the rural-urban migration and remainder due to the addition of the new areas as 'urban.'

Two, since 1901, the percentage of urban population as compared to the country's total population has grown steadily -10.8 percent in 1901, 17.2 percent in 1951, 27.8 percent in 2001, 31.2 percent in 2011 and 35.7 percent in 2022.

Three, India's urban population in 2020 (48.0 crore) is one and half times the US population (33.2 crore) of 2022, the third most populous country in the world.

Four, though cities in range of 5-10 lakh and one million plus population are emerging as key growth centres, there is a tilt in the centralization of urbanization process around large metropolitan cities, making Indian urban-

ization substantially a process of 'Concentrated Urbanisation'.

Five, India's demography is at the epoch-making cusp. In 2022, the Chinese population, for the first time since 1961, shrank by 8,50,000 from that of 2021 to be at 1.4118 billion. This means India has dethroned China as the world's most populous nation. Also, a large portion of Indian population growth is happening in cities. As per the United Nations World Prospects, in 2050 years of independence, "India's population will be 167 crore, out of which urban population will be 81.4 crore, tantalisingly close to 50 percent."

Six, fast-paced urbanization can either yield urbanization dividend in conjunction with demographic dividend or can lead to urban chaos. As per UN-HABITAT World Cities Report (2022), the country's urban population from 48.31 crore in 2020, will be 54.74 crore in 2025, 60.73 crore in 2030, and 67.45 crore in 2035. The UN also estimates 2050 urban population at 81.4 crore.

(Contd. on page 29)



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# Families of 1971 war heroes allege Bangladesh's main Opposition party peddles lies

**It has been alleged that the party was making attempts to whitewash the bloodshed masterminded by General Zia before Japan and other Western countries.**



(News Agency) How can a military dictator usurping power be made public only after a carnage involving the nation's first family be the beacon of freedom, liberty, good governance and freedom of the press? This is the question being asked by the country's war heroes, eminent researchers and families of war heroes who lost their near ones during General Zia's tenure.

This comes after a letter written by Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leaders to former

Japanese premier Shinzo Abe, was made public only recently. "BNP was founded by late president Ziaur Rahman who declared war of liberation in 1971," reads an excerpt of the letter dated January 27, 2020.

Celebrated author Anthony Mascarhenas described Bangladesh's first military dictator's tenure as the start of the "legacy of blood". But the families of 1971 war heroes say that BNP is on an overdrive of falsehood to project him as the

guardian of democracy.

Such blatant glorification of a military ruler has drawn flak from many quarters. The BNP is apparently trying to push this feel-good narrative about the party chief, General Zia, to shore up its own legitimacy with powerful foreign countries, researchers say. The claim that "the BNP introduced multi-party pluralistic democracy" in the letter, many feel, points to the wave of disinformation to mislead the world leaders about the state of affairs in Bangladesh. "The main objective of the party is to institutionalize democracy in all spheres of the state to ensure freedom, liberty, independence of the judiciary, good governance and freedom of the press," the letter says.

It is on the party's official letterhead. Researchers feel that the letter blacks out the circumstances of the BNP's formation

and how the founder, General Zia offered an olive branch to ardent fundamentalist forces, like Jamaat-e-Islami, and even helped the then self-confessed war criminals and killers of the country's founding father to open up fronts in the country's political landscape, within six years into the country's independence.

These are attempts to whitewash the legacy of bloodshed masterminded by General Zia before Japan and other Western countries, the war heroes say. "General Zia rose to become the country's first military dictator and unleashed a wave of repression by hanging scores of soldiers and officers in the Bangladesh military, even as his spin doctors projected him as the beacon of freedom, liberty, good governance and freedom of the press," said Ajoy Das Gupta, a noted researcher.

**BNP's 'portraying wrong history'**

Like his father, General Zia, who during his stint as the president of the country made all-out efforts to erase the secular ideals, Tarique Rahman is also accused of following a similar path, a clear pointer that the party's bedrock was still dominated by communal and anti-liberation elements, it has been alleged.

In 2014, Tarique desperately tried to establish his father as the first president and in his pursuit, he had first come up with the claim last March that Gen Zia was the country's first president, according to Bangladesh media. Even as that statement triggered widespread condemnation from the country's top researchers, BNP's acting secretary general Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir asked Awami League leaders to do some study of history, claiming that Tarique had revealed some "historical truths" after studying different books.



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# How Did the Ceremonial President Become a 'Power Centre' in Nepal?

(News Agency) The Constitution of Nepal, 2015 has not given executive powers to the President. In Article 66 (2) of the Constitution, it is said that any work done by the President shall be done with the recommendation and consent of the Council of Ministers. There is a constitutional provision that such recommendation and consent must be submitted through the Prime Minister. Khim Lal Devkota, a member of the Constituent Assembly at that time, says that in the first session of the Parliament, there had been enough discussion about the power of the President. "When the interim Constitution was made in 2007 after the end of the monarchy, the leaders were to the conclusion that there should not be two power centres," Devkota says, "All were unanimous that executive powers should be given only to the Prime Minister."

At that time, the

parliamentarians had also discussed that the President should be given some authority, like in India. "But the leaders said that they would only keep the President as a symbol of unity," Devkota adds. So, the position of Nepal's Head of State was made ceremonial. However, before the election of the third Head of State of Nepal this year, there were a lot of tussles between the parties about who should be made the President. Like the selection of the executive Prime Minister, the parties fought in the Presidential election. Pushpa Kamal Dahal (known as Prachanda), the Chairman of the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) Maoist Centre, who is also the current Prime Minister, broke the alliance with the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) Unified Marxist-Leninist (UML), for electing a 'favourable' President. When he got a hint that KP Sharma Oli is

making a candidate for someone who would not be 'comfortable' with his future, Dahal pulled CPN-UML out of the alliance and supported the candidate of the Opposition party, Nepali Congress (NC). CPN-UML is the same party which supported Dahal for Prime Minister when NC president Sher Bahadur Deuba refused to give him the position and claimed that he should get the leadership for the first 2.5 years. Before the November 10 poll, the Maoist centre, led by Dahal had made an agreement with the Nepali Congress-led coalition that he should be supported for the post of Prime Minister. But, after the poll results, the NC President refused. Dahal reached the residence of KP Oli, Chairman of the Opposition party CPN-UML and became the Prime Minister with Oli's support. In Balkot (Oli's residence), Prime Minister Dahal had made an agreement to

take the Prime Minister post and give the Speaker and the President's posts to the Oli-led CPN-UML. Dahal could not hold on to the agreement until the Presidential elections which were held two months later. However, NC also supported Dahal while taking a vote of confidence in Parliament on January 10. According to the leaders of NC, they had given the vote of confidence to Dahal targeting the presidential elections, which later became fruitful. After getting a vote of confidence, Prachanda said that a 'national consensus' should be sought for the presidential election. According to a source close to PM Dahal, at that time, he had also started discussions with the main Opposition Nepali Congress as UML president Oli was trying to make his faith character candidates for President. Though Dahal had also proposed some names within the CPN-UML, Oli had refused all the names, according to the sources.

# Death trap was laid...: Imran Khan claims he could be killed in court, seeks virtual hearing

**Pakistan's ousted prime minister Imran Khan has requested the country's chief justice to allow him to join court proceedings virtually in cases registered against him. He claimed he could be killed if he deposed physically.**

(News Agency) Former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan, facing heat in more than 100 cases, has claimed that he could be killed during court depositions and has requested the chief justice to allow him to appear virtually. The Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) Chairman alleged on Monday that a "death trap" was laid out at the Federal Judicial

Complex (FJC), where he arrived on Saturday to attend a hearing in the Toshakhana case. The cricketer-turned-politician went on to claim that "na maloom afraad" (unknown people) were stationed outside to kill him, The Dawn reported. The embattled PTI chief in a letter to Chief Justice of Pakistan Umar Ata Bandial requested to club the

cases registered against him.

Imran Khan was in the crosshairs for buying gifts, including an expensive Graff wristwatch he had received as the premier at a discounted price from the state depository called Toshakhana and selling them for profit. He was also disqualified by the Election Commission of Pakistan for not revealing the



details of the case. The election body later filed a complaint with the district court to punish him under criminal laws but Khan has skipped several court summons in the case. Last Saturday, when Khan went to Islamabad high court for hearing in the Toshakhana case, high drama was witnessed outside the court. His arrest warrant was cancelled after ADSJ Zafar Iqbal allowed him to leave after marking his attendance at the court, due to clashes between Islamabad Police and PTI workers outside the judicial complex. Imran Khan has also been booked in close to 100 cases facing charges like terrorism, murder, blasphemy, attempted murder and treason. **'DEATH TRAP WAS LAID'**

"A death trap was laid out at the Federal Judicial Complex, Islamabad on Saturday last where I had to attend a hearing in the Toshakhana gifts case.

Some 20 namaloom afraad (unknown people) -- a reference to intelligence agencies men -- were present in the complex to kill me," Khan said during an address to the nation on Monday. "It wasn't [to put me in] jail but to kill [me]. If I keep being exposed like this then it won't take too long, they will be successful and then who will be responsible?", he said. During the address, he also played a video which showed the purported suspects in civil clothes present in the judicial complex carrying plastic handcuffs, reported news agency PTI. He alleged these men planned to strangle Khan with the rope they were holding. All these cases have been instituted against Khan during the last 11 months when the PMLN-led government came to power after ousting him through a vote of no confidence.

## Pakistan finance minister says technical reasons behind delay in deal; IMF denies tying bailout to nukes

(News Agency) Pakistan's Finance Minister Ishaq Dar said on Monday that certain technical reasons were behind the delay in an agreement with the IMF as he clarified that his recent remarks about the country's nuclear and missile programme were being used out of context. His clarification comes hours after the International Monetary Fund (IMF) rubbished claims that it has attached nuclear-programme-related strings for the revival of Pakistan's much-anticipated bailout programme that has been stalled for months. Dar last week said in the Senate that there would be no compromise on the country's nuclear and missile programme. He made the comment in response to Senator Raza Rabbani's questions about the delay in signing the agreement with the IMF. In a press statement, Dar said that his comments with regards to Pakistan's nuclear programme were in response to a colleague Senator's specific question, wherein, "I emphasised that Pakistan

has the sovereign right to develop its nuclear programme, as it best suits our national interests. Without any external dictation, which, by no means should in any way whatsoever be linked with the ongoing negotiations with the IMF." "It is clarified that neither the IMF nor any country has attached any conditionality or made any demand from Pakistan with regard to our nuclear capability and the delay in IMF staff-level agreement is purely due to technical reasons, for which we are continuously engaged with the IMF in order to conclude it at the earliest," he said. Cash-strapped Pakistan is awaiting a much-needed USD 1.1 billion tranche of funding from the Washington-based global money lender, which was originally due to be disbursed in November last year. The funds are part of a USD 6.5 billion bailout package the IMF approved in 2019, which analysts say is critical if Pakistan is to avoid defaulting on external debt obligations.

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# Taiwan ex-president to visit China in historic trip, island nation hopes it shows value of democracy

Ma Ying-jeou will visit Nanjing, Wuhan and Changsha, as well as other cities, Hsiao Hsu-tsen, the director of the Ma Ying-jeou Foundation on Monday, told a news conference in Taipei.



(SAI Bureau) Former Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou will visit China next week in what a spokesman called a bid to ease tensions between the self-ruled island and the mainland. Ma presided over a period of warm ties with Beijing, but left office under a cloud after a trade deal with the mainland failed to win approval amid the island's largest protests since the 1990s. Although the former president is visiting in a private capacity, his stature as a former leader gives the trip political overtones. Ma's proposed visit comes as China's People Liberation Army sends fighter jets toward Taiwan on a near daily basis, and as

official communications between the two governments have broken off. China's ruling government claims Taiwan is part of its territory, but Taiwan's governing Democratic Progressive Party says it's already a sovereign state that is not part of China.

Ma, a member of the opposition Nationalist Party (Kuomintang), will lead a delegation of academics and students as well as his former presidential staffers from March 27 to April 7, his office said Sunday.

The office of President Tsai Ing-wen said Ma had notified her of his plans on Monday. The president's office said it "hoped Ma, in his role as the former head of state ... can show the value of Taiwan's democracy and freedom and the position of equality and

dignity in cross-strait exchanges." Ma will visit Nanjing, Wuhan and Changsha, as well as other cities, Hsiao Hsu-tsen, the director of the Ma Ying-jeou Foundation on Monday, told a news conference in Taipei.

"He strongly believes, as both sides of the (Taiwan) Strait have entered this frozen situation in recent years, allowing young people to have an exchange will help reduce tensions," Hsiao said. "I think no matter how many weapons we buy, it's not as good as having young people from both sides understand each other, and deepen their exchange." Ma will not go to Beijing, Hsiao said. The trip is also a chance for him to honor his ancestors, he added, ahead of Tomb Sweeping Day on April 5. During the festival, which

is celebrated in Taiwan and China, among other countries, families pay a visit to ancestral graves to remember the deceased and to maintain the burial grounds. Ma's trip was also confirmed by China's Taiwan Affairs Office. Any results are likely to be symbolic, and will mostly benefit China, said Hoo Tiang Boon, a professor at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore who studies Chinese foreign policy. "Then they can then show they are not against Taiwan, they are not against the Taiwanese people," he said. "It's the DPP and what they deem as separatists causing provocations in cross-strait relations." Hoo added that he didn't think it was likely the trip would influence Taiwan's presidential elections next year.

