

An Unmanaged Foreign Media Has Got the Modi Government Fuming

The Indian government is using all its resources to try and discredit and ban the BBC documentary. But in today's world, that's not so easy.



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400 days for Lok Sabha polls: Why 2024 will be historic in many ways



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New York Lawmakers urged to make Diwali a School holiday

Bill introduced in New York Assembly by Assemblywoman Jenifer Rajkumar



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'Happening way too often': Report delves into mass attacks



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(SAI Bureau) As the nation reels from a week of high-profile shootings, a new report on mass attacks calls for communities to intervene early when they see warning signs of violence, encourages businesses to consider workplace violence prevention plans and highlights the connection between domestic violence, misogyny and mass attacks. The report released Wednesday by the U.S. Secret Service's National Threat Assessment Center analyzed 173 mass attacks carried out over a five-year period from January 2016 to December 2020 in public or semi-public places such as businesses, schools or churches.

Is tipping getting out of control? Many consumers say yes

(SAI Bureau) NEW YORK (AP) — Across the country, there's a silent frustration brewing about an age-old practice that many say is getting out of hand: tipping. Some fed-up consumers are posting rants on social media complaining about tip requests at drive-thrus, while others say they're tired of being asked to leave a gratuity for a muffin or a simple cup of coffee at their neighborhood bakery. What's next, they wonder -

(Contd. on page 18)



"Disrespectful": S Jaishankar On Mike Pompeo Remarks On Sushma Swaraj

"Professional, rational, and a fierce defender of his boss and his country," is how Mike Pompeo described S Jaishankar.



National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, a close and trusted confidant of Prime Minister Narendra Modi," 59-year-old Pompeo writes in his book.

A confidant of then US president Donald Trump, Pompeo was the CIA Director in his administration from 2017 to 2018 and then served as the Secretary of State from 2018 to 2021.

"My second Indian counterpart was Subrahmanyam Jaishankar. In May 2019, we welcomed "J" as India's new foreign minister. I could not have asked for a better counterpart. I love this guy. English is one of the seven languages he speaks, and his is somewhat better than mine," writes the former top American diplomat, who is now exploring the possibility of a 2024 presidential run.

"Professional, rational, and a fierce defender of his boss and his country," is how Pompeo described Mr Jaishankar. We hit

it off immediately. In our first meeting, I was bemoaning, in very diplomatic speech, that his predecessor had not been particularly helpful," he said.

"He (Jaishankar) said that he could see why I had trouble with his predecessor, a goofball and a heartland political hack. "Careful, I'm a heartland political hack!" I replied in jest. He laughed, noting that if that were true, it would make me the first heartland political hack who had ever been an editor on the Harvard Law Review. Well played, J," Pompeo said. J here stands for Jaishankar.

Commenting on Pompeo's claims, Mr Jaishankar told PTI, "I have seen a passage in Secretary Pompeo's book referring to Smt Sushma Swaraj ji. I always held her in great esteem and had an exceptionally close and warm relationship with her. I deplore the disrespectful colloquialism

used for her." In his book, Pompeo also says American neglect of India was a decades-long bipartisan failure. We are natural allies, as we share a history of democracy, a common language, and ties of people and technology. India is also a market with enormous demand for American intellectual property and products. These factors, plus its strategic location in South Asia, made India the fulcrum of my diplomacy to counteract Chinese aggression," he writes. In my mind, a counter-China bloc made up of the United States, India, Japan, Australia, South Korea, the United Kingdom, and the European Union would have an economic weight at least three times that of China. I chose to devote serious quantities of time and effort to help make India the next great American ally," Pompeo says.

(News Agency) Washington: Former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has said he never saw his counterpart Sushma Swaraj as an "important political player" but got along famously with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, hitting it off with him in their first meeting itself.

In his latest book 'Never Give an Inch: Fighting for the America I Love' that hit the stores on Tuesday, Pompeo describes Sushma Swaraj somewhat

disparagingly, using the American slang words "goofball" and "heartland political hack" for her.

Sushma Swaraj served as external affairs minister in the first Modi government from May 2014 to May 2019. She died in August 2019.

"On the Indian side, my original counterpart was not an important player on the Indian foreign policy team. Instead, I worked much more closely with

Two Indian students fired at in armed robbery in Chicago, one dead: Report

A 23-year-old Indian student died and another was injured in a firing incident in Chicago, reports said



(News Agency) An Indian student died and another was injured in a firing incident at Princeton Park in Chicago in the United States of America on Sunday, media reports said. The

victim, identified as Devsish Nandepu, died due to his injuries while undergoing treatment at a hospital. The students were shot during an armed robbery Sunday night in Princeton Park on the South Side, reported PTI, quoting media reports. A man was fatally shot and another was critically wounded during an armed robbery Sunday night in Princeton Park on the South Side, the Chicago Times reported. The incident happened while Nandepu, 23, and another man were waiting near a parking

lot when a vehicle approached them. Two occupants from the vehicle held them at gunpoint and demanded valuables from them, reports said. According to a report, Devsish Nandepu died on Monday morning at Christ Medical Center in Oak Lawn after 4 am. He was shot in the armpit and was rushed to the hospital in critical condition but succumbed to his injuries. Nandepu and his friend complied and were shot, officials said. The younger man was struck in the chest and was

taken to the University of Chicago Medical Center, where he was in critical condition, police said.

He died due to his injuries hours later, according to police and the Cook County medical examiner's office. No arrests have been made in the case so far. Chicago has witnessed a series of gun violence incidents over the past weekend. At least seven people were killed and several others injured in over ten separate shooting incidents since January 20.

Suella Braverman mulls cut to post-study student visa stay in UK: Report

(News Agency) British Home Secretary Suella Braverman is said to be on a collision course with the country's education department over plans to cut the period of stay allowed for overseas students under a post-study visa route, according to a UK media report on Wednesday. The new Graduate Visa route, which allows foreign graduates – including Indians – the chance to stay on to job hunt and gain work experience for up to two years without the requirement of a specific job offer, is expected to be cut under Braverman's proposed review. According to 'The Times', the Indian-origin home secretary has drawn up a plan to "reform" the Graduate Visa route requiring students to obtain a

work visa by getting a skilled job or leave the UK after six months. The newspaper refers to leaked advice to say that the UK Department for Education (DfE) is attempting to block the changes as they fear it would harm the UK's attractiveness to international students. A government source who backs Braverman's plan said the Graduate Visa was being increasingly used by students on short courses at "less respectable universities". "It's being used as a backdoor immigration route," the newspaper quoted the source as saying. The DfE, however, argues that the two-year Graduate Visa, often referred to as the UK's post-study offer, was aligned with most of Britain's main competitors, with only

the US offering a one-year visa. According to the latest statistics by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), Indians overtook the Chinese as the largest cohort of foreign students last year and the new Graduate Visa route, introduced in July 2021, was dominated by Indians – accounting for 41 per cent of the visas granted. Braverman's proposal is reportedly among several drawn up after Prime Minister Rishi Sunak asked the Home Office and the DfE to submit proposals for reducing the number of foreign students coming to the UK. Figures published last week showed there were 680,000 foreign students in the UK. The government's 2019 Higher Education Strategy included a target of 600,000 students

by 2030, which was met last year itself. Another proposal being considered would reportedly allow foreign students to bring dependent family members with them only if they were on postgraduate research-based courses such as a PhD, or postgraduate courses that were at least two years long. The UK Home Office refused to comment on the leak, but a government spokesperson said: "Our points-based system is designed to be flexible according to the UK's needs, including attracting top-class talent from across the world to contribute to the UK's excellent academic reputation and to help keep our universities competitive on the world stage."

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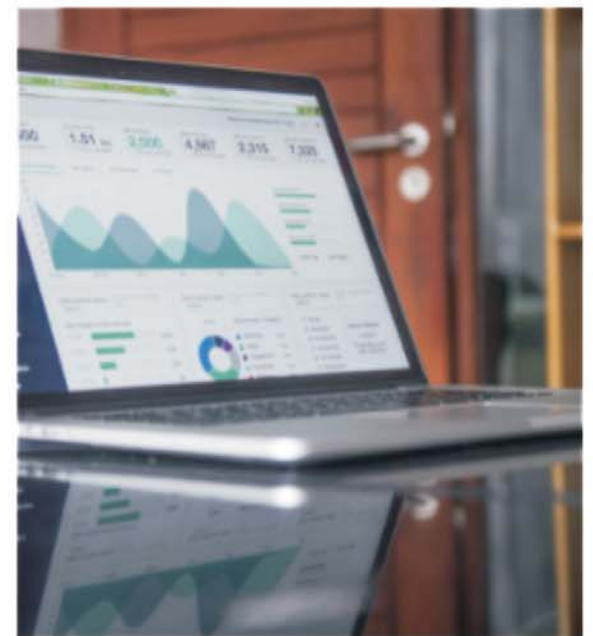
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Web magazine, alotusinthemud.com launched

Veteran Journalist Parveen Chopra's wellness & spirituality website launched at the Indian Consulate in New York



Parveen speaking: At the launch, Parveen Chopra spoke about the uniqueness of his web magazine

(By our staff reporter) New York: A new wellness and spirituality web magazine, alotusinthemud.com, founded by seasoned journalist Parveen Chopra was launched at the Consulate of India in New York on January 21.

Chopra, who has rich experience in body-mind-spirit journalism, summed up the webzine's unique content mix in his speech at the launch, "We tap the world's religious and spiritual traditions for wisdom as well as draw from the latest medical and scientific research to present content for our readers to be fully productive and successful and yet be healthy, happy and centered." He added that every article they post on alotusinthemud.com must pass the litmus test of usefulness -- something that the readers can benefit from to better their lives.

In support he cites articles on the site such as, 'Practical uses of faith—A Zoroastrian perspective', 'The 4 happy



Guest speakers holding bouquets at the launch - Dr Bhaswati Bhattacharya, Reverend Tom Goodhue, and Arvind Vora – with the Lotus team.

hormones and how to boost them', 'Is work worship - renegotiating work-life balance' and 'Beware the frozen food convenience'.

Unique interactive features of his web magazine, Chopra pointed out, include short meditations with soothing music, personality quizzes, and space for visitors to share their experiences of healing and personal or spiritual growth.

Launching the website, Consul General Randhir Jaiswal congratulated Chopra for the initiative which he called as "another slice of India in America, promoting wellness through yoga, right food habits, etc, and from which people should take benefit".

Chopra agreed that even though the Lotus site respects and sources from the world's major faiths, its founders, advisers and donors being proud people of Indian origin are committed to preserving, protecting and promoting Indian heritage by projecting it to American audiences. At the launch event, a video introducing the webzine explained that

'Lotus in the mud' is a key concept in Hinduism and Buddhism, signifying that we may get muddled by problems, but we have the inherent capability to emerge as full bloom lotuses in body, mind, and spirit.

Guest speakers at the launch included Nitin Ajmera, Chairman of the Parliament of the World's Religions (via a video message); Reverend Tom Goodhue, Executive Director Emeritus of Long Island Council of Churches; Arvind Vora, founder of Shanti Fund that promotes Gandhi's ideals among school children in Suffolk County; and Dr Bhaswati Bhattacharya, a licensed physician affiliated with Cornell Medical College and author of 'Everyday Ayurveda' published by Penguin Random House.

Supporters gracing the event included Anil Bansal, former FIA President, entrepreneur and philanthropist Mohan Wanchoo, Kamlesh Mehta, Chairman of The South Asian Times, Prof. Indrajit Singh Saluja, editor-publisher of The Indian Panorama, John Di Leonardo, founder of Humane Long Island, real estate tycoon



Darshan Singh Bagga, and Julian Lines, President of Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center in upstate New York.

A trained teacher of meditation, Chopra had founded Life Positive, India's first spiritual magazine from New Delhi in 1996 after leaving his job at India Today. Here in the US, he edited The South Asian Times and One World Under God interfaith journal.

Last year Chopra founded American Center for Wellness & Spirituality Inc, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit, to run the Lotus website.

Now Indians likely to face green card delays even for the fast track EB-1 category

(SAI Bureau) NEW DELHI: While getting a green card or permanent residence status for most Indians, working in the US, means a wait of several years and even decades; there are some individuals, who, because of top academic qualifications or exceptional talent, are lucky enough to be on a very fast track through the route of EB-1 visa applications. However, now there's bad news for Indians who are on this category as well. In fact, according to a recent US visa bulletin, all countries will remain current, except for India and China, for the coveted EB-1 category, which will have a cut-off date of February 1, 2022. What this means is that for an Indian national to be able to receive a green card in January 2023, he or she would

have had to file the EB-1 I-140 immigrant petition prior to February 2022, which means that the wait for a green card has increased by at least one year and probably more. Green card applicants with priority dates before the cut-off date can submit applications. Retrogression occurs when the cut-off dates that determine visa availability move backward instead of forward.