## US's Idaho poised to allow firing-squad executions in some cases

US's Idaho is set to bring in law to allow firing squads to execute condemned inmates when the state can't get lethal-injection drugs.

(SAI Bureau) Idaho is poised to allow firing squads to execute condemned inmates when the state can't get lethal-injection drugs, under a bill the Legislature passed Monday with a veto-proof majority. Firing squads will be used only if the state cannot obtain the drugs needed for lethal injections — and one death row inmate has already had his scheduled execution postponed multiple times because of drug scarcity. The move by Idaho lawmakers is in line with those by other states that in recent years have scrambled

to revive older methods of execution because of difficulties obtaining drugs required for longstanding lethal injection programs. Pharmaceutical companies increasingly have barred executioners from using their drugs, saying they were meant to save lives, not take them. Idaho Republican Gov. Brad Little has voiced his support for the death penalty but generally does not comment on legislation before he signs or vetoes it. Only Mississippi, Utah, Oklahoma and South Carolina

currently have laws allowing firing squads if other execution methods are unavailable, according to the Death Penalty Information Center. South Carolina's law is on hold pending the outcome of a legal challenge. Some states began refurbishing electric chairs as standbys for when lethal drugs are unavailable. Others have considered — and at times, used — largely untested execution methods. In 2018, Nevada executed Carey Dean Moore with a never-before-tried drug combination that included the powerful synthetic opioid



fentanyl. Alabama has built a system for executing people using nitrogen gas to induce hypoxia, but it has not yet been used. During a historic round of 13 executions in the final months of Donald Trump's presidency, the federal government opted for

the sedative pentobarbital as a replacement for lethal drugs used in the 2000s. It issued a protocol allowing firing squads for federal executions if necessary, but that method was not used. Some lawyers for federal inmates who were eventually put to death argued in court that firing squads actually would be quicker and cause less pain than pentobarbital, which they said causes a sensation akin to drowning. However, in a 2019 filing, U.S. lawyers cited an expert as saying someone shot by firing squad can remain conscious for 10 seconds and that it would be "severely painful, especially related to shattering of bone and damage to the spinal cord." President Joe Biden's attorney general, Merrick Garland, ordered a temporary pause on federal executions in 2021 while the Justice Department reviewed protocols. Garland did not say how long the moratorium will last.

## This US state will build a monument for aborted fetuses. Here's why

A bill signed by Republican Governor Sanders allows the construction of a "monument to the unborn" near Arkansas's Capitol grounds.

(SAI Bureau) Arkansas in the United States will build a monument to mark the abortions performed in the state before Roe v Wade was struck down last year. Arkansas Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders approved the monument to aborted fetuses on Monday. The bill signed by Sanders allows the construction of a "monument to the unborn" near the state's Capitol grounds, a report said. Anti-abortion groups and the Capitol Arts and Grounds Commission will choose artists and oversee the design of the privately-funded monument. The

Independent reported. The bill, sponsored by GOP state Senator Kim Hammer, claims that Arkansas was prevented from protecting the life of unborn children by the decisions of the United States Supreme Court in Roe v Wade from 1973 until it was overruled last year. It also states that over 2.5 lakh "elective abortions" were performed during that period, the report added.



A law Arkansas approved in 2019 banning nearly all abortions took effect last year when the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the 1973 Roe decision. Arkansas' ban only allows abortions to save the life of the mother in a medical emergency. Arkansas' proposal faced opposition from some anti-abortion Republicans who said it was counterproductive, and Democrats who said the monument proposal was divisive.

# A porn star and hush money case: What next for Donald Trump?

**Will Donald Trump be arrested? Will he be handcuffed? As the former US president may face charges in the hush money case, here's what lies ahead for Donald Trump.**



(SAI Bureau) Former US President Donald Trump is facing criminal indictment over hush money payments made to a porn star in 2016. If charged, the Republican could become the first former president to be indicted. If Trump is arrested, will he be handcuffed? When will he appear before court if he is indeed charged in the case? Here's what will happen if the New York jury decides to indict Trump.

## THE CASE

In 2006, Donald Trump, the real estate tycoon and reality television star, met an adult film actress, Stormy Daniels,

at a celebrity golf tournament in Lake Tahoe. Daniels was 27 at the time and Trump 60.

In her book, Daniels said one of Trump's bodyguards invited her to have dinner with Trump in his penthouse. They proceeded to have what she described in her book as the "least impressive sex" she had ever had. Trump denied they ever had sex and has accused Daniels of "extortion" and a "total con job." Daniels said she remained in touch with Trump over the next year in the hope he would get her on his reality television show, but it never happened.

In 2016, when Donald Trump was running for president, Michael Cohen, his lawyer, arranged a \$130,000 "hush money" payment to Daniels in

exchange for her silence about the 2006 tryst. The payment was revealed by The Wall Street Journal in January 2018 and forms the basis for the charges Trump may be facing this week in New York.

## WHAT WILL TRUMP DO?

Trump has accused the Biden administration of working hand-in-hand with District Attorney Alvin Bragg in the hush money case to derail his political campaign. He has called the case "the greatest witch hunt of all time".

Trump, in a social media post, has since suggested that he would be arrested soon.

If that's the case, he may seek dismissal of charges claiming the attorney is targeting him for political gains. He could also

challenge whether the statute of limitations, five years in this instance, should have run out, a report said. But Trump could also be charged with falsifying business records - typically classed as a misdemeanour - after he reimbursed his former attorney Cohen for the payments, falsely recorded as legal services.

However, it is not clear how the indictment will affect Donald Trump's chances in the 2024 presidential election.

## TRUMP AND FLORIDA GOVERNOR

Although Florida Governor Ron DeSantis has not announced his presidential bid yet, many rate DeSantis as a potential challenger to Donald Trump in the race for the Republican nomination.

# Iran violations may amount to crimes against humanity, says UN expert

**A UN-appointed expert said Iran's authorities have committed violations in recent months that may amount to crimes against humanity.**



(SAI Bureau) Iran's authorities have committed violations in recent months that may amount to crimes against humanity, a UN-appointed expert told the Human Rights Council on Monday, citing cases of murder, imprisonment, enforced disappearances, torture, rape, sexual violence and persecution.

Iran has been swept by protests since the death of a young Iranian Kurdish woman, Mahsa Amini, in custody last September. Addressing the Geneva-based council, Javād Rehmān, Special Rapporteur on Iran, said he had evidence that Amini died "as a result of beatings by the state morality police". Iran's state coroner has said she died from pre-existing medical conditions, not blows to the head and limbs.

Rehman, an independent expert, added that the scale

and gravity of crimes committed by authorities as part of the repression following her death "points to the possible commission of international crimes, notably the crimes against humanity". Iran's Ambassador Ali Bahreini told the body that the allegations were imaginary and Iran was being singled out and targeted in the council. "They try to portray their imaginations as the reality of the situation in Iran," he said. Some 527 people were killed in the protests including 71 children, Rehman continued, including some who were beaten to death by security forces. Women and girls were targeted with shotgun fire to their faces, breasts and genitals, he added, citing Iranian doctors. "Children released have described sexual abuses,

threats of rape, floggings, administration of electric shocks and how their heads were maintained under water, how they were suspended from their arms or from scarves wrapped around their necks," Rehman said in his speech. He voiced outrage at the execution of at

least four people linked to the protests and said that a total of 143 people had been executed since January following "grossly unfair trials". The 47-member council, the only body made up of governments to protect human rights worldwide, voted in November to appoint an

independent investigation into Iran's repression of protests which is currently being established. Evidence assembled by other investigations set up by the UN rights council has sometimes been used before international courts.

## Russia's Medvedev threatens international court with missile strike

**Dmitry Medvedev, a staunch Putin loyalist, has threatened the International Criminal Court with a missile strike for issuing an arrest warrant for the Russian President.**

(SAI Bureau) Dmitry Medvedev, the deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council, on Monday threatened the International Criminal Court (ICC) with a missile strike after the organisation issued an arrest warrant for President Vladimir Putin. The ICC has accused Putin of being responsible for war crimes committed in Ukraine, but Russia has denied committing any atrocities in Ukraine. Medvedev, a staunch Putin loyalist, wrote on Telegram, "I'm afraid, gentlemen, everyone is answerable to God and missiles. It's quite possible to imagine how a hypersonic oniks fired from a Russian warship in the North Sea strikes the court building in the Hague. It can't be shot down, I'm afraid." The former Russian president also warned

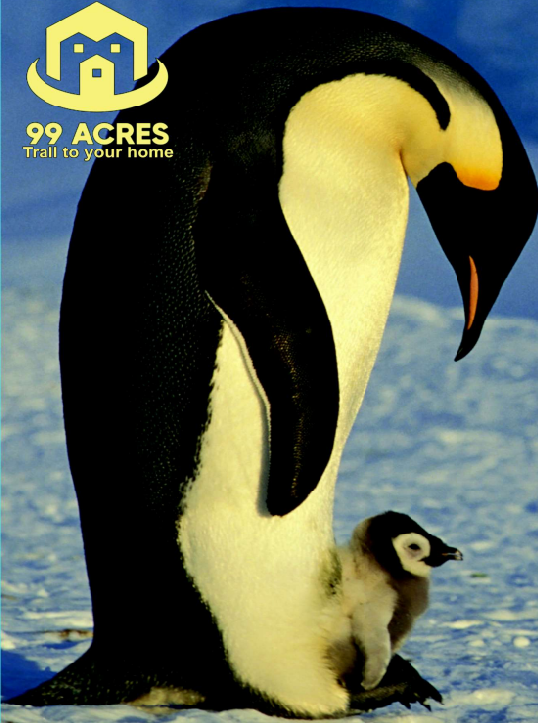
the ICC judges to "watch the skies closely," calling the court "a pathetic international organisation". In its first warrant since the war broke out in February last year, the ICC called

for Putin's arrest on suspicion of unlawful deportation of children and unlawful transfer of people from the territory of Ukraine to the Russian Federation. ICC prosecutor Karim Khan opened an



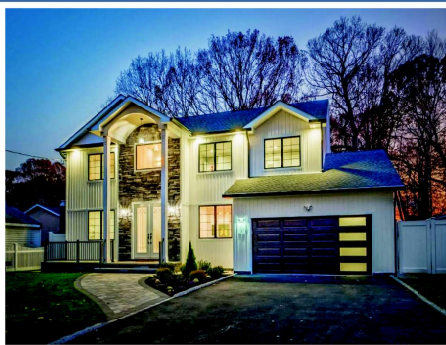
investigation into possible war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide in Ukraine a year ago. He highlighted during four trips to Ukraine that he was looking at alleged crimes against children and the targeting of civilian infrastructure. US President Joe Biden has called the warrant for Putin's arrest "justified".





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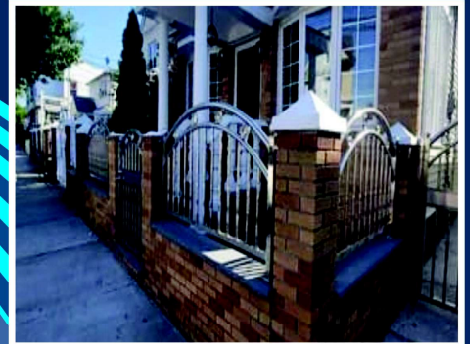
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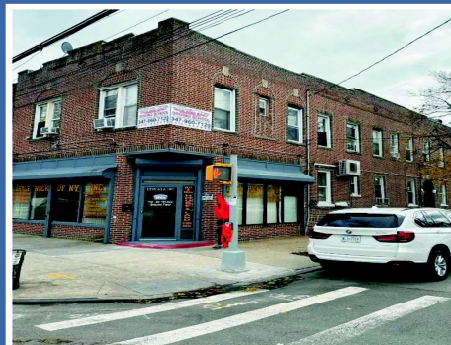
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# Media mogul Rupert Murdoch set to marry for 5th time at 92. Here's their story

**92-year-old media mogul Rupert Murdoch is engaged to marry for the fifth time to Ann Lesley Smith (66).**

(SAI Bureau) Billionaire media mogul Rupert Murdoch is engaged to marry for the fifth time, he told his own tabloid newspaper, the New York Post on Monday. The 92-year-old media titan is engaged to Ann Lesley Smith (66) and said he knows this marriage would be his last. "I was very nervous. I dreaded falling in love — but I knew this would be my last. It better be. I'm happy," he told the New York Post. Murdoch's business empire includes Fox News in the US and the rightwing tabloid the Sun in the UK. As the head of News Corporation, he also owns the New York Post, the Wall Street Journal, and the publishing house Harper Collins. The two have planned a summer wedding with Murdoch saying they look forward to "spending the second half of our lives together". Murdoch and Ann Lesley Smith met in September of 2022 at a 200-person event held at his Moraga vineyard in Bel Air,

California. "I met her and we talked a bit. Two weeks later I called her," said Murdoch, recounting his first meeting with his fiancée.