What is an EB-1 visa

Some individuals may be eligible for an employment-based, first-preference US visa if they are of extraordinary ability; an outstanding professor or researcher; or are multinational executive or

manager of a certain category. Each of the three occupational category has specific requirements. Under the extraordinary ability category, which is sometimes referred to as the

Einstein visa, applicants have to demonstrate extraordinary ability in the sciences, arts, education, business, or athletics through sustained national or international acclaim. They must meet at least three of 10 specified criteria, or provide evidence of a one-time achievement (i.e., Pulitzer, Oscar, Olympic medal) as well as evidence showing that they will be continuing to work in the area of their expertise. No offer of employment or labour

certification is required for this category. Some outstanding professors and researchers, too, can qualify for this visa. They have to demonstrate international recognition for outstanding achievements in a particular academic field and must have at least three years' experience in teaching or research. They must be entering the United States in order to pursue tenure or tenure track teaching or a comparable research position at a university, institution of higher education, or private employer. They must meet at least two of six specified The private employer must show documented accomplishments and that it employs at least 3 full-time researchers. No labour certification is required for this category.



New York Lawmakers urged to make Diwali a School holiday

Bill introduced in New York by Assemblywoman Jenifer Rajkumar



Neeta Jain , Jagdish Sewhani , Assemblywoman Jenifer Rajkumar ,Neeta Bhasin , Beena Sabapati
At the State Assembly house , Albany.



(By our staff reporter) Albany, states should fall on track. New York- New Yorkers from all walks of life came to Albany to advocate for Diwali to be a School Holiday. With the support of Eric Adams Mayor, New York City and school Chancellor David Banks, Assembly Member, Jenifer Rajkumar introduced legislation to make Diwali a school holiday. Jenifer Rajkumar said that time has come to make School Holiday Now.


More than 300,000 Hindus, Jain, Sikhs celebrate the festival of Diwali in New York. It's only fair that Diwali should be a school Holiday so that children can celebrate Diwali with their families.

Jagdish Sewhani said that it's simply unfair for Hindu Students in New York City to be at school on their most popular festival, Diwali. If schools had declared holidays around other religious days, why not Diwali then?


South Asians and Indo-Caribbean in New York are fighting for Diwali school holiday for ages. It should be a public holiday in New York City, then New York State and consequently other

"It's time to recognize more than 300,000 Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh and Jain faiths New Yorkers to celebrate Diwali, the Festival of Lights. Thousands of students, parents, and faculty would not have to select between observing the day or missing school or work," asserted Jagdish Sewhani, President, American India Public Affairs Committee.

Hinduism is not only the oldest and third largest religion of the world but it is rich in festivals. More so religious festivals are very precious and sacred to Hindus. Diwali, the festival of lights, drive out the darkness and light up the lives, representing the victory of good over evil. It indicates the occasion of Bhagwan Shri Ram returning to Ayodhya after 14 years of exile. In India Christmas is national holiday, It should be a national holiday in USA also asserted Mr Sewhani. Senator John Liu, Senator Kevin Thomas, Assemblyman David Weprin and many more showed their Support for this Bill to Make Diwali a school holiday.



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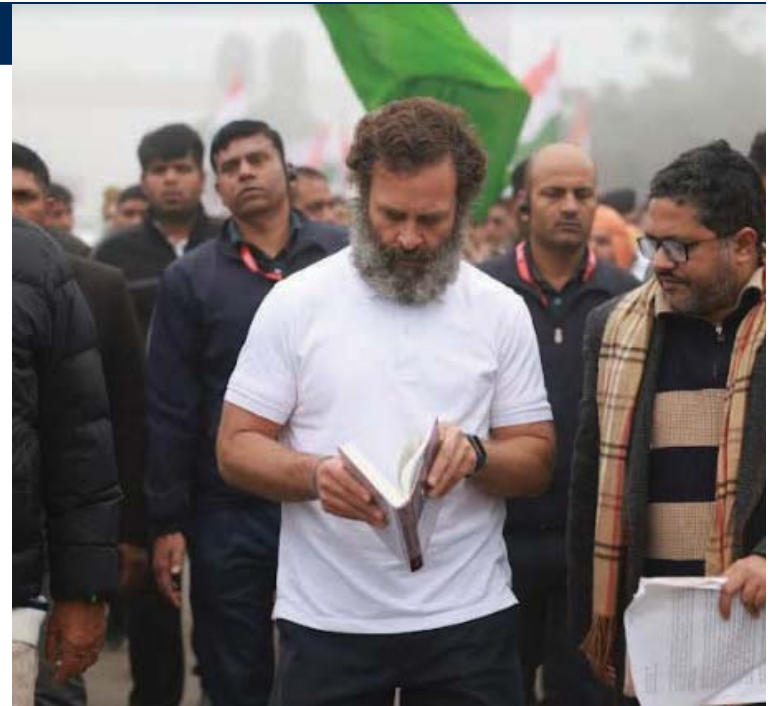
UPA period saw transformation in the way India deals with external world

Foreign policy scholar in Bharat Jodo Yatra

(By S Thind) New Delhi- Eminent scholar of India's foreign policy Dr Rejaul Karim Laskar took part in Bharat Jodo Yatra on 8 January 2023, and walked with Shri Rahul Gandhi. Dr Laskar walked for around 15 kilometres from Dodwa-Taraori crossing to Samana Bahu in Karnal District of Haryana. During this time, Dr Laskar presented his recently published book to Shri Rahul Gandhi. Shri Bhupinder Singh Hooda (former Chief Minister of Haryana and currently Leader of Opposition in Haryana Legislative Assembly) also walked with them. Dr Laskar's book 'Forging New Partnerships, Breaching New Frontiers: India's Diplomacy during the UPA Rule 2004-14', which he presented to Shri Rahul Gandhi while walking with him in the Yatra, was published recently by Oxford

University Press (a Department of the University of Oxford- the world's highest-ranking university). Shri Rahul Gandhi read several pages of this book with keen interest while Dr Laskar explained to Shri Rahul Gandhi the major findings of this book regarding the diplomacy of the UPA Government.

Dr Laskar explained to Shri Rahul Gandhi that as per the findings of this book, the ten-year period of UPA Government (from 2004 to 2014) saw a significant transformation in the way India deals with the external world in the sense that India established important strategic partnerships, successfully dealt with key security challenges and acquired leadership position in the key structures of global political and economic governance.



Rahul Gandhi's security lapse in J-K 'disconcerting': Congress prez Kharge

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Friday lashed out at the Centre over an alleged security lapse during the Bharat Jodo Yatra which entered Kashmir and termed it "disconcerting", adding that it is the government's responsibility to provide security.



(SAI Bureau) Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Friday lashed out at the Centre over an alleged security lapse during the Bharat Jodo Yatra which entered Kashmir and termed it "disconcerting", adding that it is the government's responsibility to provide security. Lapse in Rahul Gandhi's security detail in Jammu & Kashmir during Bharat Jodo Yatra is disconcerting to say the least. It is GOI's prime responsibility to provide security. India has already lost two PM's and scores of leaders and we demand better security for the Yatris," Kharge tweeted. However, the Jammu and Kashmir Police dismissed the allegations levelled by Rahul Gandhi of security lapse in the Bharat Jodo Yatra.

"The government is acutely mindful of the security concerns and all arrangements have been made to ensure the best possible security for the ongoing Bharat Jodo yatra,"

RK Goyal, Additional Chief Secy (FC), Home Dept J-K, on Rahul Gandhi's security breach. "The size of the crowd was larger than planned which led to the pressure on the available security resources and

created the impression that security arrangements were not in place. However, 15 companies of paramilitary forces and 10 companies of J-K police were deployed," he added. This comes after Rahul Gandhi alleged that the police personnel who were supposed to manage the crowd during the Yatra "were nowhere to be seen". "This morning during the Bharat Jodo Yatra, unfortunately, the police arrangement completely collapsed and the police who were supposed to manage the crowd was nowhere to be seen. My security people were very uncomfortable with me walking

further on the yatra so I had to cancel my walk. Other yatris did the walk," Rahul Gandhi said addressing a press conference in Jammu and Kashmir's Anantnag. The police said that the organizers of the yatra did not inform about the large gathering from Banihal. "Only authorised persons as identified by organisers & frisked crowd was allowed inside towards the route of Yatra. Organisers & managers of BJY did not intimate about large gathering from Banihal joining the Yatra, which thronged near the starting point," Kashmir

Zone Police tweeted. The police said that full security arrangements were in place. "Full security arrangements were in place including 15 Coys of CAPFs and 10 Coys of JKP, comprising of ROPs and QRTs, route domination, lateral deployment and SFs were deployed for high-ridge and other deployments," the police tweeted. "JKP was not consulted before taking any decision on discontinuation of Yatra after conducting 1 km yatra by organizers. Rest of yatra continued peacefully. There was no security lapse at all. We will provide fool proof security," the police added.

India issues notice to Pakistan to modify Indus Waters Treaty

(SAI Bureau) India has informed Pakistan of its intent to amend the 62-year-old Indus Waters Treaty for management of cross-border rivers because the Pakistani side's "intransigence" in handling disputes has raised questions about the integrity of the pact, people familiar with the matter said on Friday. The "notification for modification" of the treaty was conveyed by the Indian side on January 25 through the Commissioners for Indus Waters of the two sides. India was forced to issue the notice as Pakistan's actions "adversely impinged" on the treaty's provisions and their implementation, the people said. The Indus Waters Treaty was signed in 1960 after nine years of negotiations between India and Pakistan and was brokered by the World Bank, which too is a signatory. It is the most durable treaty between the two countries but has



partner in implementing the Indus Waters Treaty in letter and spirit. Pakistan's intransigence on the treaty forced India to issue a notice of modification," one of the people said. The notice opens up the

process for making changes to the treaty for the first time since it was signed in Karachi on September 19, 1960, by then Pakistan president Mohammad Ayub Khan, then Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru and W A B Illif of the

World Bank. "The objective of the notice for modification is to provide Pakistan an opportunity to enter into inter-governmental negotiations within 90 days to rectify the material breach of the Indus Waters Treaty. This process will also update the treaty to incorporate the lessons learned over the last 62 years," the person cited above said. The notice was issued in line with Article XII (3) of the treaty, which states: "The provisions of this Treaty may from time to time be modified by a duly ratified treaty concluded for that purpose between the two Governments."

'Delhi Police in overdrive': Mahua Moitra's fresh attack over BBC documentary

Mahua Moitra has been relentlessly tweeting about the BBC documentary.

In the midst of controversy over screening of a documentary by the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) on Prime Minister Narendra Modi at universities in Delhi and other parts of the country, Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra targeted the police in the national capital. Her comments came hours after more than 20 people were detained following a row over the screening of "India: The Modi Question" at Delhi University's Faculty of Arts. "Amazing how Delhi Police in overdrive to stop @BBC film screening but nowhere to be found when woman is dragged for 13 kms by drunk drivers. (sic)" She was drawing comparison between the action on Friday by the cops to what has been criticised as the lack of response when a 20-year-old woman was dragged by a car for several kilometres on the New Year's Day.

The death of the woman - who worked as a beautician and was the sole bread-earner at her home - in the hit-and-drag

case had drawn much anger across the country with many people questioning the delay in response by the police to the vehicle, which had drunk man aboard. Several police personnel were later suspended as outrage continued.



Meanwhile, Mahua Moitra has been constantly lashing out at the government over the two-part BBC documentary, which talks about Gujarat riots 2002 in the first episode. In the

second episode, the documentary revisits several decisions taken under PM Modi's tenure, including the scrapping of Article 370. The government earlier this month blocked the access of the documentary on social media sites, including YouTube, days after the Ministry of External Affairs said it might spoil the relations with other nations.

Chaos has been reported at several varsities, including the Jawaharlal Nehru University and Jamia University, in the national capital this week following attempts at screening the documentary.

Car hits scooty, drags rider for 350 meters in Delhi; 1 dead

In the latest drag-and-hit incident coming to light from Delhi, a car rammed into a scooty and dragged the rider for about 350 meters, reported news agency ANI. This incident took place near Prerna Chowk in Kanhaiya Nagar on Friday when the car slammed into the scooty and the impact of the collision threw one of the riders to the car's roof; he later fell on the road.

Another rider, according to police, got stuck between the windshield and bonnet of the car that was thrown open in the aftermath of the crash.

A video of the incident was tweeted by ANI. The hazy footage shot from the other side of the divider appeared to show something being dragged on the roof of a car on the road. The authenticity of the video could not be verified by Hindustan Times independently.

Police said Kailash Bhatnagar was declared brought dead in the hospital, while another victim - identified as Sumit Khari - is under treatment. Five people have been arrested in connection with the case, and

an FIR was registered at the Keshav Puram police station.

"The 5 occupants didn't stop the car and dragged the rider and the scooty for 300-350 metres. PCR van chased them and nabbed 2 accused, rest 3 fled. Later they were arrested. Accused were apparently drunk. Rider of scooty died in hospital and the one in pillion hospitalised. Probe on," ANI quoted Deputy Commissioner Of Police Northwest Delhi, Usha Rangnani, as saying.

This comes weeks after a woman was killed in Delhi's Kanjhawala area after being dragged for nearly 12 km by men driving the car - reportedly in an inebriated condition - on January 1. Murder charges were slapped against four of the accused. Six of the seven accused in the case were initially charged under section 304 (Culpable homicide not amounting to murder). Police said four among them - who were inside the car at the time of the incident - had been slapped with murder charges, reported news agency.