Murdoch has been married four times and has six children from his first three marriages. He had Prudence MacLeod, with his first wife Patricia Booker and sons Lachlan and James with his second wife Anna Mann. He has two more daughters — Grace and Chloe — with his third wife, Wendi Deng. Murdoch's fourth wife was the former supermodel Jerry Hall, from whom he split in 2022. Ann Smith has also been married twice before. According to the New York Post, her first marriage was to the Huntington railroad family in San Francisco. Later, she married Chester Smith, who had founded the Spanish TV giant Univision. Smith died in 2008. Speaking to the New York Post, Ann said, "I'm a widow 14 years. Like Rupert, my husband was a businessman."

# Macron, resign: Protesters set rubbish on fire as no-confidence vote fails

(SAI Bureau) Protesters set piles of rubbish on fire in a central Paris on Monday after President Emmanuel Macron's government narrowly survived a no-confidence motion in parliament on Monday over a deeply unpopular pension reform.



The failure of the no-confidence vote will be a relief to Macron. Had it succeeded, it would have sunk his government and killed the legislation, which is set to raise the retirement age by two years to 64. But the relief proved short-lived. In some of Paris' most prestigious avenues, firefighters scrambled to put out burning rubbish piles left uncollected for days due to strikes as protesters played cat-and-mouse with police. Earlier on Thursday, a Reuters reporter saw police fire tear gas and briefly charge at protesters after the no-confidence vote barely fell short of enough votes to pass. Unions and opposition parties said they would step up protests to try and force a U-turn. The vote on the tripartisan, no-confidence motion was closer than expected. Some 278 MPs backed it, just nine short of the 287 needed for it to succeed. Opponents say this shows Macron's decision to bypass a parliamentary vote on the pension bill - which triggered the no confidence motions - has already undermined his reformist agenda and weakened his leadership.

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# The world turns on TikTok

Italy, Norway and Netherlands become latest nations to move against the social media giant over security and safety fears

Italy, Norway and The Netherlands have become the latest nations to move against the Chinese social media giant TikTok over security and safety fears. In Rome, Italy's antitrust authority said Tuesday it had opened an investigation into the app as it allegedly breaches its rules by allowing the publication of 'dangerous content' inciting suicide, self-harm and poor nutrition. Meanwhile, the Dutch government is moving to ban central government employees having the app installed on their phones - following the lead of countries including the United States and Britain, as well as the European Union's executive branch.

Norway's justice minister, whose active TikTok use has previously landed her in hot water, also recommended on Tuesday that her country's government employees refrain from using the Chinese app on their work devices. The latest moves come as Chinese company ByteDance, owner of the app, is facing tighter regulation globally, with growing concern about the potential for the authoritarian government in Beijing to access users' location and contact data. Concerns stem from a law China implemented in 2017 that requires companies to give the government any personal data relevant to the country's national security. There's no evidence that TikTok has turned over such data, but fears abound due to the vast amount of user data it collects. The app, which boasts more than one billion active users, is also regularly accused of spreading disinformation, putting users in danger with hazardous 'challenge' videos, and allowing pornography, even though it is supposed to prohibit nudity. Several children have also reportedly died while trying to replicate the so-called blackout challenge, which involves users holding their breath until they pass out.

The probe in Italy involves TikTok's Irish unit, which is responsible for its European customers relations, as well as the British and Italian divisions, said the country's antitrust watchdog said in a statement on Tuesday. Italy's tax police visited the Italian headquarters of the app on Tuesday, it added.

TikTok denied wrongdoing and said it would cooperate with the

investigation.

The Italian authority said that on the platform there are numerous videos of young people adopting self-harming behaviour, such as the recent 'French scar' face-marking challenge which has become viral.

According to the watchdog 'adequate systems to supervise content published by third parties are lacking' and the app violates TikTok's guidelines which provide for the removal of dangerous content.

The antitrust body also takes issue with the exploitation of artificial intelligence techniques capable of 'causing undue conditioning' of TikTok's users.

A spokesperson for TikTok rejected the allegations, saying the company does not 'allow content showing or promoting dangerous activities and challenges, suicide, self-harm or unhealthy eating behaviours.'

'More than 40,000 dedicated safety professionals work to keep our community safe, and we take extra care to protect teenagers in particular,' the spokesperson added.

Also on Tuesday, the Dutch government said it would take steps to ban the TikTok app from smartphones belonging to government employees. 'For civil

servants employed by the national government, it is immediately discouraged to have apps from countries with an offensive cyber program against the Netherlands and/or Dutch interests installed and used on their mobile work devices,' the government said in a statement that did not identify TikTok by name. The new policy came after lawmakers asked whether it was possible to ban central government staff from using the app on work devices.

The advice follows an assessment by national intelligence agency AIVD that warned that apps from such countries - which include China, Russia, North Korea and Iran - 'carry a heightened risk of espionage.'

Alexandra van Huffelen, the Dutch minister for digitalization, said in a statement that the new policy 'goes beyond discouraging one application. We opt for a structural solution that central government officials can trust in their work in a digital world.'

The government said it is planning to move quickly to set up all mobile devices given to central government staff 'in such a way that only pre-permitted apps, software and/or functionalities can be installed and used.'

The decision comes two weeks after the Dutch government an-

gered Beijing by announcing that it is planning on imposing additional restrictions on the export of machines that make advanced processor chips, joining a U.S. push that aims at limiting China's access to materials used to make such chips.

Norway appeared set to follow suit amid espionage fears, with the country's justice minister also recommending that Russian messaging app Telegram be banned.

'In their risk assessments ... the Norwegian intelligence services single out Russia and China as the main risk factors for Norway's security interests,' Justice Minister Emilie Enger Mehl said in a statement.

'They also single out social media as a forum favoured by potentially dangerous actors and others who want to influence us with disinformation and fake news,' she said. The recommendation applies to all work devices used by government officials and which are connected to the government's digital systems. The youngest member of the government, 29-year-old Mehl found herself at the centre of a media frenzy last year after she admitted, after a long silence amid suspicions about the app, that she had installed TikTok on her work

phone.

She stressed she had deleted it a month later, and said she had used it because she needed to reach a young audience - the main users of the app. Government employees can still use TikTok and Telegram if necessary for professional reasons, but on devices that are not connected to the government's digital systems, the ministry said. Governments in Britain, the United States, New Zealand and the European Commission have banned TikTok on work devices. It was reported yesterday that Australia is also set to ban the application from government devices. Yesterday, Britain's BBC also told staff to delete TikTok from their phones. ByteDance is being investigated by the Justice Department in the United States for allegedly spying on American citizens, including several journalists, with the firm facing a nationwide ban unless the Chinese owner sells its shares in the app.

TikTok acknowledged in November that some employees in China could access European user data and admitted in December that employees had used the data to spy on journalists. The group has however insisted that the Chinese government has no control over or access to its data.

## India witnessed significant human rights violations in 2022, says US report

unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists, and enforcement of or threat to enforce criminal libel laws to limit expression are some of the other human rights violations mentioned in the report. It is noteworthy that India has rejected similar reports by the US government in the past. The Union government has asserted that India has well-established democratic practices and robust institutions to safeguard the rights of all. The US report also mentions restrictions on internet freedom, interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and harassment

of domestic and international human rights organisations among serious rights violations in India.

Among other issues, it listed lack of investigation of and accountability for gender-based violence, including domestic and intimate partner violence, sexual violence, workplace violence, child, early, and forced marriage, femicide, and other forms of such violence; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting members of national/racial/ethnic and minority groups based on religious affiliation, social status or sexual

orientation. "There were reports that government authorities accessed, collected, or used private communication arbitrarily or unlawfully or without appropriate legal authority and developed practices that allow for the arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, including the use of technology to arbitrarily or unlawfully surveil or interfere with the privacy of individuals," the report said.

The report added that citizens generally enjoyed freedom of speech, but the government continued to restrict content based on broad public and national interest provisions.

## Why Nitish Kumar Could Be The Best Bet For Leading The Opposition in 2024

Kumar's reputation as an honest and incorruptible politician is a breath of fresh air. He has kept Bihar on a pedestal of governance and maintained a balance between BJP's Hindutva and RJD's Jungle Raj. This could help him in gaining the trust of the electorate, especially those who are increasingly disillusioned with the existing political system.

The Opposition parties need a formidable leader who can furnish a plausible alternative to the ruling party and Nitish Kumar impeccably fits the bill. Kumar's

adroitness in crafting coalitions and collaborating with sundry parties is an invaluable asset. His proficiency in working with an array of parties in Bihar, coupled with his amicable relations with various leaders of Opposition parties, renders him the quintessential candidate to spearhead the Opposition alliance. Furthermore, his antecedent tenure as a Union Minister has bestowed upon him exposure to national politics and a perspicacity into the mechanics of the Central government.

Undoubtedly, this endeavour shall not be a facile undertaking, for Nitish Kumar is besieged by multifarious perils. Foremost among these threats is the concerted integrity of his political party, the JD(U), in Bihar. The party is currently grappling with numerous upheavals, as several pivotal leaders have defected. It would be an intriguing spectacle to witness how Nitish Kumar and the JD(U) navigate the political aftershocks in their native land and portray themselves on a national stage.

# Budget on hold Why the Centre has issue with Delhi government's ad spend

Delhi minister Kailash Gahlot was to present the budget for the Union Territory on Tuesday. But the Centre raised objections over the AAP government's allocation for advertisement and publicity and didn't approve the budget. What is the charge and what are the Delhi government's claims?

The Delhi government put on hold the presentation of the budget, which was slated for Tuesday, after it failed to get clearance from the Union home ministry. The biggest concern that the Centre flagged, according to sources, was the UT government's high expenditure allocation for advertisements and publicity while not focusing enough on infrastructure development. The lieutenant governor, too, had flagged in December last year the Delhi government's increase in ad spend. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seeking his approval to present the UT's budget in the assembly. "For the first time in the country's 75-year history, the budget has been stopped," he wrote in the letter to PM Modi.

Kejriwal accused the central government of resorting to "gundagardi" and said that for the first time in the history of the country, a government's budget was put on hold.

## DELHI BUDGET AND AD SPEND

But why is the Centre uneasy with the

Delhi government's budget?

The Delhi budget for financial year 2023-24 was to be presented by minister Kailash Gahlot on Tuesday. But the Centre didn't give a go ahead to the presentation of the budget.

The home ministry had sought clarification from the AAP government as its budget proposal had high allocation for advertisement and relatively low funding for infrastructure and other development initiatives, PTI reported, quoting sources.

"The AAP government has so far not responded to our queries," a source in the Union Home Ministry was quoted by PTI as saying.

AAP government officials denied the Centre's charges. PTI quoted sources in the AAP government as saying that the allocation for advertisement and publicity in this budget was the same as in the last year's budget.

AAP government officials said the total budget size was Rs 78,800 crore, out of which Rs 22,000 crore was earmarked for

expenditure on infrastructure and just Rs 550 crore on advertisements.

Lieutenant governor VK Saxena had in December 2022 flagged a 3,787 per cent jump in the Delhi government's advertisement and publicity budget in 9 years.

**AAP ALLEGATIONS AGAINST CENTRE**  
AAP national spokesperson and Delhi minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said the Home Ministry expressed some concerns about the Delhi government's budget and refused to grant its approval in a letter sent to Delhi chief secretary on March 17.

"He sat on it for three days. This is bigger than any anti-national activity. This should be investigated. The Centre is behind this conspiracy and the budget is being delayed at its behest," AAP's Bharadwaj alleged.

Saurabh Bharadwaj asked how could a 'babu' sitting at the Centre question the expenditure of the government. Shopping

## AAP GOVT VS LG

But the row between the Centre and Delhi

government over advertisements is nothing new. In December last year, the lieutenant governor had asked Delhi's the chief secretary to recover Rs 97 crore from the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) for political advertisements. The LG VK Saxena alleged that AAP published political advertisements as government ads using government money. "Being the constitutional head of government of NCT, I deem it appropriate to observe with concern that the expenditure on account of advertisements/publicity by the Govt of NCT of Delhi has increased from Rs 15 crore to Rs 568 crore, a jump of 3,787 per cent approx in 9 years," VK Saxena wrote Saxena in a note to the chief secretary in December. The AAP government in Delhi has had frequent run-ins with the LG since 2014, when the party first came to power in the national capital. The situation has continued even though the Raj Bhavan occupants have changed -- from Najeeb Jung to Anil Bajjal to the incumbent, VK Saxena.

## Rape-accused Nithyananda's 'fake country' Kailasa cons 30 US cities

The sister-city agreement between Newark and the "United States of Kailasa" was inked on January 12 and the signing ceremony took place at the City Hall in Newark. According to the website of "United States of Kailasa", there are over 30 American cities that have signed a cultural partnership with the fake nation. Cities include Richmond, Virginia, Dayton, Ohio, Buena Park, and Florida, among others.

A report by Fox News on Thursday said that authorities have found "the supreme fake pontiff" has a "long list of cities" he has duped.

The report said that Fox News reached out to some of the cities in the US for a reaction on the agreement with the fake nation. "And so far most of the cities have confirmed these proclamations are in fact true," the report said. "Our proclamations with Kailasa are not an endorsement. They are a response to a request and we do not verify the information that is requested," Jacksonville, North Carolina told Fox News.

Fox News blamed the cities for not "Googling" for information about the fake nation.

The report added that it's not just mayors or city councils but "people running the federal government" who are falling for the fake nation too. According to the fake guru, two members of the Congress have given Kailasa "special congressional recognition", it added.

One of them is Congresswoman Norma Torres of California, who is on the House Appropriations Committee.

"So, the person who decides what we spend our tax dollars on just got duped by an alleged rapist guru with a fake country," a Fox News anchor said.

Republican Troy Balderson from Ohio also presented "his divine holiness and pontiff of Hinduism congressional recognition".

Earlier this month, Press Secretary in the Department of Communications, City of Newark, Susan Garofalo, had told PTI that as soon as "we learned about the circumstances surrounding Kailasa, the City of Newark immediately took action and rescinded the sister-city agreement" on January 18.

"Based on deception, the ceremony was groundless and void. Although this was a regrettable incident,

the City of Newark remains committed to partnering with people from diverse cultures in order to enrich each other with connectivity, support, and mutual respect," Garofalo said. The sister-city agreement with a fake nation is an embarrassing episode for the city, a Newark resident told Fox News. "I think it's embarrassing that he didn't do his background research before entertaining them."

Last month, representatives of the USK attended two UN meetings in Geneva - a general discussion on 'Equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems' on February 22 and the general discussion on the 'General Comment on economic, social, cultural rights and sustainable development' on February 24.

Responding to Kailasa's participation, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said, "Anyone can submit information to the treaty bodies, who will use their judgment to determine the credibility of the submissions received." Nithyananda is wanted in India on several charges of rape and sexual assault. He has denied all charges and allegations.

## Parents in France will be liable for punishment if they share photos of their children on social media

allow courts to ban parents from posting photos of their children on social media. Even if one parent shares images online, both father and mother would be jointly held responsible for their children's image rights. Moreover, it is also being said that if parents decide to upload private images online, then they will also have to involve the child based on "his or her age and degree of maturity" before posting them. In simpler terms, parents would be required to take the consent of their child before posting anything on social media. The parents will reportedly get banned from posting anything online if they disagree.

The proposed bill comes at a time when we are seeing growth in 'sharenting', which is putting the privacy of children at risk, according to the details mentioned in the bill. Sharenting is basically parents creating accounts on social media and sharing information or photos of their children online. This is something that we have been seeing on apps like Instagram. Studer explained that the photos of children can be "misused for child pornography" or can "lead to bullying in the school environment." In an interview with Le Monde, he said that he has seen an average of 1,300 images of a 13-year-old child circulating on the internet, which could put his or her privacy at risk. It is being 50 per cent of photographs used in child pornography forums have been taken from accounts that parents use on social media. In the most extreme cases, the family judge will be allowed to "make a forced partial delegation of parental authority for the specific case of an exercise of image rights." It is important to note that the bill still needs to be passed by the French Senate and made official by the president, after which it will become a law in the country.



# The Oscars and Decoloniality: Guilt-Tripping Indians Celebrating International Success

After all, isn't that what commenting on social media is about, for the most part? Be that as it may, in this particular instance, the slogan being spouted by the aforementioned section of social media commentators, who are disgruntled over Indians celebrating the success of Indian entries at the Oscars, is the voguishly oversimplified term 'decoloniality'.

Vaguely understood by the sloganeers themselves, decoloniality happens to be a theoretical concept which encapsulates a culture-specific way of being and knowing, and which provides a radical alternative to the one that is forcefully imposed upon much of the world by Euro-American colonialism throughout history. Decoloniality, thus understood and practised, can become a key instrument in dismantling the hegemony of the colonialist Euro-American way of being and knowing, which has a universalistic pretension of an almost fanatic nature, and which seeks to dominate the minds and bodies belonging to every other culture on this planet. Each erstwhile (or presently) colonised nation or culture that has somehow managed to survive the onslaughts of colonialism in one form or another, has the potential to evolve and offer its own version of decoloniality, based on its peculiar historical experience and its national character.

Like some African and Latin American nations with a really long and harrowing experience of European colonialism, present-day India, too, has evolved its own distinct form of decoloniality. But India had to withstand a double whammy of successive colonialist projects: at first, she faced a particularly traumatising Islamic rule across various large parts of the Subcontinent, followed by the British colonial rule that engulfed almost the whole country and invaded every little aspect of Indian life. Barring a few African nations, no other nation or culture had to undergo such a distressing and prolonged experience of political and cultural colonialism.

However, there's still a silver lining to this dark period's history. Due to the sheer historical and geographical magnitude of the twofold colonial impact, India's resistance has accordingly evolved to be much more layered and richer than any other form of anticolonial

resistance anywhere in the world. In fact, other nations have drawn inspiration from it to resist and change the dehumanising status quo that colonialists sought (and, in several instances, are still seeking) to perpetuate. Add to this India's civilisational legacy, which itself had evolved through millennia of pre-colonial Indian history, and through multiple socio-cultural revolutions occurring at both pre-colonial and colonial periods, it helped India surge boldly ahead into the future, braving all sorts of odds along the way. In the process, the Indian civilisation has wrought for itself a wonderful power of assimilating differences into its mainstream, without allowing any fundamental changes to occur in its character.

These evolutions have taken a long curve through India's vast historical timespan – emerging rather slowly through the first fifteen centuries of the common era, building its groundwork upon the shoulders of saints and warriors who defended dharma in the face of Islamic invasions and proselytising efforts – but it picked up a highly accelerated rate of growth only thereafter, reaching a climax in the 19th and 20th centuries during the British colonial period. Moreover, this homespun Indian decoloniality has been shaped by historical circumstances and cultural currents that are not exclusive to India, a country which has constantly interacted with various nations of the world in these slow-paced intervening centuries, before reaching an apogee of cross-cultural transactions, especially with Europe and America, in the last two hundred-odd years. Several world historical events, and the influence of exemplary leadership in such events – including the French Revolution, the American Revolutionary War, the Italian Carbonari Movement, the Unification of Italy, the shaping of the modern German state under Bismarck, the Irish Revolutionary Movement, and the Russian Revolution – left a deep imprint upon the best minds of India in those two centuries of tumultuous political upheavals around the world.

Despite all these strong currents of influence rushing in from all directions, India in the 19th and 20th centuries has attempted, even more vigorously than she has done in the past, to assimilate those external

elements into her time-tested civilisational character. The special contribution of the dynamic modern era consisting of the last two centuries is that it gave India's own version of decoloniality a very definite and robust shape, as against an amorphous, disjointed decolonial narrative of the era that immediately precedes it. India in those two critical centuries was blessed with some extraordinary minds and personalities in the fields of religion, education, philosophy, politics, the arts and the sciences: viz., Raja Rammohun Roy, Pundit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Thakur Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya, Mahatma Gandhi, Jagadish Chandra Bose, Abanindranath Tagore, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Nandalal Bose, Sri Anirvan, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, Ramachandra Gandhi, and many others. It is thanks to their exemplary lives, their self-effacing, benevolent actions, the profundity of their thinking, and the clarity of their articulation, that the assimilative decoloniality of Modern India was made future-ready for India herself, and for the rest of the world, even before the twentieth century came to a close. Thus, a careful perusal of Indian history reveals that centuries of life-threatening and all-sacrificing struggle started bearing fruit with a cultural revolution in the nineteenth century, which in turn gave rise to a bold new anticolonial political revolution at the very beginning of the twentieth. And it is mainly due to the momentum generated during that revolutionary era, that India has managed to maintain a connection, howsoever thin, with her living but endangered civilisational inheritance till this day through thick and thin, through all the deafening tumult of historical-political-social upheavals, and despite having suffered two prolonged, severe bouts of foreign colonial rule at the hands of various West Asian and European nations.

Precious little of this historical complexity is reflected in the popular discourse that reduces decoloniality to a mere slogan. Slogans as such are not necessarily bad; they help you get excited over things that are sometimes worth getting excited about, but there is a kind of

unidirectional inertia of motion attached to the business of sloganeering, that ends up zombifying human beings by stripping them off their God-given power to reflect.

Having closely followed the popular discourse arising out of a supposedly nationalist coterie, it seems to me that an ill-understood, ill-digested, and childishly flawed perception of decoloniality, as well as an equally ill-conceived area of its application, is lately being used as a bundle of sticks to beat some unsuspecting and rather easy targets with. The latest of such victims is the Indian crowd celebrating the success of Indian films like 'RRR' at various competitive platforms overseas. Their fault? Merely that they're elated at the success of these Indian films at some foreign awards ceremony and are celebrating the same.

Little do our decoloniality sloganeers realise that competition, of any kind and on whatever platform, does have the inherent tendency to build up a kind of intense anticipation around it, which should be dissipated, and can only be expressed, through a momentary outburst at one's success or failure. Not everyone happens to be the stoic sthitaprajña that the Bhagavad Gita presents as an ideal – least of all our decoloniality sloganeers. And that is by no means a hopeless scenario; even competition can usher in some good if it is fairly conducted, and if it generates a healthy desire in the participants' minds to excel at their craft. The competitive spirit that is fundamental to the concept of sporting events is a case in point. Will our decoloniality sloganeers now decry international sports as well? Will they denounce the various prestigious recognitions that Indian cricket teams, Indian hockey teams, Indian football teams, Indian athletes and sportspersons have over the years gained, and still continue to gain, through their hard work and performance in competitive events organised internationally, or by a foreign country exclusively, such as the Olympics or the US Open tennis tournament?

How I wish these deprecators of the Oscars had instead directed their 'critical lenses' at the very idea of introducing competition in the field of cultural content production – like the great poet

Rabindranath Tagore had once done in his essay "Brahmana" to criticise competition as a fundamental driving force of the socio-political machinery in Europe. That would at least have been a much more genuine critique of the economy of such show businesses that masquerade as measures of cultural excellence – something patently foreign in the traditional cultural domain across civilisations, and especially so in terms of Indian cultural sensibilities.

I also wonder if these geniuses have ever stopped to consider the fact that these Oscar-winning Indian films are now going to attract more attention, and so will the works of those who have been involved in the making of these films. I for my part hadn't even heard the name of The Elephant Whisperers before it won the coveted prize; and it is only after the news broke that I noticed its presence on Netflix, despite being a regular visitor to the Netflix website. When I finally did watch this short documentary film, I was struck by the affectionate depiction of what was a classic vignette of a patently Indian, Hindu way of life integrated with Nature in perfect harmony. While watching the documentary, I was reminded of Tagore's utterance, made in deepest spiritual conviction, to the effect that God is ever-present in his life by entering his heart through his relations – father, mother, brothers, wife, his friends and children, indeed his entire family – when Bomman, one of the human protagonists of the documentary short subject, observed in all sincerity and simplicity: "I am proud of being both a priest and a mahout. Both bring me immense happiness. We pray to Lord Ganesha. Seeing an elephant, to us, is equivalent to seeing God. God and elephants are one for me. The way I serve God is the same way I serve the elephants. We take care of Raghu [an elephant calf, another protagonist from the film] every single day, which in turn, puts food on my table every day. This is God's presence in my life. Without him, we'd have nothing." That is the whole essence of Indian civilisation's attitude to life, summed up in a fraction of a sequence in 'The Elephant Whisperers'.

# What Xi Jinping's West Asia Forays Mean for India, US and the World

A stage soon came when the US charges of China supplying weapons to Russia needed independent corroboration, which, however, was not coming even from America's western/West European allies.

The US has over 30 military bases in the Gulf-Arab region, including five in Saudi Arabia. No one is suggesting that they all would ask the US to shut them down, here and now. They may, however, tell Washington not to deploy American forces from those bases against nations friendly to them, say, Iran in the changed environment. As may be recalled, the US had used bases in Gulf Arab bases during the anti-Iraq 'Kuwait War' in 1991. Unlike in the past, it may have to be wary about domestic street interpretation or any such military initiative as 'war on Islam'.

## LESS DEPENDENT ON OIL

China's future moves in West Asia would be keenly watched. While dealing with Saudi Arabia and Iran at the same time, Beijing is also dealing with the 57-member Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC), spread across continents, and the 22-state Arab League, confined in the Gulf region. The membership of the two is intertwined.

Then, there is the 55-member African Union (AU), where, too, the other two have their own relevance and influence. Between them, the OIC and the AU are the largest blocs in the UN General Assembly (UNGA). They are not together on all matters, but with China staying in the background, the scenario may change over time, based on issues. That alone may also be China's ambitious goal in the first stage.

For India, over the past couple of years, ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) social media activists have been claiming that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the nation's relationship has flourished as never before, and not certainly under Nehruvian Congress leaders, as often propagated. It is now becoming clear that such a Gulf-Arab outreach to India was a part of the larger picture and not a standalone affair.

It was a fair assessment, but only up to a point. Even after the Saudi patch-up under China's watchful eyes, Tehran has sought the resumption of oil imports from the country, citing difficulties in procuring the same from Russia, through Western sanctions. It may be Iran's way of testing the strength of bilateral relations, and India's willingness to take lesser risks on the sanctions-cum-im-

port front compared to Russia's. However, the pro-Modi social activists in the country should understand that under new leaderships, especially the 'moderniser' in Saudi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman Al Saud, or MBS for short, the region is re-positioning itself for a world less dependent on oil and whose production too could begin reducing drastically for them to use it as a political tool. The US military presence would not serve them much, either. They seem to be falling upon the old dictum of making up with enemies than surrendering to supporters.