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We're seeing the first major blow to Biden's 'regular Joe' image

President Joe Biden, who has struggled for weeks to contain the fallout surrounding the discovery of classified documents at his home and former office, must have sighed with relief when former Vice President Mike Pence announced classified documents were also found at his home in Indiana.

Both of these incidents come on the heels of the documents saga surrounding former President Donald Trump, who – like Biden – is now under a special counsel investigation. In August, the FBI seized more than 100 classified documents from Trump's Mar-a-Lago home during a court-approved search.

News reports have emphasized the way the Biden and Pence responded differently than Trump. For one, lawyers working for Biden and Pence notified authorities shortly after the classified documents were first discovered and made an effort to return them, while Trump's team resisted efforts by the Department of Justice to retrieve all the documents at Mar-a-Lago.

But, as evidenced by the latest revelations, this is not simply an inside Washington story. Nor is it one that it will go away anytime soon. While Pence's disclosure certainly takes the heat off Biden, this scandal is bad news for Biden's brand name.

And new polling makes this clear. More than eight out of 10 Americans approve of the appointment of a special counsel to investigate the handling of classified documents found at Biden's home and office. However, according to the same CNN poll, it seems Americans understand the differences between the two cases involving Biden and Trump. While a majority of Americans disapprove of the way Biden has handled the issue and consider it a serious or "somewhat serious" problem, it's telling that only 37% of Americans believe he has done something illegal. Yet, when it comes to Trump's case, 52% of Americans believe he has done something illegal.

Biden, who established himself as the responsible foil to Trump in 2020, has now squandered the political high ground on this issue. And with Pence thrown into the mix, Trump's team believes the latest developments could help support their argument that this should be treated as an administrative issue, rather than a criminal one.

Biden also has more to lose when it comes to the issue of reputation. One of Biden's greatest assets has

been his image as a regular Joe – a straight shooter who can be trusted. Like former President Jimmy Carter, who cast himself as an upstanding candidate after Watergate, Biden ran for president in 2020 as the seasoned "adult in the room" after the tumult of the Trump years.

We're now seeing the first major blow to that image, with more attacks sure to come now that the Republicans who have gained control of the House are vowing to investigate everything from Hunter Biden to the president's border policies. Regardless of what House Republicans will find, if anything, they are capable of redirecting our attention to negative attacks on Biden and further damaging his reputation. If Democrats don't think these sorts of stories can have legs, they should just ask Hillary Clinton's emails, which the GOP famously used to bludgeon her reputation right through the 2016 election.

Biden might have a stronger reputation than Clinton, which will help. But that certainly won't insulate him from an onslaught of attacks in the next two years.

The turmoil will also renew talks within the Democratic Party about whether Biden should run for reelection or who might challenge him in the primaries — two conversations that had largely abated after the party's stunning performance in the midterms.

All of these controversies can easily distract both the public and the media from the issues Biden would rather focus on, such as the slowing of inflation or military support for Ukraine.

And, of course, there are plenty of ways this could continue going south for Biden, especially if there are fresh revelations surrounding his handling of classified documents. But all of this is surmountable. While there are constraints on what Biden can say in the midst of an ongoing investigation, he should be as direct with the public as possible and make every effort to turn over whatever material he has. He must also be proactive in pushing forward conversations about his domestic agenda and keeping the public eye focused on the chaos and division House Republicans are sowing.

But he and his supporters shouldn't discount the significant political impact this story can have. It has already opened the door to questions about his prospects in 2024 and given a laggard Trump campaign something to crow about.

Is The Chinese Empire Waning?

History has cunning passages and contrived corridors, says T.S. Eliot in his poem 'Gerontion'. Empires are forged over time and empires are destroyed over time. The sun that 'never set' is now a very dim one. The shift from the glorious days of the British Raj to the United Kingdom of today represents one of the starkest contrasts imaginable. Over the last decade — or decade and a half — China, for instance, has risen enormously. But at what cost?

"China's peaceful rise" was the official policy and political slogan under Hu Jintao former general secretary of the Communist Party. China has stuck to it ever since to assure the international community that its rise — economically or militarily — should not be cause for concern. On several occasions, China has tried to assure the world that its rise poses no threat to global peace and security. However, one look at the skirmish in Tawang in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh last month would prove otherwise. The Chinese caught the jawans of the Indian Army by surprise. Speaking to The Guardian, two Indian army officers, who wished to remain unnamed, put the number of Chinese soldiers between 150-200 whereas the number on the Indian side was just about 50. Like the clash in Galwan in June of 2020, the Chinese side confronted and challenged the Indian soldiers on patrol, without any provocation from the Indian side. Six Indian soldiers were gravely injured and 30 received minor wounds. One of the officers said that there have been at least two confrontations since the provocation in Galwan but the one

in Tawang was much more serious in nature as the Chinese side was "unusually aggressive" and seemed to be "well prepared for the clash." They began striking Indian soldiers without any forewarning. Peter Jennings, the former executive director of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, argued, "It's quite a deliberate Chinese strategy to try to maximise what they perceive as being a moment of distraction." India needs to be prepared, therefore, for these 'surprise engagements' and not be caught unawares, like it was in 1962, 2020 and 2022.

The world seems to have had enough of the belligerence on the part of the Chinese government, and, in fact, democracies around the world no longer seem to be worried about offending Beijing. For instance, despite threats from China's foreign ministry, officials from Europe, Japan and other parts of the world have now started expanding long-ignored relationships with Taiwan ever since Nancy Pelosi, the then Speaker of the US House of Representatives, visited the country in August 2022. In return, China has started muscling into the South China Sea and the neighbouring countries with which it shares international borders. In April of 2020, the Chinese government sank a Vietnamese fishing boat and harassed ships from both Philippines and Malaysia, laying claim to Fiery Cross Reef, the Spratly Islands and Scarborough Shoal, and declaring them to be 'Chinese districts.' In August of 2022, China sent fighter jets into Taiwanese airspace in what was clearly a display of force.



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China is eyeing Afghanistan's mineral wealth- but it comes at the cost of its own safety

China's quest to secure lithium, even with illegal means, is just getting started.

China's new foreign minister, Qin Gang, made an unusual call to his Afghan counterpart, Taliban leader Amir Khan Muttaqi, on 21 January. Qin urged Muttaqi to ensure the safety of Chinese nationals in Afghanistan following the devastating attack on a Kabul hotel last year.

"China attaches great importance to the safety of Chinese personnel, institutions, and projects in Afghanistan. It is hoped that the Afghan side will take strong measures to ensure the safety of Chinese personnel and institutions in Afghanistan," said the Chinese foreign ministry's readout of the call.

The Islamic State-Khorasan Province had claimed the 12 December 2022 attack which injured five Chinese nationals.

The story of one of these victims—a girl named Xiaoyun who suffered multiple fractures after a tragic fall from the hotel's eighth floor balcony—was heavily reported by Chinese State media. Chinese Ambassador to Afghanistan Wang Yu and his staff had donated blood to Xiaoyun and other injured.

But what is luring Chinese nationals to Kabul? It's the precious unexploited minerals.

Interest in Kabul's mineral wealth

When the US withdrew from Afghanistan in 2020, Beijing sharpened its pencil to draw out areas that were rich in mineral deposits. However, one resource on top of China's mind is Afghan lithium, which, according to some estimates, rivals the

world's largest reserves in Bolivia.

China's ambition to become the next global hub of electric vehicles (EVs) and other equipment industries is betting on the lithium boom. This has pushed the Chinese State and private enterprises to gawk at Afghanistan's lithium reserves like most Western players.

And the quest to secure lithium, even with illegal means, is just getting started. Chinese business groups are pouring into Afghanistan to map out business opportunities. And Beijing feels the burden of ensuring their safety in a country torn by decades of violence.

Recently, Taliban authorities arrested two Chinese nationals illegally transporting 'precious stones' out of the country. The Chinese citizens, reportedly working with Afghan collaborators, were allegedly transporting rocks containing up to 30 per cent lithium. These precious stones were extracted from Nuristan and Kunar.

While the Taliban hasn't allowed for the extraction of minerals from Afghanistan, growing economic difficulties are forcing it to finally open doors for China-owned companies.

Xinjiang Central Asia Petroleum and Gas Company (CAPEIC) recently signed a contract with Afghanistan's acting minister of mines and petroleum, Sheikh Shahabuddin Delawar, to extract oil from a 4,500 km area extending from the northern Sar-e Pul, Jawzjan, and Faryab provinces. The \$540 million oil deal will likely be followed up with attempts by

other Chinese enterprises to sign agreements with the Taliban for natural resource extraction.

Besides lithium, Afghanistan has extensive reserves of chromite, nephrite, coal, lead, zinc, copper and iron, and even precious metals such as gold, uranium and mercury. But the promise of mineral wealth in Afghanistan is nothing new, and dates back to the British-imperialist era in Kabul.

A 'stable, inclusive' govt in Kabul

Beyond its interest in Kabul's natural resources, Beijing also wants a more 'stable' Taliban administration.

"China supports the Afghan interim government in building a broad and inclusive political structure, implementing moderate and prudent domestic and foreign policies, combating all forms of terrorism, and maintaining friendly exchanges with other countries, especially neighbouring countries," said Qin during the call with Muttaqi.

The mention of an 'inclusive' political structure may not necessarily mean that Beijing wants greater political participation of minorities and women. Still, the issue of women's education has worried many in China.

The hashtag 'Let Afghan girls go to school' was recently trending on Weibo, with over 9.9 million people viewing it.

Beijing is still pushing for a 'broad and inclusive political structure', but the Taliban faction running Afghanistan now is unlikely to deliver the change and

stability China wants.

China's plan for Afghanistan

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) may have grown fickle as Beijing's domestic economy goes through the doldrums. But the securitisation of BRI is just getting started and will be the next critical phase of its development – especially in Afghanistan.

When President Xi Jinping recently inspected the guards stationed at the Khunjerab gate post, his message to the People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops was not only to secure China's national border but also to protect the country's economic interests, which increasingly look Westward.

Besides the failure to bring political stability to Kabul, Beijing has also failed to achieve its target of ending the presence of Uyghur militant groups in Afghanistan, as the Taliban hasn't handed them back. Taliban claims to have acted against Uyghur extremist groups on its soil, but there is no concrete evidence. Beijing can continue to claim it doesn't 'interfere' in the internal affairs of other countries, but the Chinese nationals rushing to Kabul and needing support will likely change the perception. Given the challenges in Afghanistan, we can safely assume that China will be embroiled in counter-terrorism operations in the country to protect its citizens. That's where Kabul and Beijing will find themselves at odds.

Western unity is critical, but Ukraine needs more than tanks to win this war

It has felt like an interminable wait, but in fact Germany's hesitation over Leopard 2 tanks lasted only a few days. Berlin has got what it wanted – more cover from the US – although it had to pretend at one point it didn't want it.

With Washington agreeing, in principle, to send some of its gas-guzzling Abrams tanks at some point, chancellor Olaf Scholz has scored a diplomatic victory. Berlin is now not alone in sending homemade tanks to Ukraine and can portray itself as not simply being bullied into agreement.

Politically, western unity is critical. The west may not be fighting directly in Ukraine, but the war is not one it can afford to lose. If Russia is able to hang on to the fifth of Ukraine it has captured throughout 2023, the Kremlin, now in charge of the world's largest rogue state, will only grow in confidence.

Instead, the western alliance has shown it can stick together as it upgrades its weapons supply to Ukraine, at the price to the US of 30 of its arsenal of Abrams tanks – although their fuel demands, "three gallons to the mile" according to the

Pentagon, mean simple logistics supply will be a challenge for Kyiv's forces.

However, even if the Abrams take months to arrive, it is beginning to look like Ukraine will be promised a meaningful number of tanks in relatively short order. Germany has promised a company of 14 of its Leopard 2s and will allow Poland to send 14 more. Britain wants to send 14 of its Challenger 2s.

Norway is ready to send eight Leopards and the Netherlands may offer 18, while Finland, Denmark and Spain all appear ready to join in – and France may offer some Leclerc tanks too. That could eventually surpass the 100 that the IISS thinktank has suggested would be needed to have some impact on the battlefield, although well below the 300 Ukraine has said it needs to win the war.

Germany has long been concerned about how Russia might respond, not least because of the long memory of the second world war. The propaganda value for the Kremlin is obvious – it wants to paint Russia as locked in a war with Nato to rally support among its own population – but that is not threatening for the west.

Meanwhile, Moscow is so heavily embroiled in Ukraine that the idea it could retaliate militarily against Nato members (and so risk a Nato response) is hard to believe, beyond perhaps carrying out some cyber-attacks.

Tanks are not war-winning weapons by themselves, however, although heavy tracked armour is critical to mounting any kind of offensive across open terrain against entrenched Russian positions, not least because they can continue to advance once they meet the inevitable resistance. They also need support from infantry and other armoured vehicles, while commanders on the ground need training in the tactics of such combined arms. Earlier this month, the US, Germany and Sweden committed about 200 fighting vehicles, while the US has expanded its training in Grafenwöhr, Germany.

What is less clear is whether Ukraine can mount a war-winning offensive at a time when Russia is increasingly expected to announce a second mobilisation. That would come on top of the 300,000 recruits the Kremlin forcibly sent to the army last autumn, of whom up to half have not yet

been committed to battle. Numbers matter in warfare; an attacker would normally seek a three-to-one ratio to be confident of offensive success.

Meanwhile, there are rumours that Ukrainian tanks are running short of the 125mm ammunition that is standard for its T-64 and T-72 tanks, as are the Russians. A reason for switching to western standard Leopards with their 120mm guns is to access Nato stocks, and Ukraine's desire for tanks may be more defensive than it first appears.

Political promises are also only the first part of the story. There are an impressive-sounding 2,329 Leopard 2s held by 13 Nato allies, enough in theory to supply Ukraine in strength and retain enough for self-defence. But 369 are in storage and the state of repair of those held by militaries is uncertain. In August, Spain, sitting on 327 Leopards, found them in a "deplorable state" – unfit to send 10 to Ukraine without months of remedial work. Madrid appears to have made progress since, but the question remains regarding how many good-quality Leopard 2s are available now, plus spare parts.

A Foreign Policy Fuelled By ‘Calcium Pills’

Will the MEA sue the BBC? Will it summon the British High Commissioner and say we will cancel talks over the Free Trade Agreement?

One of the interesting anecdotes in Peter Martin's China's Civilian Army was how nationalist citizens in China used to send calcium pills to the foreign ministry to criticise what they perceived as a lack of backbone in standing up to foreign countries. Things have changed spectacularly since then, and China's "wolf warrior" diplomacy is, these days, seen as much more appropriate to nationalist opinion, even if it has significant downsides in helping the country achieve its own international goals.

Diplomacy – as a tool of give and take, of convincing others that their goals can align in a manner that furthers your own country's strategic interests – is often hard to explain to a domestic audience. Instead, headlines of how 'our' diplomats have shown others their place, or been humiliated, is generally how it is consumed by a lay audience. While zero-sum outcomes are sometimes achieved, for example the alliance of NATO and partner countries against Russia's invasion of Ukraine, these are the exceptions that prove the rule. Instead, diplomacy is often the day-to-day routine that helps a country sell its products abroad, keep its citizens safe and manage alliances – loose or tight – that support domestic prosperity and security. Pandering to pride, or fearing humiliation, may achieve the goal of emphasising a country's red lines, but are counter-effective in doing much else.

Few things illustrate this – and the fact that India's diplomacy has shifted to a diet of calcium pills – more effectively than the MEA's meltdown over the BBC documentary on Narendra Modi. When MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi stated that "the bias, the lack of objectivity, and frankly a continuing colonial mindset, is blatantly visible," who was he trying to convince to do what? What strategic objective was being pursued? Had India been part of a grouping of post-colonial countries addressing the inequality inherent in global institutions – including the media, that are almost always based in developed, former



colonial countries – then that would have made sense. But the real contender for that position is China, creating institutions such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (that India is to host) that are alternatives to the US and Europe-led international order. India's relevance has been reduced to being anti-China as it protests the Belt and Road Initiative and joins the US through security arrangements and the Quad. Parroting what are essentially the same points that China makes achieves

what, precisely, for India?

There is an additional problem of India pursuing a calcium-rich foreign policy, which is that of credibility. Emphasising red lines is only useful if you are willing to, and have the ability, to do something about it. Even the US, with all of its power, was reduced to a joke when it refused to enforce the red line of the Taliban marching into Kabul. In the case of an India that is manifestly unable to defend its borders from the PLA or even the Tatmadaw, what red lines is it going to draw? Using questionable emergency

powers to take down links to YouTube or Twitter hardly matters when the subjects under discussion are largely already well-known in India. Will the MEA sue the BBC? Will it summon the British High Commissioner and say we will cancel talks over the Free Trade Agreement?

A great deal of barking with no bite to go along with it highlights weakness, not strength. In the end, though, it is hardly fair to blame the MEA for this state of affairs, just as it is unfair to blame the

Chinese diplomats running away from their American counterparts when Nixon was trying to open channels with China. Given the terrifying Cultural Revolution, during which Chinese diplomats were attacked, humiliated, and even tortured to death, it made sense for them to look over their shoulders and yell their loyalty to the regime as loudly as they could. With the rise of Xi Jinping and his aggressive campaigns to silence and sideline any independent power centres, Chinese diplomacy has returned to this essential prototype.

In doing so, diplomats serve their own interests and that of their lord and master, not necessarily those of the country. Just as the PLA pledges loyalty to the Communist Party and not to the country, the Chinese foreign ministry – a "civilian army" in Zhou En Lai's evocative phrase – exercises minimal autonomy and always looks to the general secretary of the party for direction. It is just sad to see India's foreign ministry being reduced to a cut-rate replica.

I'm a copywriter. I'm pretty sure artificial intelligence is going to take my job

"Write an article on 'What is payment gateway?'" I recently typed into a ChatGPT window. ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence-powered writing generator, quickly obliged.

The result was impressive. Sure, the tone was inhuman and the structure as sophisticated as a college essay, but the key points, the grammar and the syntax were all spot on. After a bit of a punch-up, it was perfectly passable as a sponsored content article designed to drum up business leads for a software provider – an article like the one that I, a professional copywriter, had just spent hours writing.

My amusement quickly turned to horror: it had taken ChatGPT roughly 30 seconds to create, for free, an article that I charged £500 for. The artificial intelligence software is by no means perfect – yet. For businesses that rely on churning out reams of fresh copy, however, it's a no-brainer, isn't it?

For those unfamiliar with ChatGPT, let me explain. Developed by OpenAI, ChatGPT is an artificial intelligence-based chatbot that's been trained to interact with users in a natural, conversational way. Unlike traditional

language models, ChatGPT can learn to generate responses without explicit instructions on what the correct answer is. Users can make any request – from Tell me about Watergate to Write an opinion piece about ChatGPT taking someone's job – and ChatGPT will produce a response. If you run it through a plagiarism checker, you'll discover that that content is 100% unique. The developers admit that the software still has limitations. It tends towards the verbose and repetitive ("honing my craft and perfecting my ability to craft"), and minor changes to question phrasing can be the difference between an amazing response and no response at all. The more we use it, however, the better it will become. As ChatGPT told me, it can already "replicate the writing styles of different authors" and "even be trained to mimic the tone and voice of a particular brand or organization". I don't claim any superior insight, just a realization that if a company can improve its bottom line by cutting costs in its supply chain, it will. Any sentimental attachment to human-created content is sure to be quickly overridden, I suspect, by the economic argument. After all, AI is super-fast labor

that doesn't eat, sleep, complain or take holidays.

In the near term, writers and editors will still be needed, but fewer of them. A human will prompt AI to generate mountains of copy, only intervening again to fact-check, amend and approve. But how long before the model learns to spot commercial opportunities, generate ideas and put perfect content live without any human involvement? What does this mean for you? PriceWaterhouseCooper predicts that AI will produce a \$15tn boost to GDP by 2030. Fantastic, but it also predicts that 3% of jobs are already at risk from AI. By the mid-2030s, this proportion will jump to 30% – 44% among workers with low education. That's a lot of people who will need to "upskill", retrain or drop out of the workforce. History has shown that, when technology has replaced humans, we've created new purposes for ourselves. But in its eternal quest for self-improvement, is there a danger that AI will continually outpace us by making us redundant more quickly than we can redefine our roles? To take the creative industries as one example, AI is already replacing movie extras, songwriters and audiobook narrators.

BBC Documentary on Gujarat 2002 Reminds Us That We Are Not Interested in Truth

People in India can fight cases of property matters for 20 years but do not believe in fighting for justice when collective injustice is meted out.



The Government of India has banned a BBC documentary from social media platforms. This documentary examines the anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat in 2002 and concludes that the then-chief minister of Gujarat was “directly responsible”. He was the head of the state government after all. He is the prime minister of India today.

To many who had observed, reported and followed the aftermath of the 2002 violence, the documentay does not necessarily reveal anything dramatically new. Those who complain that talk of the complicity of the then chief minister in the violence is far-fetched should remember that just a few months ago – during the campaign for the elections to the legislative assembly in Gujarat – the home minister of India (and closest ally of the prime minister) boasted that in 2002, the “rioters” were “taught” such “a lesson” that they have not been able to raise their heads again. This has resulted in “permanent peace” in Gujarat, he said.

It was not difficult to decipher the hidden message in this dog whistling. ‘Rioters’ in the Hindutva lexicon always means Muslims. Hindus can never be violent and are certainly not rioters. They are always “forced to retaliate” when faced with violence. So the intent of the home minister’s statement was clear. He himself was reminding the Hindus of Gujarat about what was done in 2002 and taking pride in it – and was also obliquely threatening the Muslims.

Whatever the case, the home

minister’s statement meant that the Gujarat violence of 2002 took place or was arranged to “teach a lesson” to the Muslims, after which they would not be able to raise their heads. In this way, when the home minister of India makes a statement glorifying the 2002 violence in Gujarat, he is also taking responsibility for it. The BBC documentary also wants to say this – but through evidence. This is not new. Nevertheless, after its release, there was excitement in the official circles of India. The spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs was particularly agitated when asked about the allegations that the film makes and called it an example of the ‘colonial mentality’.

Not that there is nothing new in the film. What is particularly damning for the then chief minister, who occupies the chair of the PM today, is the information that at that time the British government had conducted its own investigation into the cause of the Gujarat violence and found Modi “directly responsible”. This report was kept confidential for obvious reasons. This report somehow fell into the hands of a BBC producer and his colleagues, prompting them to investigate the violence.

There are people in India who are upset and ask what right the British government had to investigate an incident of violence in India. Is this not a violation of India’s sovereignty, they ask. Do the British feel that they are still ruling India? But Jack Straw, who was then Britain’s foreign secretary (minister) clarified that British citizens of Indian origin had made representations to the

government and the inquiry was conducted to respond to them.

In an interview with The Wire, he said, “There were also people I knew whose families were directly affected by these inter-communal riots. They were making representations to us and that is one of the reasons why the then (British) high commissioner ordered this investigation.”

So the British government did not turn away from its responsibility towards its citizens, as the Gujarat and Indian governments did. The question regarding colonial arrogance or some hidden anti-India mentality remains. Around two years ago, the BBC made a film on the Bengal famine which occurred during British rule and held the then British prime minister, Winston Churchill, responsible for it. What kind of ‘colonial mindset’ blames the British PM for the deaths of lakhs of Indians? The BBC documentary on the 2002 Gujarat riots seeks to answer the question of one of the three British nationals who survived the violence. What happened to his two relatives, and if they were killed, then why, and how? What kind of violence were they killed in? Who did it and why didn’t the government take effective steps to stop it? Was the violence spontaneous or was it planned?

Have our official investigative agencies answered these questions satisfactorily? Has the answer been found as to how the S6 coach of the Sabarmati Express caught fire? Why was it assumed that the fire was started by the Muslims of Godhra as part of a ‘conspiracy’?

Why didn’t the then railway minister Nitish Kumar consider it necessary to investigate it? How did the then chief minister of Gujarat come to the conclusion that some naradhams (murderous people) had started the fire? Who were those naradhams? And why use this theory to virtually justify the subsequent pogrom, by calling it a ‘reaction to action’ – as in Newton’s law of motion? Even if we assume that the fire was started by Muslims, why was the subsequent violence allowed? Why was permission given to take out a procession in Ahmedabad with the bodies of the kar sevaks killed in Godhra? Why was the police not only passive but also involved in violence against Muslims? How was a former MP, Ehsan Jafri, despite his repeated calls to the chief minister and senior officials, not provided security and eventually killed by the mob? Why did the chief minister say that Jafri himself was responsible for this because he had fired on the mob? Why were the eyewitnesses of that time dismissed outright?

Why was there no further investigation on the statement of Haren Pandya, former home minister of Gujarat, before a citizens’ tribunal that the Gujarat chief minister had a meeting with top officials encouraging violence? Why was the murder of Haren Pandya also pinned on an improbable conspiracy involving even more improbably ballistics? Is there any connection between the statement he made and his murder? Why was the charge

made by Pandya’s family that the chief minister was responsible for his death not investigated?

It is argued that since the Supreme Court of India has decided that the chief minister of Gujarat need not face any more questions, the matter should be deemed closed forever. But if the judiciary is to be believed, then no one was responsible for the demolition of Babri Masjid. Did that crowd of lakhs gather on its own? Did that mob bring down the Babri Masjid in a moment of excitement?

In the case of the demolition of the Babri Masjid, the court acquitted the leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party who were accused of conspiracy and complicity. They owned the crime and boasted about their role publicly but the court could not find any evidence to convict them. Similarly, in the case of Gujarat violence, the court-monitored inquiry committee decided the Gujarat government and the then chief minister had no reason to be subjected to a trial. Was it credible?

The BBC film, 20 years later, reminds us once again that we as a nation are not interested in truth. In fact, truth repels us. And we are also careless about the pursuit of justice. We Indians can fight cases of property matters for 20 years but do not believe in fighting for justice when collective injustice is meted out. That’s why be it the 1984 anti-Sikh violence or the 1989 anti-Muslim violence in Bhagalpur, or Nellie or Mumbai, we did not try to find out what was at the root of mass killings.