## TRADITIONAL FRIENDS

From an Indian perspective, this in turn means that its traditional friends in West Asia could move closer to the centre in matters involving China, or the US and the rest of the West. The positive side, for now, is that they are not as much concerned about the Pakistani ranting on the 'Kashmir issue' as they used to be in solidarity with a fellow Islamic nation. In this era, after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, some of them may begin to see Pakistan as less of an Islamic nation and more of a South Asian country, all over again.

Such thinking on their part could well be replaced by individual nations and groups taking a closer look at India on religious issues than earlier. In establishing ties with China, the 'Uyghur

crisis' has not hurt them. But such comparisons need not apply to India's case all the time, as they would pick and choose issues, depending on the existing and evolving public mood near home. When it is human rights, they may find themselves on the same page as the US-led West vis-a-vis India, but not necessarily in the case of China.

## LARGER SCENARIO

For India, West Asia is a major trading and investment partner. Until

Russia's offer of cheaper oil, Saudi Arabia used to top the nation's oil source. As of 2020, the region also hosted 7.6 million labour from the country, more than half the total of 13.6 million NRIs. There are reasons to believe that the numbers would have only increased, and so would the NRI remittances from the region as a whole. All this comes with a tag for New Delhi as shown by past evacuations at the height of the 'Kuwait War' (1990), Covid pandemic ('Operation Vande Bharat', 2021) and the Ukraine War ('Operation Ganga', 2022), among others.

In all this, there is a larger scenario that neither India nor the rest of the world can overlook. From Myanmar and China in the East, through Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Russia, not excluding West Asia now, more and more nations can now take a neutral stand in matters with India and China, and also India and Paki-

stan, as against their tacit or open support for the nation.

It is not as if many of them had backed India outright in the past, but many, if not most of them, had definitely identified with the US, New Delhi's post-Cold War strategic partner. It would have worked for India in times of need. New Delhi also has to keep a closer watch on US-European relations, both during the Ukraine War and in the post-war years, whenever. Nations like France and Germany were known to be wanting to strike roots independent of the US in geo-strategic affairs (hence their own Indo-Pacific strategies) but they were unable to carry the EU's poor member-nations with them.

How India's new-found aggression viz Western Europe plays out too remains to be seen after External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar ticked them off on 'Europe's problems are not the world's problem'. If the reference was not to the colonial past or the two World Wars of the previous century, the Ukraine War has still shown that Europe's problems are the world's problems. Whatever China's prescriptions for the Saudi-Iranian patch-up, if it works, Xi may now turn his attention to try ending the Ukraine War, where he has an open invitation from President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, as if his nation was tired of fighting somebody

else's war more than its own. Even if he succeeds halfway, the temptation for Xi to turn his attention to the intractable 'Kashmir issue' should not be underestimated.

For some decades before Doklam (2017) and Galwan (2020), through Track 2, China, using Aksai Chin in its possession as a lever, was mooting a three-way conversation with India and Pakistan. New Delhi is still wedded to a bilateral approach to Pakistan under the 'Shimla Agreement' (1972) and there has not been any suggestion to the contrary.

If the US sees a distant Chinese hand, it is bound to push for a one-on-one India-Pakistan rapprochement, which does not look possible just now but is still the only way out, barring a decisive war. Pakistan's economic ills, coupled with greater American realisation that it now badly needs a foothold in extended West Asia may tempt it, even more, to look at the options.

The recent bi-partisan resolution in the US Senate, asserting the acceptance of McMahon Line and Arunachal Pradesh as an integral part of India may be aimed at snubbing China, which has been amassing troops along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with India. But it may also open up negative arguments as to what the US thought Arunachal Pradesh, otherwise, was, all through.

## Why air pollution in India is a public health crisis and demands urgent action

According to the Global Burden of Disease Study 2019, the economic losses from premature deaths and morbidity caused by air pollution amounted to \$36.8 billion, or 1.36 per cent of India's GDP.

### Steps by the government

Recognising the gross public health threat posed by air pollution, the government has taken some foundational steps, with the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) as the nodal ministry. It has implemented the National Clean Air Programme, a time-bound national-level strategy, to combat rising air pollution by 2024.

Further, the National Air Quality Monitoring Programme, with CPCB as its executing agency, is monitoring the levels of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, PM10, and PM2.5, along with other meteorological factors, through its network of 804 active stations that serve 344 cities and towns in 28 states and six union territories. The CPCB has also developed the National Air Quality Index, a colour-coded air monitoring and classification tool launched by MoEFCC under the aegis of the 'Swachh Bharat'. Further, India jumped directly from Bharat Stage-IV to Bharat Stage-VI norms in 2019 in lieu of increasing emissions.

A significant portion of social consciousness has also come from the National Green Tribunal's environmental activism, which was established as a statutory body in 2010 to deal with environmental cases and to expedite the implementation of decisions relating to them. Even the Supreme Court has quickly assumed the role of an environmental activist. On various occasions, the SC has made it evident that the fundamental right to life under Article 21 also encompasses the right to a healthy environment. Be it the reconstitution of the Environment Protection (Prevention and Control) Authority, the reinforcement of the 'Polluter Pays' principle, the freezing of production licenses of manufacturers of harmful pesticides and relocating hazardous industries, or banning crackers with barium on Diwali, the apex court has kept the environmental consciousness in India, breathing and pulsating.

Although the government has taken affirmative steps to control and prevent air pollution, the policy and programme landscape around it seems isolated, scattered and fragmented, and lacking teeth. Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that judicial activism cannot be used in place of executive action.

### The Road Ahead

Thus, the government and other stakeholders must work together in unison towards a cleaner and healthier environment in a collaborative, consultative and convergent manner. India must prioritise its public health, and the current scenario regarding the health effects of air pollution should suffice to put us into a 'mission mode' against it. First, a holistic, integrated, and comprehensive year-wide action plan to tackle air pollution must be formulated, as being practiced in Delhi-NCR (the GRAP). Second, various air pollution monitoring mechanisms should be consolidated into one robust and standardised monitoring system. Third, more research and development projects on emissions and their effects should be funded in order to help reorient and redirect our future policy decisions.

Further, the conventional wisdom, for long, has correlated higher emission levels with economic growth, thereby limiting the magnitude and urgency of the response. But lately, it has been increasingly recognised that the issues around air pollution present both challenges and opportunities, giving the perfect prelude to the government and businesses to work together in unison and invest in clean technology.



# For 2024, Rahul Gandhi Must Open Talks With These 3 Leaders

Those who underestimated Rahul Gandhi were in for a shock when he embarked on an ambitious project like the Bharat Jodo Yatra. Some were skeptical about Rahul Gandhi completing the Yatra and others ridiculed the very idea.

The Bharat Jodo Yatra proved to be a beam of light in the darkness for the Congress. Skeptics and critics were shocked by the response that the Yatra generated throughout. I am sure the Congress must have organised crowds for the Yatra, but the overwhelming response could not be the result of just party management. People genuinely came to see and meet Rahul Gandhi. It is no secret that the BJP initially tried to malign the Yatra with their below-the-belt propaganda but soon they

realised that it might boomerang on them, so they stopped.

Rahul Gandhi is no longer the "Pappu". He has emerged as a serious politician. He has earned this for himself through his hard work and sincerity. Now the accusations of entitlement will not cut ice with people. It is this transformation of Rahul Gandhi from a so-called 'Pappu' to 'Pundi' that is a singular achievement for the Congress.

In their desperation to soil Rahul's newfound image, the Modi Government and the BJP are going out of their way to paint him as anti-national.

The Yatra has also caused heartburn for many opposition leaders; the space which many of them clamoured to occupy is no

longer vacant.

It's no secret that Mamata Banerjee wanted to be projected as prime ministerial candidate for the opposition. Nitish Kumar is another aspirant, along with Arvind Kejriwal. Now it is incumbent on Rahul Gandhi to break the ice with these leaders and involve them in a one-on-one conversation for larger unity and make them understand that leadership is not an issue at all, and that the first priority should be to unseat the BJP.

There is undoubtedly some movement in the direction of opposition unity. In this session of parliament, more than a dozen opposition parties have not only been meeting regularly and but they have also coordinated effectively on the Adani is-

sue, except Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress. Even the BRS of KCR (K Chandrasekhar Rao) and AAP, who were seen to be staying away from the Congress until recently, have been active in this exercise. They have quietly accepted the leadership of the Congress and Mallikarjun Kharge. This is a welcome sign for opposition unity but the news from Kolkata must have dampened the spirit of this unity and gladdened the BJP.

There is no denying that opposition unity has always been tricky business and a complicated affair. It is time consuming too, but it is also an opportunity for Rahul Gandhi and the Congress to show their leadership and turn adversity into opportunity.

## Saudi-Iran Patch-up: Can New Hegemon Fix Ancient Rivalry?

(it isn't as if other countries, including the US and its European allies haven't ever indulged in such actions, only the Saudis were very clumsy and were caught out) doesn't make any sense. If anything, the Americans should be doubling down in support of MbS who is attempting changes that could transform the face and fate of West Asia in a way that was unimaginable a few years back. But with wokeism guiding US foreign policy, instead of encouraging and supporting MbS, the Americans seem more interested in shunning him and treating him as a pariah. Ironically, when Saudi Arabia was a medieval monarchy, the US was glad to look the other way to the non-existence of civil rights, women rights and human rights; now when Saudi Arabia is making a radical departure from the past and opening up, the Americans are hell bent on scolding and shaming the Saudi ruling dispensation. Frankly, compared to some of the really horrible leaders that the US has had no compunctions in dealing with, MbS is an angel. Despite the lack of warmth in the relationship between the Saudis and the Americans, the latter were kept in the loop on what was happening with Iran. The Saudis have quite smartly used the space available to try and maximise their advantage. At one level, by normalising relations with Iran, they hope to disarm Iran and the threat that it poses with its aggressive and interventionist diplomacy, particularly in places where Saudis have vital security interests. This buys time and space for Saudis to do their own thing, domestically as

well as in the defence and diplomatic field. At another level, the Saudis hope to use the US and China rivalry to their advantage. They think that this move will focus US attention on keeping close to the Saudis and giving them the security guarantees that they are seeking from the Americans. What is more, the reluctance of the Americans to sell some of the weapon systems to Saudis and also hector and preach to the Saudis could be tempered by the new developments and realities.

For their part, the Iranians also get some space. Beleaguered by the unending protests by women, reeling under the US-led Western sanctions, and with the economy in a crisis, the Iranians

needed to claw out of their isolation. With normalisation of relations with Saudis, other Arab states like UAE will also follow. But perhaps compared to the benefits that the Saudis get, the advantages for Iran are somewhat limited. The sanctions imposed on Iran are not going away. It is unlikely that the Saudis or Emirates will bust these sanctions. The Saudis are not going to turn the clock back on the channels they have opened up with Israel. Saudi allies like UAE are also unlikely to reverse the diplomatic normalisation with Israel. New groupings like the I2U2 are not going away anywhere. The really interesting thing to watch out for will be how much pressure will come on Iran's nuclear

programme from the Saudis. This is a critical issue for the Saudis, as it is for Iran. The bottom-line is that thaw will remain a work in progress and things could freeze over once again anytime.

Some analysts, especially the ones in Pakistan, are getting all excited and seeing the emergence of a new anti-Western bloc led by China. The Pakistani strategists (an oxymoron if ever there was one) believe that their dream of a PRICS (Pakistan-Russia-Iran-China-Saudi Arabia) alliance — the pun is entirely intended — could soon become a reality. This will allow Pakistan to once again extract geo-strategic rents from its geography. The icing on the cake will be that India will get isolated in the region. But this is yet

another one of the great Pakistani delusions that have ruined that country.

From the Indian perspective, there is certainly some discomfort to see the Chinese play a big diplomatic role in a region in which India has vital security and economic interests. But India's relationship with all the major players in the region is robust and is only deepening and becoming stronger. In fact, in some ways, the Saudi-Iran thaw makes the diplomatic tight-rope walking a lot easier for India. While India needs to watch very carefully the Chinese intrusions and influence in the region, it is important to not get overawed by the diplomatic coup pulled off by the Chinese.

## There Will Be Consequences! India Sends Strong Message to UK on Khalistani Attack

Across the Western world, especially in the UK and Canada, Sikh groups are mostly controlled by Khalistani sympathisers who operate in tandem with Islamist outfits, pushed, promoted and patronised by the local Pakistani diplomatic mission under the aegis of the ISI. Any shortfall to fund Khalistani militancy abroad and in India is now being met by Pakistan's ISI, while the West happily ensures they are provided safe refuge and passage. But in Britain, things get even more complicated, given its inherent anti-India bias and, worse, pro-Pakistan tilt. Historically, when the Europeans first came to India, they were overwhelmed by the socio-cultural and economic superiority and sophistication of this country. In 1616, when Sir Thomas Roe arrived in Agra, India, as the first accredited English ambassador to the Mughal Empire, he was acutely aware of the shabbiness of the gifts he had brought from England. By the early 19th century, however, more so after the 1857 mutiny, Indians and their way of life began to be looked down upon. This derision for Indians took an intense Hindu hatred turn as the British saw the freedom struggle

largely as a Hindu movement for independence under the Congress leadership.