How Lohiaite Socialists Found Themselves Caught in Sangh Parivar's Chakravyuh

Both George Fernandes and Sharad Yadav made Bihar their karmabhoomi. Both fell forlorn in the last leg of their lives and both died unsung.

By Nalin Verma

Sharad Yadav had a dramatic debut in the Indian parliament in 1974. But his death on January 12 went relatively unnoticed. The ailing Lalu Prasad Yadav – perhaps the greatest in the dwindling breed of the Lohiaite socialists – expressed grief on the demise of two of his socialist compatriots, Mulayam Singh Yadav and Sharad Yadav, within three months in an emotionally choked voice from Singapore.

But it's more appropriate to compare Sharad's death with that of George Fernandes, four years ago in 2019, than with Mulayam. The Catholic Christian turned charismatic Lohiaite had stunned the mighty Congress by winning the Bombay (now Mumbai) Lok Sabha seat in 1967. Sharad, a gold medallist engineering graduate, too had stunned the mighty Indira Gandhi by winning the Jabalpur Lok Sabha seat in 1974 as a joint opposition candidate. Jayaprakash Narayan had famously declared Sharad – 27 years old then – a "people's candidate", and his victory a "people's victory".

Both George and Sharad made Bihar their karmabhoomi. Both fell forlorn in the last leg of their lives and both died unsung. It was largely because both ardent Lohiaites fell prey to the Sangh parivar's "chakravyuh" – the military

formation used in the Mahabharata to trap the enemy.

The Sangh parivar's chakravyuh, though, was vastly different from the one laid by the Kauravas against Arjuna's son Abhimanyu. Abhimanyu fought till his last breath; the Kauravas failed to win over him. But Fernandes and Sharad fell into the trap very easily. The Sangh parivar lured them with power and lucre, making them abandon what constituted the basis of their politics. They fell into the charms of "liberal" A.B. Vajpayee and "genial" L.K. Advani, and lost the path shown to them by Lohia and JP. They stayed ailing and inactive for a long period of time before their deaths. The deprived sections and the minorities – battling under the Sangh's ceaseless attack on them under the Narendra Modi-Amit Shah era that began in 2014 – had lost hope in them much before they met their end.

From 1998 to 2004, Fernandes as the convenor of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) functioned more as an emissary of Vajpayee. Leaving behind his fire against the Sangh from 1960's onwards, Fernandes even forgot to criticise the rioters of Gujarat. Vajpayee had asked Modi, the then chief minister, to observe "rajdharm". But Fernandes kept a studied silence on the genocide. In fact, he conspired against his protégée Nitish Kumar when the latter opened a

front against his Gujarati counterpart from 2009 onwards. Instead of supporting Nitish, Fernandes sided with the BJP leaders in the Modi camp. Unlike Fernandes, who along with Madhu Limaye was the most ardent adherent of Lohia earlier, Sharad rose under the guidance of JP and worked more under the patronage of Choudhary Charan Singh and Devi Lal. Sharad hit the headlines by championing the backward class movement in the wake of the implementation of the Mandal Commission report in 1990. He took out the Mandal rath yatra to counter Advani's Ram rath yatra. But be it because of his personal jealousy or competitive politics, Sharad fell out with Lalu – once Sharad's protégée – in 1997. He looked more insecure after parting ways with Lalu. He joined the Vajpayee cabinet. There too, he couldn't command the Sangh parivar's trust as much as Fernandes did. Nitish – another one Sharad's protégées – got him to replace Fernandes as the Janata Dal (United) president in the early 2000s. But Sharad, instead of pursuing larger socialist politics, got into competition with Lalu in Bihar. Lalu eventually outsmarted him. Thus, because of their own failings, both Fernandes and Sharad fell into the Sangh parivar's chakravyuh and were left forlorn in the last legs of their lives. The 1990's witnessed the decline of the

Congress at the grassroots level in the Hindi heartland. Mandal politics propelled regional satraps Lalu and Mulayam, who consolidated their OBC support bases. Seeing these leaders with larger social bases, Muslims broke out from the Congress fold and shifted to them. On the other hand, the resurgent BJP made inroads into the Congress's upper caste and Dalit vote base. In the beginning, the Sangh parivar made their way into the OBC vote base by aligning itself with splinter groups of Mandal-related parties – Samata Party in Bihar, Lok Dal in Haryana, and Apna Dal and other caste-based parties in Uttar Pradesh. The Modi-Shah era infused Hindutva into India's body politic in a starker manner. The BJP has weaponised a large chunk of the OBCs and Dalits using welfare schemes laced with jingoistic slogans and violent campaigns against minorities in the name of love jihad, cow protection and nationalism.

Many socialist theorists believe that Lalu, besides representing Lohia's legacy, also carries the streaks and mores of the iconoclast revolutionaries of freedom struggle era, B.R. Ambedkar and Erode Venkatappa Ramasamy alias Periyar, father of the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu. Lalu has been a relentless campaigner against the Sangh's politics for over 35 years. **(Contd on page 16)**

BJP Makes Its 2024 Plan Clear - Modi, Modi, Modi

Swati Chaturvedi

The hashtag says #ModiOnceAgain. The video has Prime Minister Narendra Modi, 72, striding towards the camera; he is heard quoting famous Urdu poet Nafas Ambalvi "Usse guma hai ki meri udaan kuch kum hai, mujhe yakeen hai ki yeh aasman kuch kam hai" (rough translation: much remains to be done, our potential is limitless).

Colour me not surprised as the BJP launches its campaign for a historic third term at the centre with Modi as the background and foreground. The BJP is not mentioned, neither is any minister despite the 56-second-long advert focusing on infrastructure upgrade of highways, roads, railways and metros.

Modi akela nahi bada ho raha Modi ke sath-sath Hindustan bhi bada ho raha hai.

Rise & rise of SuperPower India under the leadership of Narendra Damodardas Modi.

Less than 500 days to go for the mandate of 2024. Modi in his address at the BJP's national executive this week (delegates had cell phones confiscated outside the venue) said that the party has 400 days to

showcase the "historic work" of his government en route to winning another term which would catapult the BJP to historic heights. Clearly, Modi is now thinking about legacy and his place in his history alongside bête noire Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, who ruled for three terms at the centre.

For this column, I spoke to four senior leaders from the BJP to get perspective on election preps. Three had an identical line: that Modi has never lost any election he contested starting in 2001 from Gujarat which he governed for four terms.

The big battle for 2024 is going to be the most Presidential contest as far as the BJP is concerned, and the national executive officially acknowledged Modi's role as the BJP's election-winning totem.

J P Nadda, the BJP President has got his term extended till 2024 - this was reported exclusively last September by me in an NDTV column - made no bones about Modi being the match-winner. Nadda highlighted that nine elections are due before 2024 and the BJP has the political appetite to win them all. He also made it a point to indicate that with

"personal attacks" on the PM, the Opposition has acknowledged that he is the key to the BJP's success. So far we have seen various political avatars of Modi - the Hindu "Hridaya Samrat", the "development man" and this time around, the Modi iteration is reportedly going to be a "global statesman" who the world acknowledges as an effective leader (think of his remarks on "this not being an era of war" in the context of Russia-Ukraine and how they were repeated by several world leaders). A BJP minister told me, "The Opposition keeps mocking us, saying that the presidency of the G20 is a routine affair where it is held by every member in turn. What they don't understand is that we have spun it as a huge deal."

In keeping with the global statesman template, Modi also called out unnamed people (read Narottam Mishra, MP, minister) who have made "attention-seeking statements" on films (read Shah Rukh Khan's 'Pathaan') and have therefore diluted the BJP's focus on its "good work". The BJP has reportedly commissioned an extensive survey for the upcoming Karnataka election

and only three leaders including Amit Shah and JP Nadda are privy to the results. Modi had Karnataka on his mind when he had a very public chat with former Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa on the sidelines of the big BJP meeting in Delhi.

Yediyurappa, who has been on an extended sulk, asked him to inaugurate an airport in Shivamogga, BSY's stomping ground. An assurance has also been extended that son B Y Vijayendra will get a post if the party wins the state, something that had been agitating BSY for a while. So while Basavaraj Bommai will remain the Chief Minister, he pretty much sent out an SOS to Modi during his presentation on Karnataka preps, asking the PM to make pit stops in the state regularly. A very well-funded BJP has the winning "hawa" and "mahaul" (PR, trends) but has to crack the formula for winning over the South, something Modi emphasised. Expect more full-page advertisements, videos, jingles and even drones added on to the BJP election arsenal. Expect full Modi saturation as he is the medium and the message for 2024.

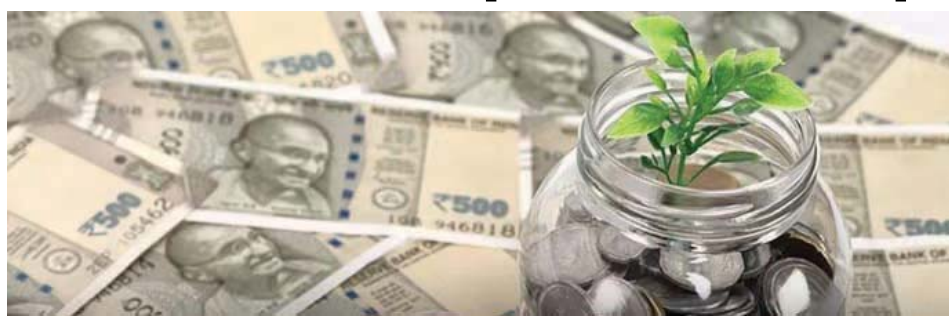
Why rapid economic development is important for India

Given our cultural strength, we should have become a developed nation in about 30 to 40 years. But we have made some mistakes – some can be corrected, and others are hard to correct, writes Sadhguru.

India is a society in transition. When a society is in transition, we must always make the transition quickly. If you go on transitioning over fifty years, one or two generations will suffer immensely. Unfortunately, we are still in this mode.

As a republic, India is only 75 years old. In the life of a nation, 75 years is not too much time. But at the same time, we have a thousand-year-old culture. Given our cultural strength, we should have become a developed nation in about 30 to 40 years. But we have made some mistakes – some can be corrected, and others are hard to correct.

There was a time when everyone in the world, whether it was Columbus or Vasco da Gama, wanted to go to one place – Bharat. They were not looking for enlightenment. They were looking for wealth, and this was the wealthiest nation. We were a vibrant manufacturing and trading nation. How were we trading? Through established land routes going both East and West for over 10,000 years. Many cities in the Middle East were built upon the taxes levied on Indian traders. That



was the volume of business that was happening.

Well, then conquests happened, we were ruled by someone else, and things went bad for us. After independence, revival should have happened quickly, but one significant blockage we created was that we cut off trade routes both in the east and the west. The only way you can export anything from this country now is through maritime trade. But if you really look at it, our ports are really coming of age only in the last 5–6 years' time. Before that, our ports were just namesake ports compared to international ports. So, these mistakes have been made. If not for information technology, our economic revival would not have happened. Now, though we have only been a republic for 75 years, we have a cultural and economic history that we have not forgotten. The economy is beginning to buzz in a big way, and the number of young people becoming entrepreneurs is massive. When we

were growing up, the only thing our parents would advise was, "Become a doctor or engineer." Otherwise, you were no good. Today, parents are encouraging their children to become entrepreneurs and sportspersons. It is absolutely fantastic to see that shift happening. It should have happened a little earlier, but this is how a nation is. Above all, we are a kaleidoscope, a very wonderful chaos. We are not like an arrow; we are like a swarm of bees. If you have noticed a swarm of bees, they all seem to be going in different directions, but on the whole, they go where they want to go. I was talking to a high-level government official in the United States. I asked, "Why are you constantly supporting our neighbors who are collapsing on all levels? They have troubled you enough. Most of your 'wanted people' were all in that country." He said, "Sadhguru, the problem is not of today's leadership. In 1947, when you got freedom, we had no real access to the world. Our information and

access were only through the British. They gave us a clear picture that Pakistan will succeed because it has one religion and one focus. India will kill itself because it has too many ingredients." So we are like a bee swarm – going all over the place with a lot of buzz, but going in the right direction. I am really encouraged about what is happening in the country right now, but it needs to happen on a bigger scale. Right now, we have a demographic dividend. If you wait for 15–20 years, we will all become old. There is a saying: "Even if you are on the right track, if you don't move quickly enough, you'll get run over." Especially because we are on the right track, we must move at a certain pace, because in terms of quality of living, we are behind many developed nations – not only Western nations, even Asian nations. Things are beginning to change, but not enough to touch 1.4 billion people. In a country with these many languages, religions, castes and creeds, taking them in one direction quickly is difficult. For every economic step we take, there are people who are continuously arguing against it. Maybe some checks and balances are needed and we cannot go full throttle, but this is a responsibility we have as a nation. I have no doubt where India will go. The question mark is only about the pace.