The Congress leadership under Gandhi, Patel and Nehru was innately secular in nature, but the British and the Muslims saw them as Hindu leaders. In their eyes, the Congress was a Hindu party and the British thus could never forgive 'Hindu India'. Also, the fact that the creation of Pakistan was almost entirely the product of British geopolitical strategy to keep a portion of the subcontinent, if it couldn't keep the whole of it, so as to avert an expected Soviet threat to the region, made the UK establishment go traditionally soft on Pakistan. The British distrust for 'Hindu India' was further magnified after the Nehruvian dispensation pursued a largely anti-Western, pro-Soviet foreign policy in the name of non-alignment. The British establishment, including its Deep State, still betrays that anti-India bias; in fact, it has only intensified in recent years, especially with Modi's India being the only "bright spot" in the otherwise gloomy economic scenario, defying the Churchillian doomsday scenario. What further bothers the Western world is the con-

ventional Indian tendency to go solo in geostrategic affairs, as in the case of Ukraine. It has also been a considered view of this writer that the West and India are at best "friends with benefits", a term Seema Sirohi has used for her latest book, *The India-US Story*. And when a friendship is based on benefits, it tends to swing as issues change. Yes, the West wants India as a bulwark against China, but it is also a fact that the West is deeply wary of rising India. Especially the establishment and the Deep State in the West that are yet to accept India as an all-weather friend. The London High Commission saga once again underlines the distrust that the British establishment betrays for India. It is this milieu that lets all sorts of anti-India elements find easy access to and safe refuge in the UK. Sadly, at a time when Prime Minister Modi is genuinely trying to bridge the gulf between India and Britain by pushing for a free trade agreement (FTA) with the UK, even when the latter is likely to experience greater windfall from the deal than India, the typical British distrust for him and his idea of India has only become stronger.

# How India can Reboot Urban Mobility to Prepare for the Future

Seven, the country's urbanisation pattern is complex and uneven. Its smaller states/UTs are largely urban- Delhi (97.5 percent), Chandigarh (97.25 percent), Lakshadweep (78.7 percent), Puducherry (68.33 percent), and Goa (61.17 percent). Also, a few states will soon be more urban than rural- Tamil Nadu (48.40 percent), Kerala (47.70 percent) Maharashtra (45.27 percent), and Gujarat (42.6 percent). And there are states with low/very low urbanization- Himachal (10.075 percent), Bihar (11.29 percent), Assam and Orissa (14 percent), UP (22 percent), Chhattisgarh (23.24 percent), Jharkhand (24.04 percent), Rajasthan (24.87 percent) and Madhya Pradesh (27.63 percent).

Urbanization in India must be looked at with a nuanced prism.

Firstly, some states have matured urbanization, few are reaching there, and some states though have lower urbanization percentages, the actual urban population is high because these are high-population states.

Secondly, the urban population of India in 2035 (67.45 crore) will be close to the total population (68.4 crore) of India in 1981. Likewise, urban population in 2050 (81.4 crore) will be closer to country's 1991 population (84.4 crore). It brings in its train humungous problems.

## URBAN INDIA - THE DEFINING PROBLEM

To recap for brevity's sake, urban population between 1970 and 2020 has more than quadrupled- from 10.9 crore to 48.31 crore. Also, Indian cities comprising barely 3 percent landmass contribute 63 percent to the nation's GDP and by 2035, they will contribute to 75 percent of the nation's GDP.

### What does it mean?

Looking East at China, we find that out of 514 million plus cities in the world, 150 plus are in China. India too soon will have more than a dozen megacities and will need 125-150 million plus cities (old and new) with world-class infrastructure to accommodate the growing urban population. And to harness twin benefits of demographic dividend and urbanization dividend, it is time to banish the old paradigm of containment of cities that resulted in a haphazard growth of cities short of planning.

To reap urbanisation benefits, the country has to fix the myriad problems facing big and small cities. Problems to be fixed are many (urban sprawl, slummification, water and sanitation etc) but none starker than the need to tame the twin chaos of urban pollution and urban mobility gridlock. This three-part series focuses on how to reimagine the defining problem of urban mobility and make Indian cities 'future ready.' But where do I begin? One way is my favourite - Look East- Learning from China. But I purposefully begin with the lessons for urban India of tomorrow from the urban India of yesterday.

I start the past perfect with the hypothesis- India in the second half of the 19th century and first half of the 20th century started with first mover advantage in both rail-based and road-based. Part I is the brief history of urban mobility in India (circa

1853-1947).

## URBAN RAIL

India's tryst with rail-based urban mobility.

One, India was the first mover and the torch bearer of rail-based urban transport (also known as suburban trains or local trains) in Asia. Railways connecting the city centre (central business district) to the periphery (metropolitan areas) reached India, almost parallel to the arrival of passenger rail transport in England and continental Europe.

Two, within two decades of opening a 50 km railway (arguably the first in England) between Liverpool and Manchester, on April 16, 1953, the first train in India between Boribunder (now CSMT) and Thane completed 33.8 km journey in one hour and fifteen minutes.

Three, when the above happened 170 years ago, it marked the arrival of railroad in India. It also heralded the era of rail-based urban mobility, way ahead of any other country in Asia. In Japan, 23.8 kilometres first railway line from Shinbashi to Yokohama then was two decades away (October 14, 1872) and the troubled birth of railway in China had to wait till the end of 19th century, after extensive railway networks were in place in Europe, North America, India, and Japan.

Four, shortly after Mumbai, Calcutta got its first local train in 1954 between Howrah and Hooghly. Mumbai got second line from Churchgate to Virar in 1967. In 1925 Mumbai local trains between Bombay VT and Kurla got traction in form of EMUs. Soon came EMU services between Churchgate and Borivali in 1928. Local trains reached South India, with Madras getting first electrified local train service between Madras Beach and Tambaram stations on May 11, 1931.

Five, a detour here is in order. In 1947, undivided India had massive 65,000 route km of railway line. Even after Independence, India's route of 54000 km in 1947 was way ahead of 27,000 km of China, (barely 8,000 km usable due to civil war) and around 10,000 km in Japan.

Six, Railways contribution to urban transport in India has been humungous but an unappreciated story. India has close to 2000 km of urban rail (suburban/ local trains) operating in and around Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad, Delhi, Pune, and Lucknow-Kanpur section. In 2020, Bangalore also got approval to develop an ambitious modern suburban train network. Local trains (DMUs/EMUs) also run around clusters of other cities. Due to paucity of local trains around many city clusters, local passengers often also travel in mail/ express trains. These numbers are seldom calculated correctly.

Seven, the immense contribution of Indian Railways to urban mobility begs to be narrated. The available data indicate that the annual number of urban commuters travelling on the IR network is close to five billion, more than three times the country's total population.

Eight, apart from providing sustainable urban mobility, IR local train services have also greatly helped the dispersal of the population of big cities away from the CBD

to the larger metropolitan area.

Nine, most robust local train services in the country are in Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai. These three cities today account for the daily ridership of 7.5-8 million, 3.5-4 million and 2.5-3 million respectively, totalling 13.5 to 15 million commuters daily.

## RAIL-BASED URBANIZATION

Indian cities have fast developed around railways stations and along railway lines. Here is the story. One, cities in India and elsewhere, initially developed alongside rivers, the principal mode of transport. Since the advent of railways, cities have witnessed urban growth clustered around stations and linear development on both sides of railway lines. Japan perfected the art of this form of urbanization. Even development of Hong Kong to new territories was fuelled by rail transit-oriented push by KCRC while the Hong Kong future city itself was shaped by rail transport.

Two, India, a country with scarce land resources, has a choice to make. Truly speaking, it has Hobson's choice- cities have to grow vertical, with mixed land use along the rail and metro rail transit corridors. Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai have shown that population dispersal away from CBD is possible using suburban rail network.

Three, among many, two recent success stories of rail transit-propelled urban development are- one, the urban metamorphosis of Dwarka sub-city in Delhi after the arrival of Metro Rail and two, the extension of harbour local train services in Mumbai from Mankhurd to Panvel. The latter has transformed the urban corridors of Navi Mumbai by developing it along both sides of the track and in the process, it has also rejuvenated the alternative CBD in form of CBD Belapur.

Four, the development of Delhi-Meerut regional rail and Bengaluru suburban rail services bring more opportunities for rail transit-oriented growth. Same is the story with Metro rail which I will talk about a bit later. With India urbanizing fast, it is time to locate more rail corridors, particularly in million-plus cities and guide them to rail-oriented city growth to transfer the population load away from the bigger cities. For India to secure its place in the galaxy of developed countries by 2047, the country has to plan for cities of future now. This is how the British developed Bombay- in 1931 when Bombay had a 1.31 million population, on both central and western lines, EMU-based local services were already up and running from 1925 and 1928 onwards.

## THE CHARMING TRAMS

Not only the railways, but India was also the first mover in Asia with regards to trams as a mode of urban transport. It is time for the country to reinvent that music. Here is why- One, the year 2023 marks 150 years of the arrival of tram services in Asia in Calcutta. The year also marks the completion of 100 years of electric tramway services in Calcutta where the horse-driven trams first ran on February 24, 1873, between Sealdah and Armenian Ghat street for a distance of 3.9 km.

Two, soon the tram services were electrified and spread to other Indian cities. Before independence, at a different point

in time, tramways ran at least in ten cities (Calcutta, Mumbai, Nashik, Madras, Kanpur, Kochi, Delhi, Patna, and Bhavnagar). But except Kolkata, post-independence tram services were dismantled.

Three, I have fond memories of travelling on the window seat of the princely first class of Calcutta trams between Howrah-Esplanade (1970s), Alipore-Chowrangi (1982) and Sealdah-Howrah (1988) either as a tourist or when I worked there. Those were the heyday of the Calcutta tram, when the city boasted as many as 52 routes. Today, with all but two routes of Kolkata trams shut, it is sunset time for trams. It should not have been the case. It need not be the case.

Four, for India to re-imagine urban mobility, it is reboot time for modern tramways. And the reason is not far to seek. Tramways, also known as LRT in certain countries, are the most convenient, relatively cheaper to develop, operate and maintain and are environmentally friendly. A study done by me for the Institute of Urban Transport in 2012 named "Life Cycle Cost for Five Modes of Urban Transport" found that LRT was the least costly mode for corridors between 7500-15000 Peak Hour Peak Direction Traffic (PHPDT).

Five, my findings and convictions are backed by global data. As per the UITP report Global Trams and LRT Landscape (October 2019), as of 31 December 2018, tram and light rail systems (both described as LRT here) are operational in 389 cities across the world and are growing fast in terms of number of systems, route km and ridership.

Six, in recent years, tramways have opened/reopened in at least 110 new cities, with Europe leading the pack with 60 news systems followed by Asia-Pacific and North America with 20 and 16 new systems. In addition to the new systems, there is a flurry of activities including adding new lines to the existing system and extension of the existing lines.

Seven, Asia Pacific takes the lead. As evidenced by the UITP report, between 2014 and 2018, 1,153 km of new tramway/ LRT has opened worldwide. And 2017 was the watershed year when first time, green-field tramways projects in Asia-Pacific exceeded those in Europe, debunking the theory that tramways/LRT are not suitable for highly populated urban sprawls of Asian cities.

Eight, the ridership speaks. In 2018, globally, 14.651 billion people travelled on tramways. It was twice the world population. Maximum ridership of 10.42 billion was in Europe (204 systems, 1,276 lines 9,296 km).

Nine, China embraces tram. Today, when India is busy dismantling tramways in Kolkata, the only city with trams, China is investing heavily in tramways. And China's focus on tramways/LRT is grounded in reality. Today, China has more than 150 cities with a one million plus population. Also, currently, 50 percent of the Chinese population of 1.4 billion live in cities, compared with 18 percent in 1978, and this is expected to rise to 70 percent by 2030.



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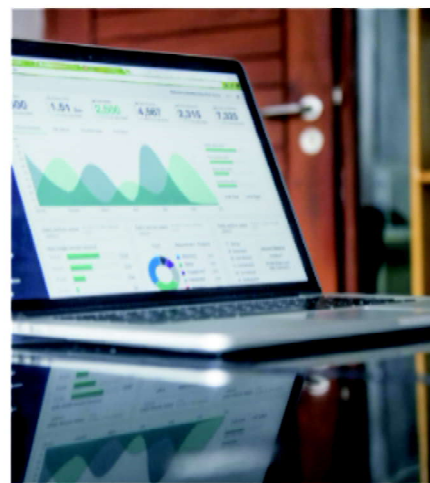
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# Japan's new thrust in the Indo-Pacific

The partnership between India and Japan is set to deepen and will prove to be the most important relationship in the Indo-Pacific in the 21st century

Japan Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's two-day visit to India on March 20-21 comes exactly a year after his last visit. Just like last time, the Ukraine war looms large in global geopolitics. But both his visits have pivoted on the strength of the special bilateral strategic and global partnership. This is an important point considering Japan has aligned its position on Ukraine with the West. While the G7 countries have taken a uniformly hard line on Russia, it risks trying to replicate the work of the UN Security Council which has failed to deliver on account of weakened multilateralism and major power contestations among the P-5 members.