One way to de-polarise Indian politics-add MOTA to the ballot

In India's 'first-past-the-post' system, there's a perverse incentive for political parties and candidates to overtly antagonise one section of voters to secure another section's votes.

Regardless of whether one is in agreement with a certain bearded national leader's long march across the country or not, it is generally acknowledged that Indian society today is more polarised and divided than it was a decade or two ago. Most reasonable people across the political spectrum also agree that it is in the larger social and economic interest of the country to reduce identity polarisation and strive for a more harmonious society. It is then important to understand the incentives that shape such behaviour in our politics and endeavour to minimise or eliminate them.

How we elect our leaders is at the root of such travails. India's current electoral method of choosing one candidate or political party from a menu of choices on the ballot is incompatible with the vast and complex diversity of the nation. In the current system called 'first-past-the-post' (FPTP), any candidate with a simple majority is declared the winner. This has resulted in a perverse incentive for parties and candidates to secure a certain

more on dividing others' votes. This system does not penalise a party or a candidate from overtly antagonising a section of voters in order to secure another section's votes. Given India's inherent deep identity cleavages, its electoral system must encourage and incentivise political parties to woo every section of society and not reward them for shunning certain sections.

What's the alternative then?

Indulge in a thought experiment. Let us suppose that when given a ballot of choices of candidates/parties to vote for, you are allowed to choose more than one candidate. That is, you no longer have to force yourself to make just one choice (most preferred or least non-preferred) but you can choose many candidates or parties that represent your interests. India's electoral ballot currently has a NOTA (None Of The Above) button. Think of this new method as having a MOTA (Many Of The Above) button. The candidate or party that has the most 'tick marks' then wins.

Would this change how you vote? Would this change how we choose

winners? Would this produce different incentives for our politics?

Let's say there are three parties A, B, and C competing in an election in a constituency that has a sizeable number of both Dalits and dominant caste voters. Party A promises to represent only Dalits, is antagonistic to the dominant castes and promises a socialist economics. Party B represents only 'upper' castes, is antagonistic to Dalits and adopts a libertarian economic policy. Party C is neutral in identity representation and espouses welfare economics.

There may be some 'upper' caste voters who support welfare economics and are against the idea of being antagonistic to Dalits. Both parties B and C are acceptable to these voters. There may be some Dalit voters who do not like socialism and for whom parties A and C may be acceptable. In this system, by virtue of not being antagonistic to any section of voters, party C may emerge as a potential winner with the most 'tick marks'. Whereas, in the current FPTP system, voters with nuanced priorities are forced to vote

for just one party that may not fully represent their entire set of preferences.

This system is called Approval Voting, which is a well-researched voting methodology that is used in the United Nations, in internal primaries of many political parties in the US, and occasionally in the election of the Pope at the Vatican. It is generally preferred as a voting method in situations where the number of candidates are many, the electorate is very diverse and fragmented and there is a strong desire to reduce disharmony in elections.

'Approval voting' benefits India

Approval voting drives parties and candidates towards a consensus centre, in contrast to the current FPTP system that encourages parties to move to the extremes and win elections with a smaller share of overall public support. Voters may have a preferred choice, an acceptable choice and a completely unacceptable choice. In approval voting, the party that is the most preferred and acceptable wins while the most hated party is kept out.

minimum share of the votes and focus

Doctor who molested patients convicted of federal sex counts



(SAI Bureau) — A gynecologist accused of molesting hundreds of patients during a decadeslong career was convicted of federal sex crime charges Tuesday in a victory for accusers who were outraged when an initial state prosecution resulted in no jail time.

Robert Hadden, 64, of Englewood, New Jersey, was

convicted after less than a day of deliberations at a two-week trial in which nine former patients described how he abused them sexually during examinations, when they were most vulnerable. Outside the courthouse after the verdict, women who were among Hadden's victims expressed relief at his conviction and said they were eager to see him start

serving time.

"This is such a victory for all of us," said Evelyn Yang, whose husband, Andrew Yang, ran unsuccessfully as a Democrat for president in 2020 and for New York City mayor in 2022. She said Hadden sexually assaulted her years ago when she was seven months pregnant. It's also validating. The jury came back with their verdict so quickly. And he was found guilty on all counts. That just, I think, leaves no doubt in anyone's mind that he was a serial predator who deserves to be imprisoned," she said. Hadden, who is subject to electronic monitoring and was free on \$1 million bail, declined to comment as he left the courthouse. He may not be free for long. Judge Richard M. Berman declined a request by a prosecutor and 10 victims that Hadden be immediately jailed,

but set a hearing next week to further consider the matter. Sentencing was set for April 25. His conviction in federal court on four counts of enticing victims to cross state lines so he could sexually abuse them carries a potential penalty of decades in prison. That's a much tougher potential punishment than Hadden received when he initially pleaded guilty in state court in 2016 to allegations involving a smaller number of women. His plea deal with the Manhattan District Attorney's Office required him to surrender his medical license but didn't require any jail time. "People are mystified," Berman said in court, citing the success Hadden has had at avoiding prison. "There is a feeling that somehow or another he skirts the process." Hadden worked at

two prestigious Manhattan hospitals — Columbia University Irving Medical Center and New York-Presbyterian Hospital — until complaints about his attacks shut down his career a decade ago. The institutions have already agreed to pay more than \$236 million to settle civil claims by more than 200 former patients.

At trial, Hadden's lawyers did not contest that he molested patients. They said his state court plea covered those crimes and that federal charges alleging patients from New Jersey and Nevada crossed state lines to be sexually abused were inappropriate since he didn't know where they came from. After the verdict, Assistant U.S. Attorney Jane Kim argued that Hadden should be immediately jailed as a risk to flee and a danger to the community.

Get your own house in order: China tells US to fix its debt problems after Yellen's Africa remarks

(SAI Bureau) Chinese officials in Zambia have responded sharply over US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen's remarks calling China a 'barrier' to debt reform in Africa.

After US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen called China a "barrier" to debt reform in Africa this week, Chinese officials in Zambia had a pointed response - get your own house in order. The Chinese Embassy in Zambia said on its website Tuesday "the biggest contribution that the U.S. can make to the debt issues outside the country is to act on responsible monetary policies, cope with its own debt problem, and stop sabotaging other sovereign countries' active efforts to solve their debt issues." Republicans in the House of Representatives are using a risky, unusual threat to refuse to vote in a new debt ceiling, a figure that reflects money already spent and now owed by the government, to pressure the Biden administration and Democrats to cut spending programs. So far, the Biden White House is refusing to negotiate, counting on hardline Republicans to step back under pressure from

businesses, investors and moderates.

U.S. national debt is about \$31 trillion, a figure that has skyrocketed since 2000s \$5.6 trillion thanks in part to increased spending for an aging population, outlays for Iraq and Afghanistan wars, COVID-19 programs and tax cuts that trimmed revenues. Yellen and International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva arrived separately in Zambia Sunday to highlight the need for debt reform in Africa. Zambia defaulted on its debt in 2020 and has made little progress to restructure it with Chinese and private creditors to date, a situation that has helped push citizens into poverty. The world's poorest countries faced \$35 billion in debt-service payments to official and private-sector creditors in 2022, more than 40% of which was due to China, the World Bank said. The U.S. Federal Reserve's rate increases, designed to tame inflation at home, and the appreciating U.S. dollar have added to African countries' debt service burden, the African Development Bank said last week.

China-built 'Lekki Deep Sea Port' opens up in Nigeria. What you should know



(SAI Bureau) The Lekki Deep Sea Port, which has been handed over to Nigeria by the China Harbor Engineering Company Ltd (CHEC), is expected to ease congestion at the country's ports.

A billion-dollar Chinese-built deep seaport has come up in Lagos, Nigeria. The Lekki Deep Sea Port, which is expected to ease congestion at the country's ports, is handling cargoes in transit for other destinations. The seaport may also help Nigeria become an African hub for trans-shipment.

President Muhammadu Buhari has made building infrastructure a key pillar of his government's economic policy and hopes that this will help his ruling party win votes during next month's presidential election. "This is a transformative project, a game-changer project. This project could create at least 200,000 jobs," Chinese Ambassador to

Nigeria Cui Jianchun told Reuters after the port was commissioned by Buhari.

THE LEKKI DEEP SEA PORT
The China Harbor Engineering Company Ltd (CHEC) handed over the deep sea port to the government of Nigeria in November last year. The new Lekki Deep Sea Port is 75 per

cent owned by the CHEC and Tolaram group.

The balance is shared between the Lagos state government and the Nigerian Ports Authority. The Lekki Deep Sea Port is the largest seaport in Nigeria and one of the biggest in West Africa. The construction of the port commenced in June 2020 and is designed to handle 1.2 million standard containers annually.

As a commercial project of tripartite cooperation between China, France and Nigeria, Lekki port is of great significance for promoting Belt and Road cooperation in Africa. China is among the largest bilateral lenders to Nigeria and has funded rail, roads and power stations.



Classified documents found at former US Vice President Pence's home



(South Asian Insider Bureau) Documents marked as classified were found at former US Vice President Mike Pence's home, his attorney has said.

Documents marked as classified were discovered at former U.S. Vice President Mike Pence's Indiana home last week, and he has turned those classified records over to the FBI, his attorney said in letters seen by Reuters on Tuesday. The attorney, Greg Jacob, sent a letter

to the National Archives on Jan. 18 notifying them of the documents and in a separate letter on Jan. 22 notified the Archives that the FBI came to the former vice president's home to collect them. The discovery puts Pence in the company of his former boss, former President Donald Trump, and President Joe Biden after documents with classified markings were found at their residences.

Jacob said in the letter dated Jan. 18 to the National Archives that "out of an abundance of caution" Pence had engaged outside counsel to review records stored in his home after reports about the materials found at Biden's residence.

"Counsel identified a small number of

documents that could potentially contain sensitive or classified information interspersed throughout the records," Jacob wrote in the letter.

"Vice President Pence immediately secured those documents in a locked safe pending further direction on proper handling from the National Archives," he said. Pence's counsel did not review the contents of the documents once they were determined to be marked classified, the letter said.

In a separate letter dated Jan. 22, Jacob said the Justice Department "bypassed the standard procedures and requested direct possession" of the documents at Pence's residence. With agreement by the former vice president, FBI agents came to his Indiana home at 9:30 p.m.

on Jan. 19 to collect the documents stored in the safe, Jacob said.

Biden, whose documents dated from his time as vice president, and Trump, who resisted turning over the items, leading to an FBI raid, are both facing special counsel investigations by the Justice Department over improper handling of classified materials.

During a presidential transition period, the records from each administration are supposed to be turned over to the legal custody of the U.S. National Archives. It is unlawful to knowingly or willfully remove or retain classified material. Failure to properly store and secure classified material poses risks to national security if it should fall into the wrong hands.

US, Germany set to send battle tanks to Ukraine

Just hours before turning 45 today, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy pressed allies to move forward with providing over five to 15 modern tanks to reinforce Ukraine's military power.



(South Asian Insider Bureau) The United States was expected to announce on Wednesday that it will send heavy tanks to Ukraine, and Germany has decided to do the same, sources said, reported news agency Reuters. This decision will reshape the war with Russia, Kyiv said. Just hours before turning 45 today, Ukrainian President

Volodymyr Zelenskyy pressed allies to move forward with providing over five to 15 modern tanks to reinforce Ukraine's military power. "Discussions must be concluded with decisions," Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address. "Decisions on real strengthening of our defence against terrorists. The allies have the required

number of tanks." Washington was ready to start a process that would eventually send M1 Abrams battle tanks to Ukraine, just days after arguing against granting Kyiv's requests, two US officials told Reuters on Tuesday. According to a third official, the US commitment could total about 30 tanks to be delivered over the coming months. Meanwhile, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz had decided to send Leopard 2 battle tanks to Ukraine and allow other countries such as Poland to send them as well, two sources familiar with the matter told Reuters.

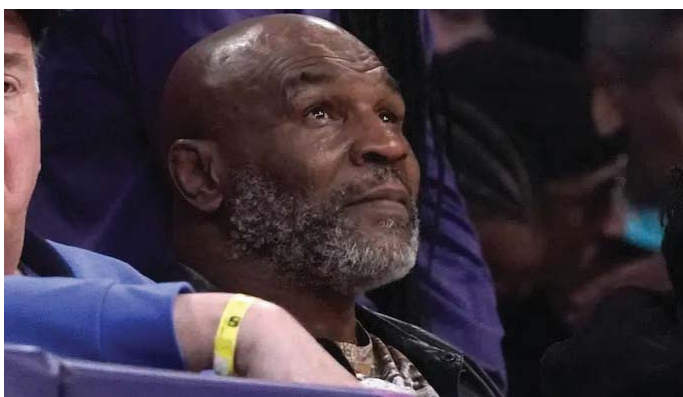
Germany was planning to send in at least one company of Leopard 2 A6 tanks, which usually comprises 14 tanks, Reuters quoted Spiegel magazine, which first reported the news, as saying. Officials in Kyiv are hopeful, despite no official confirmation from the US or Germany. "A few hundred tanks for our tank crews! This is what is going to become a real punching fist of democracy," Andriy Yermak, the head of Zelenskyy's administration, wrote on Telegram. Kyiv has been pleading for months for Western tanks that it says would give its forces the ability to break through Russian defensive lines and recapture occupied territory in the east and south.

Woman files suit accusing Mike Tyson of rape in early 1990s

The woman, who is suing for \$5 million, said Mike Tyson raped her in a limousine and that she has suffered from "physical, psychological and emotional injury" in the years since then.

(South Asian Insider Bureau) A woman has filed a lawsuit accusing former heavyweight boxing champion Mike Tyson of raping her sometime in the early 1990s after she met him at a nightclub in Albany, New York.

The woman, who is suing for \$5 million, said Tyson raped her in a limousine and that she has suffered from "physical, psychological and emotional injury" in the years since then. The woman's affidavit does not provide a date for the attack but says only that it happened in the early 1990s - around the same time that beauty pageant contestant Desiree Washington



said Tyson raped her in Indianapolis. Tyson was convicted of raping Washington on Feb. 10, 1992, and served three years in prison. The legal action in New York was filed under the state's Adult Survivors Act, which gives sexual assault victims a one-year window to file lawsuits over assaults

that happened years or even decades ago. The woman said in her affidavit that she got in Tyson's limousine and the boxer immediately started touching her and trying to kiss her. "I told him

no several times and asked him to stop, but he continued to attack me," the woman said. "He then pulled my pants off and violently raped me." The lawsuit was first reported by the Times Union of Albany. The woman is seeking to maintain her anonymity because, she said,

publication of her name "would certainly pose a risk to me of further mental harm, harassment, ridicule or personal embarrassment." The woman's attorney, Darren Seilback, said in a separate filing that his office did not simply take the woman at her word but investigated her allegations and determined that they are "highly credible."

Seilback said Tuesday he could not comment further on the case. A message seeking comment from Tyson was sent to an agency that has represented him. Brooklyn-born Tyson, 56, won adulation as the undisputed world heavyweight champion from 1987 to 1990, but his life outside the ring has been turbulent. Tyson's former wife, actor Robin Givens, said in divorce papers that their late-1980s marriage was characterized by "unprovoked rages of violence and destruction."

New Zealand's labour leader Chris Hipkins sworn in as prime minister, vows focus on economy



country on Sunday. The ceremony in front of his friends and colleagues after the resignation of Ardern, 42, who said she had "no more in the tank" to lead the country. Hipkins, 44, has pledged a back-to-basics approach focusing on the economy and what he described as the 'pandemic of inflation', reported the Associated Press.

He will have less than nine months before taking part in a tough general election, with opinion polls indicating his Labour Party is trailing its conservative opposition. The Labour party chose the ex-Covid-19 response and New Zealand Governor-General Cindy Kiro officiated the brief swearing-in

ceremony in front of his friends and colleagues after the resignation of Ardern, 42, who said she had "no more in the tank" to lead the country. Hipkins, 44, has pledged a back-to-basics approach focusing on the economy and what he described as the 'pandemic of inflation', reported the Associated Press.

Meanwhile, Carmel Sepuloni was also sworn in as deputy prime minister, the first time a person with Pacific Island heritage has taken on the role. She congratulated Hipkins and thanked him for the trust he'd placed in her. After the ceremony, Hipkins said as an aside to General Cindy Kiro.

reporters: "It feels pretty real now."

Hipkins is known to many by the nickname "Chippy," which fits with his upbeat demeanor and skills as an amateur handyman.

ARDERN'S GOODBYE

Hundreds gathered in the grounds of Parliament as Ardern left for the final time, hugging each of her members of parliament in turn, with many looking visibly emotional. She then travelled to Government House, where she tendered her resignation to King Charles' representative in New Zealand, Governor General Cindy Kiro.

Labour leader Chris Hipkins has been sworn in as the 41st Prime Minister of New Zealand. Labour leader Chris Hipkins was sworn in as New Zealand's 41st prime minister in a formal ceremony on Wednesday, to lead the party and the

days after the resignation of outgoing Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, reported Reuters.

The Labour party chose the ex-Covid-19 response and New Zealand Governor-General Cindy Kiro officiated the brief swearing-in

AmazonSmile's end is alarming, say nonprofits that benefited

Amazon's surprise decision to shut down its AmazonSmile donation program has left thousands of its nonprofit beneficiaries disappointed and concerned about finding ways to replace the funding.

The e-commerce giant had launched AmazonSmile in 2013, contributing 0.5% of every purchase made by participating customers to the charity of their choosing. As of 2022, the company said it has donated \$449 million to various charities.

Before it ends the program next month, Amazon says, it will provide a final donation to each of the 1 million-plus nonprofits that used AmazonSmile, equivalent to 25% of what the charity received from the program in 2022.

Some of the e-commerce giant's competitors, including Walmart and Target, have their own community donation programs that somewhat resemble AmazonSmile.

But nonprofits say they feel let down.

Tenisha Taylor says she felt Amazon insulted her Chicago nonprofit's work by saying its program hadn't provided enough of an impact for its charitable beneficiaries. You haven't talked to me," said Taylor, who founded the Ezekiel Taylor Foundation, which provides scholarships to young Black men from Chicago whose lives have been affected by gun violence. "You haven't seen my bottom line of impact of these brilliant young men that I have walking on campuses across this country." Taylor noted the huge disparity between the wealth of Amazon's founder, Jeff Bezos, and the small amounts that nonprofits use to try to make their communities healthier and safer.

"We are making this company (Amazon) rich — we are," said Taylor

referring to communities of color like hers. "At the very least, they can be good corporate citizens to pay it forward in the communities that are patronizing them."

Amazon's decision to end the program was part of a strategic shift to support initiatives that work on a larger scale, like its \$2 billion contribution to build affordable housing, said Patrick Malone, a company spokesperson. After 10 years, he said, it was time to reevaluate the program. He said the move is not a criticism of the nonprofits it supported.

The company also recently announced that it would lay off 18,000 employees and cut other less profitable parts of its business. Taylor and other nonprofit founders say they are angry that Amazon didn't give them an earlier warning about the program's end. Many nonprofits had promoted AmazonSmile in their own fundraising appeals because the program provided them with a passive revenue stream from Amazon customers.

Lauren Wagner, executive director of the Long Island Arts Alliance, based in Patchogue, New York, said she had encouraged the nonprofits she supports to sign up for AmazonSmile. Now, she's concerned that her organization doesn't know the identity of those customers and wants Amazon to seek permission to share that information with nonprofits. Malone said Amazon had notified customers of the program's end and has no plans to share customer information with nonprofits. Wagner said she contacted Amazon many times over the years to suggest improvements to the program. Among her suggestions were allowing users to donate without specifically going to

smile.amazon.com and providing the option to donate when shopping on the Amazon app, something the company eventually allowed. "They certainly never listened to any of the emails that were sent or they never surveyed us," she said. "They never got our input on how to make it more impactful." A former Amazon employee, Adam Goldstein,

said he, too, doubts how interested the company was in improving the program. For three years at Amazon, Goldstein said, he helped nonprofits claim donations, which he said felt was personally rewarding. But he didn't get the impression that the company cared deeply about giving back to the community.



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400 days for Lok Sabha polls: Why 2024 will be historic in many ways

(SAI Bureau) A third term for PM Modi, who has never lost a state or national poll, will propel him into the league of India's greatest prime ministers in terms of tenure. But how likely is that proposition? Every time an election approaches, many of us choose words like historic to describe it. There's not much wrong with such a description because elections, by their very nature, do alter history—even irrespective of the results. Because even when a party's victory or loss in a national poll doesn't fully represent the aspirations or anxieties of the whole country, they do mirror the rejection or endorsement of certain political philosophies. It's through the election process that our beliefs either deepen or are called into question, shaping the present and future of a nation, and, of course, its people.

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi told his party, the BJP, that "We have 400 days before the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, and we have to do everything in people's service. We have to create history."

So, what's the history here that we're talking about?

Narendra Modi has won two national polls, in 2014 and 2019. Another win, in the May 2024 elections, will propel him into the big league as far as Indian prime ministers are concerned. Jawaharlal Nehru was the first prime minister when India became Independent in 1947. But he wasn't an elected PM in 1947, so to speak. The British handed over power to Congress. To cut a long story short, without getting into Vallabhbhai Patel and Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru was the choice for the top job. The country was still five years away from its first national (Lok Sabha) polls. Nehru was a member of the Constituent Assembly that had been

formed to frame the Constitution of India. Nehru then won three consecutive national polls—in 1952, 1957 and 1962. He died, while in office, in 1964. So, in a way, Nehru was elected prime minister thrice by the people of the country. And so was his daughter, Indira Gandhi. She won in 1967 and 1971. She imposed an Emergency during 1975-77 and lost the 1977 polls, only to return to the prime minister's office (PMO) in 1980. She was assassinated, while serving as PM, in 1984. Cut to now: The BJP has pushed the Congress into survival mode through shattering defeats in the last two national polls. The grand old party has also lost several states to the BJP during this period. But 2024 could be historic. PM Modi has matched Manmohan Singh's record of two consecutive terms, even though the BJP has seen the Congress leader as somebody who took instructions from the Gandhis. Rajiv Gandhi was, anyway, prime minister for a single term (1984-89). Gulzarilal Nanda also became PM twice, but he was a place-holder when two serving prime ministers, first Nehru and then Lal Bahadur Shastri, died.

It's the Nehru-Indira legacy that has caused more unease to the saffron party. While the Congress credits Nehru for building modern India and Indira for splitting Pakistan into two, the BJP places the Jammu & Kashmir issue at Nehru's doorstep and also blames him for the 1962 war defeat at the hands of China. The BJP remembers Indira for, among other things, the Emergency. Be that as it may, the legends of Nehru and Indira still hold, with an air of superiority, and the BJP, if it wins in 2024, will have addressed that to some extent. From the BJP's own quota, Atal Bihari Vajpayee became PM thrice, but the sum total of

his three tenures was only a little over six years. In 1996, he had to quit in 13 days because he couldn't muster the numbers he thought he would. In 1999, the AIADMK pulled the plug on his government after 13 months, but he continued in office amid the Kargil conflict. He only had one full five-year tenure (1999-2004). But will PM Modi win in 2024? No matter how boringly disappointing it sounds, only the people of the country can answer this. But there seems to be a buzz in the BJP's favour. This buzz is not unfamiliar. Ruling parties have had the advantage of this buzz. Part of it comes from media coverage that gives prominence to most of what is said by those holding public office.

But we can look at the question rather differently. In India's electoral history, there have been some signposts. Initially, the Congress, with its legacy of being a movement for India's independence, ruled at the Centre and in states for years. Its core voting constituency comprised the upper castes, Muslims and Dalits. It left out a vast chunk called the backward castes, something socialists, with Congress background, married with anti-Congressism. In the 1960s and 1970s and then again, a decade later, the grand old party lost power at the Centre and in some states, primarily in northern India. Then came the BJP's surge and Vajpayee's era but the party's appeal was still not potent enough and the government survived only due to a large coalition. Ultimately, the Congress returned for two successive terms. 2014 marked a third signpost: Hindutva plus Modi. The Mandal politics had outlived its utility, upper caste politics was obviously a thing of the past, and it was time for Kamandal plus. In the coming years, labharthis (beneficiaries of welfare

schemes) were to become the BJP's key constituency. What also signifies the current era is the opposition's inability to put up a joint front against the ruling dispensation. Collective challenges were behind the downfall of several governments in the past. Nobody knows what the future holds, but right now, the two Modi challengers, Congress's Rahul Gandhi and AAP's Arvind Kejriwal, can't stand each other. And TMC's Mamata Banerjee, who seems to have lost a bit of her appetite to be a Modi challenger, doesn't quite get along with either Rahul or Kejriwal. So, can't PM Modi lose? Again, only the people will decide. But one should remember prime ministers have lost when few thought they would. 2004 is a classic case in point. When Vajpayee looked invincible, Manmohan Singh came to lead the country for 10 years. But a bit of history will be made even if PM Modi loses. He has never lost an election. In 2001, the BJP sent him from Delhi to Gujarat to take charge as chief minister. He then won three successive polls in his home state before storming Delhi Darbar in 2014. The question on everyone's mind may have its answer in whether or not 2014 will reveal another electoral signpost. On Tuesday, the BJP's national executive meeting passed a socio-economic resolution, also talking about its politics of saturation. No, the party didn't mean that its electoral performance has peaked, and it's downhill from here. Far from it. In fact, quite the contrary. What it meant was the benefits of social welfare schemes were now reaching all beneficiaries! If this doesn't make much sense, here's something for those interested in political catchphrases. If Acche Din was an election slogan for 2014, the thrust ahead of 2024 is to usher in Sarvottam Kaal.

How India is caught in narcotics web of Golden Crescent and Death Triangle

Tamil Nadu and Kerala have become major destinations for smuggled drugs from Pakistan. Apart from long coastlines and existing port connectivity, another reason for this is that it is easier to transport drugs from these two coastal states to Sri Lanka and Maldives further south.