India, on the other hand, is seeking to use its G20 presidency this year to bring the global community's focus back on developmental issues, notably the UN's SDGs.

While the G7 remains riveted on the geopolitical fallout of the war in Ukraine, Japan's presidency gives the G7 a chance to rebalance its agenda. As PM Kishida stated in his address to the strategic community in Delhi today, Japan is keen to use its revitalised vision of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) to ramp up its contribution to infrastructure, connectivity, security and development across the geography of the Indo-Pacific. Japan's traditional footprint in the region has traditionally relied on Official Development Assistance (ODA) to advance quality infrastructure and build partnerships in the region.

Kishida's visit comes shortly before the G7 Summit in Hiroshima this May to which the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been invited.

These engagements between the two prime ministers will provide an opportunity for India to seek a tandem with the G7 agenda on food, energy, climate change, healthcare and the like through the good offices of a credible interlocutor such as the Japan PM.

An interesting observation from PM Kishida's speech on FOIP was the primacy attached to a broader definition of the security paradigms beyond maritime issues.



He mentioned the importance of securing airspace, possibly as a direct consequence of the provocations that Japan's Air Self Defence Force (JASDF) has faced in recent years as a result of air operations by the Chinese PLA Air Force (PLAAF) and the Russian Air Force in the areas near Japan.

Every year, Japan scrambles its fighter jets on hundreds of occasions to intercept alien aircraft.

The JASDF scrambled its fighter jets 1,004 times in the fiscal year 2021, of which 722 times was in the face of intruding Chinese aircraft. But Russia too accounted for 266 occasions. The more worrisome issue for Japan is the fact that the PLAAF and the Russian Air Force are increasingly intensifying their activities, including joint naval exercises, in the areas surrounding Japan. Another interesting point made by Kishida was his idea of Japan developing a holistic economic and investment policy to address regional needs in the Indo-Pacific in the face of opaque developmental finance already on offer from certain quarters.

For instance, he spoke tellingly of keeping India and Bangladesh central to building a value chain around the Bay of Bengal and northeast India.

Bangladesh, as he put it, is now graduating from its earlier status as a Least Developed Country (LDC) and, along with several other smaller South Asian economies such as Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Nepal, has been caught on the horns of a dilemma in seeking easy developmental finance and suffering its consequences in due course.

Kishida also referred to the Pacific, where a new geopolitical competition is taking shape. The Japanese Foreign Minister, Yoshimasa Hayashi, recently visited the Solomon Islands and expressed Japan's willingness to offer assistance in maritime security. This is a timely move given that the Solomon Islands has been in the eye of the storm since it switched diplomatic ties from Taiwan to the People's Republic of China.

Japan is also part of the tandem known as the Partners in the Blue Pacific to meet the challenge of China's opaque economic

inducements in a part of the world which was earlier under the influence of powers such as the US, Australia and New Zealand, particularly in the South Pacific in Melanesia.

Going by Kishida's address, Japan is increasingly viewing the Indo-Pacific through a securitised lens, unlike in the past. His references to the Acquisition and Cross Serving Agreement (ACSA) with India and the Reciprocal Access Agreement that it has recently concluded with both the UK and Australia are cases in point.

These will soon be ratified by the Japanese parliament, he said. In this unfolding scenario, his frequent emphasis on the centrality of India in the realisation of FOIP augurs well for the bilateral strategic partnership. Ties between India and Japan have been further strengthened over the past year after a lull during the Covid-19 pandemic. Defence ties are being strengthened. The inaugural edition of the air exercise between the forces of the two countries - Veer Guardian - was held at the Hyakuri Air

Base in Japan this January. The fourth edition of the Dharma Guardian exercise between the Indian Army and the Japan Ground Self Defence Force (JGSDF) was hosted by Japan in February at Camp Imazu in the Shiga province. Kishida's FOIP gives fresh impetus to the groundwork prepared by former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The four pillars broadly outlined by Kishida - an inclusive and rules-based international order in the Indo-Pacific, addressing the emerging challenges in the Indo-Pacific in equal partnership with like-minded countries, multi-layered connectivity including digital infrastructure such as undersea cables, and lastly, the security of the high seas and the airspace for protecting freedom of navigation, overflight and unimpeded commerce - all resonate well with India's own vision of the Indo-Pacific outlined by PM Modi. The partnership between India and Japan is set to deepen and will prove to be the most important relationship in the Indo-Pacific in the 21st century.



# Indian policymaking is good when cautious, botched when rushed. Learn from US banking crisis

India has done great in regulation because it took time to think things through. The US banking crisis should encourage Modi govt to avoid rush jobs like demonetisation.



The recent past has shown that every time Indian policymakers have exercised what looks like excessive caution, they have been rewarded. Conversely, each time they have pushed through something in a hurry, they have been burned. The latest example of the former is the resilience exhibited by our banking sector in light of the meltdown taking place in the US and Europe. On the flip side, there are numerous examples of rushed policies being botched—prominent ones being demonetisation, GST, and the farm laws.

Let's start with what India has gotten right through its caution. Take the policies put in place by the Reserve Bank of India and the Ministry of Finance regarding cryptocurrencies. Since December 2013, the RBI has issued several public notices over the last decade, warning potential investors of the risks associated with investing in cryptocurrencies.

Even when the crypto craze started gaining momentum and was capturing the public imagination in 2017, the Finance Ministry took the firm stance that investments in cryptos were as risky and compared them to Ponzi schemes. In February this year, RBI deputy governor T Rabi Sankar said that cryptos "may be even worse" than Ponzi schemes.

In his last Budget speech in 2018, then Finance Minister Arun Jaitley was clear in saying that the government "does not consider cryptocurrencies legal tender... and will take all measures to eliminate use of these cryptoassets" as part of the payment system. That is, no transactions at all would be allowed in cryptocurrencies.

He was, however, quite supportive of blockchain technology, on which cryptocurrencies are based, but which has a wide range of uses well beyond cryptos.

Jaitley's attitude towards cryptocurrencies and blockchain has stayed with the government till now. In Budget 2022, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a provision to tax profits arising out of cryptocurrencies, which gave hope to the industry that legal recognition was round the corner.

## Slow and steady

But this was the government at its cautious best. What they basically said was that if you profit from the sale of cryptocurrencies, then you have to pay tax on those profits. But if you lose money or are a victim of fraud, you're largely on your own, because there's no regulator to turn to. Legal recognition remains elusive.

Now, look at this caution this way. Had India welcomed

cryptocurrencies with open arms, there would have been every chance that a meltdown like the one that happened with FTX in the US would have happened here. The reason it hasn't is because our regulators are extremely risk-averse.

So, you can have some crypto investors losing some money because the prices have dropped, or you can see them falling victim to scams, but the number and scale of such incidents are far smaller due to the discouraging attitude taken by the government.

Another example of India's cautious approach being the template for policies around the world is the way we have reacted to the Chinese app TikTok. In June 2020, the Indian government banned TikTok and 58 other apps, citing privacy and national security concerns. Sure, this had the not-so-subtle undercurrent of getting back at China due to our geopolitical tensions and border skirmishes, but it looks like the ostensible issues of privacy and national security are real. The US is reportedly seriously considering banning TikTok unless the parent company sells its stake.

The US isn't the only one to follow India's lead. The European Commission, the EU Council and the European Parliament have all banned TikTok on their officials' phones, as have the UK and New

Zealand.

Finally, we come to banking regulation. Yes, India's banking industry has earned a pretty poor reputation due to the profligate lending that took place in 2009-13, and the subsequent high rates of non-performing assets, and the collapse of banks and NBFCs like Yes Bank and IL&FS. But the fact is that this mismanagement was on the lending side, where individual discretion played a much more important role than regulation (or the lack thereof) did. On the deposit side—which is where the US regional banks are currently facing their crises—India has robust regulations and standards. The most important thing is that the RBI, early on, decided that the globally-agreed best practices on banking regulation—the Basel III guidelines—would apply to all Indian banks. In 2021, the central bank extended this to even include All India Financial Institutions (AIFIs) such as EXIM Bank, NABARD, National Housing Bank (NHB), and SIDBI.

This is not the case in the US. There, a significant lobby forced the government to relent and allow smaller banks to remain outside the remit of the Basel III norms. This is how the banks like Silicon Valley Bank, Signature Bank, and Silvergate Bank could operate

with such imprudent practices.

It's great to see that the RBI is following this careful approach to the launch of Central Bank Digital Currencies as well, where it's running extensive pilots before doing a full-scale launch.

## Haste makes waste

Now, let's get to the rush jobs that have been shown to have been error-ridden. The first, of course, is demonetisation. If the idea was to curb black money, data shows that that failed since all the cash returned to the system. If it was to stop terror financing, that too was short-lived since it all flowed back once cash returned to circulation.

If the idea was to push digital transactions and greater formalisation, the former would have happened on its own due to the sheer convenience of UPI, and the latter would have happened about eight months later when Good and Services Tax was launched. GST would have led to an increase in tax collections as well, another reason given for demonetisation.

This brings us to the launch of GST itself. The great strength of GST was that it was based on the matching of invoices of the buyers and the sellers, and so could theoretically plug a whole lot of leakages. Pushing GST onto an unprepared economy meant that invoice-matching was put on hold for several years.

GST is undoubtedly a great reform, but its greatness has been severely limited so far due to a patchy and hurried rollout.

Then we come to the now-infamous farm laws. Even though you'll find very few non-political farmers actually saying the laws were harmful, the government's rush in pushing them through meant that it didn't spend enough time convincing the more vocal farmer groups. The end result was that it had to embarrassingly revoke the laws.

India has done a great job in many areas of regulation because it has taken the time to think things through. The ongoing banking crises in the US and Europe should show the Indian government the value of this caution, and encourage it to abandon its haste.

# Credit Suisse no more: How years of decay and mistrust ripped apart its rich legacy

While the final chapter of Credit Suisse ended quickly, the Swiss banking giant's fall from grace was a result of years of decay, mistrust and scandals.



Top European lender Credit Suisse Group AG is no more, bringing an end to the global financial institution's 166-year-old rich history.

The crisis-hit bank was bought by UBS Group AG in an historic deal, brokered by the Swiss National Bank. The deal was finalised after Credit Suisse came under pressure amid concerns of a full-blown global banking crisis after the collapse of two US banks. While the final chapter of Credit Suisse ended quickly, the Swiss banking giant's fall from grace was a result of years of decay, mistrust and scandals.

## Credit Suisse's fall from grace

Credit Suisse was like a national icon for Switzerland, representing the country's robust finance industry on the world stage and giving stiff competition to the biggest banks on Wall Street. But as it gained recognition as one of Europe's top financial institutions, trouble was brewing in the background – from scandals to legal issues. Credit Suisse's troubles came prominently under the limelight after Silicon Valley Bank's collapse, which triggered an alarm in global markets about the possibility of a looming banking crisis.

Soon after, a report emerged that Credit Suisse's biggest backer, Saudi National Bank, said it would not invest anymore in the lender. This led to a massive decline in Credit Suisse's shares, and the Swiss central

bank had to rush with a \$54 billion cheque to plug the cracks and calm investors.

However, even this lifeline failed to soothe investors and left the Swiss authorities with no choice but to push UBS to acquire the failing bank.

## Confidence crisis

The Swiss authorities regretted the situation and said it was unfortunate Credit Suisse was not able to deal with its difficulties. A complete loss of confidence from the markets and customers proved to be the final nail in the coffin for Credit Suisse. The UBS deal was a huge blow for Credit Suisse, which was among one of the world's 30 systemically important banks. But the situation got so bad it was the only option left to the Swiss authorities to prevent a complete collapse, which would have sent shockwaves across the global stock markets. Though it may not be the final bank to fail amid the ongoing global financial turmoil, it definitely has helped boost confidence that is necessary to avoid complete chaos. Credit Suisse's reputation started taking a hit over the past few years, but it was once a force to reckon with.

It had more than \$1 trillion in assets before the global financial crisis hit in 2008 and it even survived it without any bailout. Cut to 2023, and its assets are almost reduced to half of that amount.

And now it finds itself at the end of the road – a development that

could prove to be a significant blow to Switzerland's economy, which is largely dependent on the stability of its finance industry. Credit Suisse has played a crucial role in financing some of the biggest developmental projects in the world and also safeguarding the wealth of the world's richest individuals.

Over the past few years, the bank has seen senior management make frequent exits, and those who occupied the positions found themselves facing even more performance pressure.

This has proved counterproductive for the bank, evident by a nearly 100 per cent decline in its stock from its peak before the financial crisis in 2008.

## Risky bets, fraud, spying and more

Credit Suisse's first mistakes started over 2 decades earlier, when it took over its US partner, First Boston, which embraced the high-yield debt markets and lent billions to fund risky buyout transactions.

Several other aggressive expansion plans were set in motion over the next decades, but ultimately did more harm than good to Credit Suisse as its management kept changing.

And then in 2015, the bank suffered another big blow when it hired a fraudulent private banker with no clients and no banking experience. Patrice Lescaudron, who died by suicide in 2020 after being convicted in 2018, was exposed in 2015 for stealing from the bank's wealthy clients.

It may be noted that for more than a decade, Lescaudron defrauded some of Credit Suisse's most sensitive accounts belonging to prime ministers and oligarchs. Leaked regulatory reports later blamed the bank for ignoring brazen compliance violations by one of its own. And then there were scandals that further dented the bank's reputation, including one instance from 2019 where a top ranking employee was spied on after he quit. It started off with a feud between the then-CEO Tidjane Thiam and wealth management division head Iqbal Khan, who desired to lead the bank one day. Their public feud damaged the bank's reputation. The matter got worse when Khan quit and joined UBS, even though he was passed over for a promotion. It triggered panic among

Khan was set to be promoted, he quit and joined UBS. However, the move triggered panic among

Credit Suisse's top ranked executives. They feared Khan would poach key personnel. They even hired a private security firm to monitor his activities.

The bank dismissed claims when the embarrassing incident came to light, and Thiam was asked to leave in February 2022. An investigation by the Swiss banking regulator in October 2021 found five additional cases of surveillance from 2016 to 2019. This further damaged the bank's already dwindling reputation.

Another big blow to the bank came in March 2021, when its biggest client, Archegos Capital Management, failed to repay \$2 billion. An internal blame game

instead of damaging the crisis made the situation worse for the bank, as it took nearly two weeks to come up with an initial tally of exposure.

This hurt the bank significantly and eroded more than a year's profit, resulting in a massive confidence crisis.

This happened at a time when Credit Suisse's top executives were already facing criticism for failing to shield the bank and wealthy clients from the collapse of a \$10 billion suite of funds it ran with now-disgraced financier Lex Greensill.

An independent report into the loss suffered by the bank due to the Archegos episode, suggested that complexity, culture and controls were to blame. The report also indicated that Credit Suisse had a "lackadaisical attitude towards risk" and "failed at multiple junctures to take decisive and urgent action".

## The final blow

The bank saw one final leadership change in October 2022 as Chairman Axel Lehmann and CEO Ulrich Koerner took charge after the fallout from the 2021 trading debacles. The duo took aggressive steps to shore up confidence in the bank, including fundraising and job cuts.

After presenting a plan to restructure the bank, Koerner said the "new Credit Suisse" will be profitable from 2024 onwards. However, aggressive interest rate hikes since last year dampened the global economy and hit investor confidence – a combination that proved too much for Credit Suisse to handle.





# OpenAI study lists human jobs that can be replaced by ChatGPT, writing and programming roles at risk

A study by ChatGPT's parent company OpenAI has listed some human jobs that can be replaced by AI in the future. The study shows that writing and programming jobs are among the most at-risk when it comes to being replaced by AI.



ChatGPT, Open Research and the University of Pennsylvania have published a study that lists various jobs that AI can replace and those that it cannot.

## Jobs at-risk of getting replaced by AI

The title of the published study is "GPTs are GPTs: An Early Look at the Labor Market Impact Potential of Large Language Models".

The study identifies the potential 'exposure' that each job has to 'large language models'. The jobs that are more exposed have a higher risk of getting replaced. Further, the study also notes that professions relying on critical

thinking skills and scientific skills are less at-risk to be replaced by AI while jobs that need writing and programming skills might be more at-risk of automation. The study also points out that high paying jobs are more likely to get replaced by AI than compared to the low paying ones.

## Sam Altman on AI replacing human jobs

OpenAI's founder, Sam Altman had also talked about the possibility of AI replacing some human jobs in an interview with ABC News. He added that he is worried about how quickly the change will come. However, the

CEO also said that human beings have 'limitless' creativity and will find new things to do eventually. "I think over a couple of generations, humanity has proven that it can adapt wonderfully to major technological shifts. But if this happens in a single-digit number of years, some of these shifts ... That is the part I worry about the most," he said.

Sam Altman also added that people should look at ChatGPT as a tool, and not a replacement for people. "Human creativity is limitless, and we find new jobs. We find new things to do," the CEO said.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a concept that has been widely explored in popular fiction. However, with the popularity of AI chatbots like ChatGPT and Bing, a whole new debate has opened up- that of the possibility of AI

replacing human beings. While some believe that AI can replace human jobs in the future, others say that artificial intelligence can never match the creativity of a human being. Amidst all of this, Open AI, the parent company of

## India has 45,000 job openings in AI with starting salary of Rs 10 lakh for freshers, suggests report

The candidates who have around 8 years of experience or more in the Artificial Intelligence field are reportedly eligible for salaries ranging between Rs 25 to 45 lakh per annum.



people should choose Data Scientists and Machine Learning (ML) as their careers because these are things that will help them flourish and earn more without worrying about losing jobs in the future. The study also talks about the skills that are required to establish a career in Artificial Intelligence. It highlights that the focus has now amplified in scalable ML applications and so, AI professionals are now needed more than ever in scripting languages. Users need to have the skill to build conventional ML models to have a career in AI. The study

suggested that freshers in the role of data engineer could get up to Rs 14 lakhs per annum, whereas ML engineers could earn up to Rs 10 lakhs. The DevOps engineers, Data architects, and database admins will reportedly get up to Rs 12 lakhs. One can get up to Rs 14 lakhs if they take up the role of BI analyst or data scientist. The candidates who have around 8 years of experience or more in similar fields are reportedly eligible for salaries ranging between Rs 25 to 45 Lakh per annum. The study suggests that freshers should at least have a

basic knowledge or understanding of AI and its applications to give healthy competition to others in the market. Additionally, those who can develop AI skills can get very high salaries and job opportunities. The research revealed that the competition in India is already pretty aggressive and that around 400,000 Indians are already working in AI roles. It is being said that 16 percent of people in this country contribute to the global AI talent pool and Bengaluru is being referred to as the world's second largest place where AI talent is found.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) will change the future in a lot of ways, which is something that we have started seeing as tools like ChatGPT and Bing AI have proven to be pretty useful in getting tasks done pretty quickly. People are scared about whether AI will eat up their jobs because AI tools can seemingly get a lot of work done in no time. But, it is actually acting as a handy tool to free up time to focus on other productive things. Now that AI is gaining a lot of attention, the demand for AI professionals has also increased.

A report from TeamLeaseDigital revealed that at least 45,000 jobs are currently available in AI. The roles are available in different sectors, including healthcare, education, banking, manufacturing, and retail. The cited source claims

that since AI jobs are in demand, the freshers who are keen in this area will get paid in good numbers.

The report suggests that

## The Incredible Abilities Of GPT4, Evolved From ChatGPT

Why don't scientists trust atoms? Because they make up everything". This 'dad joke' was cracked by GPT4 in a demo by its creator OpenAI during its launch. You might find it funny, you might not, but the back-story of the joke will certainly impress you. Greg Brockman, a co-founder of OpenAI, showed GPT4 a picture of a handwritten note on what kind of website he wanted, and GPT4 actually built a functioning website on the fly.

The appalling dad jokes on the site were purely incidental.

This was perhaps the singular demo of the highly anticipated next version of GPT3.5 - made famous as ChatGPT - when OpenAI introduced it to an

unsuspecting world. It also announced the launch of ChatGPT Plus, which runs on GPT4 and costs \$20 a month. GPT4 is both an evolutionary and a revolutionary change from ChatGPT.

Three revolutionary changes are:

1. Making the blind 'see': GPT4 has the impressive ability to describe images in detail and be a 'visual volunteer'. The Be My Eyes demo revealed how GPT4 could describe any visual, say a painting like Starry Night by Van Gogh, in great visual detail. This multimodal feature is perhaps the killer app of GPT4 and could potentially work across images, music, and video. This feature has not been released to the public yet, as OpenAI thinks there is a

huge potential of misuse in its current form and is trying to build some ethical guardrails around it.

2. GPT4 is a polyglot: It uses Microsoft Azure Translator as a service with the ability to translate and converse in multiple languages. GPT4 was tested on its reasoning abilities across 26 languages (which included Bengali) and its reasoning was superior to that of GPT3.5/ChatGPT in 24.

3. Building websites from language: Described earlier is this jaw-dropping ability of GPT4 to build a rudimentary website out of English language prompts and images, something which could democratise web content building in a very dramatic way.

# Did American fashion designer Law Roach humiliate Priyanka Chopra with 'sample-sized' remark? Ex-stylist reacts



**Priyanka Chopra recently said she was reduced to tears after being insulted by a stylist. Law Roach has now reacted to her remarks.**

Priyanka Chopra recently revealed that a stylist once insulted her by saying that she wasn't 'sample-sized'. The star went on to reveal that she was reduced to tears

following the incident. While she did not name anyone, fashion icon Law Roach soon reacted to these remarks. He said that his comments were taken out of

context. Law Roach further said that he is fond of the Desi Girl. He had styled Priyanka, who will soon be seen in Citadel, for several red carpet events.

## LAW ROACH REACTS TO PRIYANKA CHOPRA'S REMARKS

Priyanka Chopra recently said that a stylist humiliated her by saying that she isn't 'sample-sized'. She, however, refrained from naming the individual. Law Roach has reacted to the

controversy. In a new interview, he said that his comments were taken out of context and asserted that he has never had such a conversation with the Quantico star.

"It is her gatekeepers, how they presented what I said to her to make her feel that way. I am sure it was taken out of context to get her to be like, 'Oh, okay, I'm not working with him no more. He's insensitive to my body.' Which I'm like, 'How is that

possible? I've been dressing you since pre-pandemic, and it's been nothing but great things," he told The Cut.

## LAW ROACH PRAISES PRIYANKA CHOPRA

He went on to praise the actress and her energy levels. "It drives me crazy. She has a twinkle, she has a wiggle, and I love her, even as a person," he said. Priyanka, meanwhile is awaiting the release of web series, Citadel. She will also be seen in Love Again.



## Ranveer Singh surpasses Virat Kohli to become India's most valued celebrity of 2022: Report

**Actor Ranveer Singh has emerged as India's most valued celebrity of 2022, according to a new celebrity brand valuation report. With a brand value of \$181.7 million, Singh has surpassed star cricketer Virat Kohli who occupied the top spot for five years.**

Actor Ranveer Singh is India's most valued celebrity of 2022, according to a report by corporate investigation and risk consulting firm, Kroll. With a brand value of \$181.7 million, Singh has dethroned cricketer Virat Kohli, who occupied the top spot for five years, according to the report, titled "Celebrity Brand Valuation Report 2022: Beyond the Mainstream". Kohli fell to second spot with a brand value of \$176.9 million. His brand value has seen a decline for two consecutive years after he left the captaincy of the men's cricket team. His brand value stood at over \$237 million in 20220, but declined steeply in 2021 to \$185.7 million.

Actor Akshay Kumar remained in third position with a brand value of \$153.6 million. With

a valuation of \$102.9 million, actress Alia Bhatt also retained the fourth spot and the title of the most valued female celebrity. Deepika Padukone's brand valuation of \$82.9 million earned her the fifth spot.

Amitabh Bachchan, Hritik Roshan and Shah Rukh Khan were other big names from the film industry that made it to the top 10 list of most valued celebrities. Former cricketer MS Dhoni occupied sixth spot on the list with a brand value of over \$80 million. Meanwhile, former Indian cricketing icon Sachin Tendulkar entered the top-10 club in 2022, ranking eighth with a brand value of \$73.6 million. It may be noted that the overall brand value of the top 25 celebrities in 2022 is estimated at \$1.6 billion, marking an increase of roughly 29.1 per cent from 2021.

And for the first time, South Indian stars Allu Arjun and Rashmika Mandanna made it to the list of India's top 25 most valued celebrities. Olympic gold medalist Neeraj Chopra also made it to the top 25, along with Commonwealth gold medalist PV Sindhu. They were both valued at \$26.5 million.

Aviral Jain, Managing Director, Valuation Advisory Services, Kroll said, "The theme of this year's study is "Beyond the Mainstream," which recognizes the ascent of sports stars as well as South Indian stars as strong brand endorsers."

"2022 has been the second successful year for South Indian movies at the box office, resulting in many Tollywood faces being sought after in the advertising and media industry nationally," he added.

## Fasten Your Seatbelts: Shah Rukh Khan's Pathaan To Release On OTT Platform

**Attention, Shah Rukh Khan fans, the film will premiere on March 22**

New Delhi: Do you "sense turbulence in the weather"? It ought to happen because Shah Rukh Khan, Deepika Padukone and John Abraham's blockbuster Pathaan has finally made its way to the OTT world. So, fasten your seatbelt and get ready as the highest-grossing Hindi film of all time, which is still running successfully in some theatres worldwide, will release on Prime Video this month. How excited are you? Attention, Shah Rukh Khan fans, the film will



premiere on March 22. The Siddharth Anand directorial is one of the much-awaited movies to stream on an OTT platform after a theatrical release. You can watch Pathaan in Hindi, Tamil and Telugu on Prime Video. Announcing the update, the official Twitter page of the streaming platform wrote, "We sense a turbulence in the weather, after all, Pathaan is coming! Pathaan on Prime, March 22 in Hindi, Tamil and Telugu."





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