Earlier this month, Tamil Nadu was placed under alert and strict monitoring after Mohammed Imran, popularly known as 'kanji panai' (pot of porridge in Tamil), was reported to have entered India via Rameswaram. This is a very concerning development owing to the history of this man (a known criminal and a drug smuggler), the history of illegal sea movement between India and Sri Lanka, the precarious economic situation of Sri Lanka, and the recent history of drug smuggling on this route. The police in coastal Tamil Nadu recently arrested a DMK councillor in November 2022 for attempting to smuggle cocaine worth more than Rs 200 crores from Ramanathapuram to Sri Lanka. Later, in December 2022, the National Investigative Agency (NIA) arrested nine Sri Lankans from the special camp for Sri Lankan Tamil

refugees at Tamil Nadu's Tiruchirappalli over their alleged involvement in drugs and arms smuggling to revive the LTTE. Reports also suggest that while the destination points for drug smuggling are India and Sri Lanka, the origination is from countries like Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan which need the money to help them combat the weakening economic state of their respective nations.

In March 2021, the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) registered a case after the local police arrested six Sri Lankan nationals and seized 300 kg of heroin, five AK-47 rifles, and 1,000 live rounds of 9mm ammunition off the coast of Vizhinjam, near Thiruvananthapuram. While Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka also act as mini transit points, the sheer volumes of drugs seized, and smugglers arrested by the

security agencies of Tamil Nadu and Kerala in recent times make it a compelling reason to focus on these two states. Pakistan is a major source of narcotics for other countries in the region given its location on the so-called "Golden Crescent" of opium production or "Death crescent", as popularly called by anti-narcotics agencies across the world. This crescent region includes Afghanistan and Iran – making it a natural transit point for drugs being smuggled out of Pakistan. Pakistan's porous borders and lack of effective law enforcement in some areas make it relatively easy for traffickers to move drugs across the border.

Tamil Nadu and Kerala have become major destinations for smuggled drugs from Pakistan. One of the main reasons for this is the long coastline and the

existence of large ports in Chennai and Kochi, which act as major hubs for maritime trade. Another reason is that it is easier to transport drugs from these ports to Sri Lanka and Maldives further south. Sri Lanka, which is located off the southern coast of India, is a major destination for smuggled drugs from Pakistan. The country has a history of drug abuse and the demand for illegal narcotics is high. Sri Lanka's coastal location and its proximity to India make it a prime destination for drug traffickers.

Naturally, the influx of such substances into the mainland is a major problem, with significant implications for public health, security, and social stability. It undermines the rule of law, fuels organized crime and funds terrorism. It also harms the health and well-being of individuals and communities.

'Happening way too often': Report delves into mass attacks

It was released as the U.S. experienced a particularly deadly start to the new year that has left 39 people dead in six mass killings, including one this week in Monterey Park, California, that left 11 people dead at a dance hall as they welcomed in the Lunar New Year. "It's just happening way too often," said Lina Alathari, the center's director, during a news conference ahead of the report's release. Alathari said that while the center had not specifically studied the shootings that took place this week, there are themes seen "over and over again" when analyzing mass attacks. The report is the latest in a series undertaken by the center to look at the problem of mass attacks. While previous reports examined the

specific years of 2017, 2018 and 2019, the new report noted that it analyzed multiple years of data and gives more "in-depth analysis of the thinking and behavior of mass attackers." The center defines a mass attack as one in which three or more people — not including the attacker — were harmed. Almost all the attacks were carried out by one person, 96% of attackers were men and the attackers ranged in age from 14 to 87.

The report noted that nearly two-thirds of attackers exhibited behaviors or communications "that were so concerning, they should have been met with an immediate response." It said these concerns were often shared with law enforcement, employers, school staff

or parents. But in one-fifth of the cases, the concerning behavior wasn't relayed to anyone "in a position to respond, demonstrating a continued need to promote and facilitate bystander reporting." The report also called for greater attention toward domestic violence and misogyny, noting that nearly half of the attackers studied had a history of domestic violence, misogynistic behavior or both.

"Though not all who possess misogynistic views are violent, viewpoints that describe women as the enemy or call for violence against women remain a cause for concern," the report said.

About half the attacks in the study involved a business location, and attackers often had a prior

relationship with the business, as an employee, a customer or a former employer. The report also noted the role that grievances like workplace disputes or feuds with neighbors played in mass attacks. About half the attacks were motivated "in whole or in part by a perceived grievance," according to the report.

"Workplaces should establish behavioral threat assessment programs as a component of their workplace violence prevention plans, and businesses should also establish proactive relationships with area law enforcement so that they may work collaboratively to respond to incidents involving a concern for violence, whether that concern arises from a current employee, a former employee, or a customer," the report read.

Is tipping getting out of control? Many consumers say yes

leave a gratuity for a muffin or a simple cup of coffee at their neighborhood bakery. What's next, they wonder -- are we going to be tipping our doctors and dentists, too? As more businesses adopt digital payment methods, customers are automatically being prompted to leave a gratuity — many times as high as 30% — at places they normally wouldn't. And some say it has become more frustrating as the price of items has skyrocketed due to inflation, which eased to 6.5% in December but still remains painfully high.

"Suddenly, these screens are at every establishment we encounter. They're popping up online as well for online orders. And I fear that there is no end," said etiquette expert Thomas Farley, who considers the whole thing somewhat of "an invasion."

Unlike tip jars that shoppers can easily ignore if they don't have spare change, experts say the digital requests can produce social pressure and are more difficult to bypass. And your generosity, or lack thereof, can be laid bare for anyone close enough to glance at the screen — including the workers themselves. Dylan Schenker is one of them. The 38-year-old earns about \$400 a month in tips, which provides a helpful supplement to his \$15 hourly wage as a barista at Philadelphia café located inside a restaurant. Most of those tips come from consumers who order coffee drinks or interact with the café for other things, such as carryout orders. The gratuity helps cover his monthly rent and eases some of his burdens while he attends graduate school and juggles his job.

Schenker says it's hard to sympathize with consumers who are able to afford pricey coffee drinks but complain about tipping. And he often feels demoralized when people don't leave behind anything extra — especially if

they're regulars.

"Tipping is about making sure the people who are performing that service for you are getting paid what they're owed," said Schenker, who's been working in the service industry for roughly 18 years. Traditionally, consumers have taken pride in being good tippers at places like restaurants, which typically pay their workers lower than the minimum wage in expectation they'll make up the difference in tips. But academics who study the topic say many consumers are now feeling irritated by automatic tip requests at coffee shops and other counter service eateries where tipping has not typically been expected, workers make at least the minimum wage and service is usually limited. "People do not like unsolicited advice," said Ismail Karabas, a marketing professor at Murray State University who studies tipping. "They don't like to be asked for things, especially at the wrong time."

Some of the requests can also come from odd places. Clarissa Moore, a 35-year-old who works as a supervisor at a utility company in Pennsylvania, said even her mortgage company has been asking for tips lately. Typically, she's happy to leave a gratuity at restaurants, and sometimes at coffee shops and other fast-food places when the service is good. But, Moore said she believes consumers shouldn't be asked to tip nearly everywhere they go — and it shouldn't be something that's expected of them. "It makes you feel bad. You feel like you have to do it because they're asking you to do it," she said. "But then you have to think about the position that puts people in. They're paying for something that they really don't want to pay for, or they're tipping when they really don't want to tip — or can't afford to tip — because they don't want to feel bad."

In the book "Emily Post's Etiquette," authors Lizzie Post and Daniel Post Senning advise consumers to tip on ride-shares, like Uber and Lyft, as well as food and beverages, including alcohol. But they also write that it's up to each person to choose how much to tip at a café or a take-out food service, and that consumers shouldn't feel embarrassed about choosing the lowest suggested tip amount, and don't have to explain themselves if they don't tip. Digital payment methods have been around for a number of years, though experts say the pandemic has accelerated the trend towards more tipping. Michael Lynn, a consumer behavior professor at Cornell University, said consumers were more generous with tips during the early days of the pandemic in an effort to show support for restaurants and other businesses that were hard hit by COVID-19. Many people genuinely wanted to help out and felt sympathetic to workers who held jobs that put them more at risk of catching the virus, Lynn said.

Tips at full-service restaurants grew by 25.3% in the third quarter of 2022, while gratuities at quick or counter service restaurants went up 16.7% compared to the same time in 2021, according to Square, one of the biggest companies operating digital payment methods. Data provided by the company shows continuous growth for the same period since 2019.

As tip requests have become more common, some businesses are advertising it in their job postings to lure in more workers even though the extra money isn't always guaranteed. In December, Starbucks rolled out a new tipping option on credit and debit card transactions at its stores, something a group organizing the company's hourly workers had called for. Since then, a Starbucks

spokesperson said nearly half of credit and debit card transactions have included a gratuity, which - along with tips received through cash and the Starbucks app - are distributed based on the number of hours a barista worked on the days the tips were received.

Karabas, the Murray State professor, says some customers, like those who've worked in the service industry in the past, want to tip workers at quick service businesses and wouldn't be irritated by the automatic requests. But for others, research shows they might be less likely to come back to a particular business if they are feeling irritated by the requests, he said.

The final tab might also impact how customers react. Karabas said in the research he did with other academics, they manipulated the payment amounts and found that when the check was high, consumers no longer felt as irritated by the tip requests. That suggests the best time for a coffee shop to ask for that 20% tip, for example, might be on four or five orders of coffee, not a small cup that costs \$4. Some consumers might continue to shrug off the tip requests regardless of the amount. "If you work for a company, it's that company's job to pay you for doing work for them," said Mike Janavey, a footwear and clothing designer who lives in New York City. "They're not supposed to be juicing consumers that are already spending money there to pay their employees." Schenker, the Philadelphia barista, agrees — to a certain extent. "The onus should absolutely be on the owners, but that doesn't change overnight," he said. "And this is the best thing we have right now."

An Unmanaged Foreign Media Has Got the Modi Government Fuming

(SAI Bureau) Mahatma Gandhi, whose death anniversary is a few days away, on January 30, used to say he did not want walled windows or stuffed windows; he wanted the “culture of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible”. He was neither worried nor scared of not just culture, but also of criticism. The tall leaders of the time were not worried of being criticised in the media; indeed, Jawaharlal Nehru asked the pre-eminent cartoonist of the time to freely lampoon him. Seventy-five years on, our prime minister and his acolytes are so terrified of a documentary by a foreign channel about the killings in Gujarat in 2002, that they have shut it down so that no one in India can see it online. Nor can one make even the slightest reference to it on Twitter along with a short clip – the tweet will be removed. The entire energies of the government machinery are engaged in ensuring that Indians – in India only – do not get to see the film. Government officials have called it a

‘propaganda piece’. Eminent citizens – retired judges, army officers, ambassadors – and others have come out with statements saying the film “reeks of motivated distortion that is as mind-numbingly unsubstantiated as it is nefarious”.

‘Post-imperialism’ and ‘the colonial mindset’ both make an appearance in the attacks on the BBC. Union minister Kiren Rijiju, currently engaged in a war with the Supreme Court judges, has pointed fingers at “some people in India who haven’t gotten over the colonial intoxication”. Strong words, all, clearly indicating that the film has stung the establishment, and the government finally reacted and stopped YouTube and other social media sites from showing the film in India. The opposition has called it censorship and links are already being passed around where it can be viewed. Students in different parts of the country have defiantly screened it; in these times, it is not easy to suppress something.

But if the documentary is such rubbish borne out of a colonial mindset or an international conspiracy, why not ignore it? And if it has factual errors, why would the government not issue a robust rebuttal that demolishes the claims made in it?

All opportunities were given to the government to give its side of the story, claim the filmmakers. If so, why did it not respond? Among the many people interviewed, two are pro-Narendra Modi, so it cannot be called totally one-sided. Modi’s own old interviews have been used.

The story is a familiar one to most Indians, though the film brings it all together with some stark visuals of the time. The clincher in the film is the revelation of a British government report after the killings that had concluded that the chief minister at the time in Gujarat was “directly responsible” for what happened in the state. Jack Straw, who was British foreign secretary at the time, endorses this. Why couldn’t the Narendra Modi

government draw up a long list of counter-points and show that the documentary makers have got many things wrong? Why all this huffing and puffing and shutting down of the film? Shutting one’s eyes and ears tightly does not mean an inconvenient truth will go away. So why is the Modi government behaving this way?

For the answer, look at Modi’s refusal to hold a press conference or grant an interview to a journalist either in India or abroad ever since he became the prime minister almost nine years ago. Because that would not be in his control, and Modi likes to be in control of every situation. Questions would inevitably come up, which he would not be able to answer, and some of those questions would inevitably involve his handling of the violence in Gujarat.

He could, of course, reply by saying that he has been given a clean chit by a legal process, but journalists being what they are, they would persist. His did give some interviews after the

violence, when he was the chief minister, which are used in the documentary, and these show that he was not at his comfortable best. His chilling response in one such clip that the main lesson he had learnt was “his failure to handle the media” provides a crucial clue to his subsequent behaviour as the prime minister and his unwillingness to sit down with them unless the media had been “handled”.

In the past almost nine years of the Modi prime ministership, the Indian media has been handled efficiently and no one dares step out of line. Right from the owners to the editors and then down the line to reporters, large sections of the Indian media are devotees of the prime minister and happy to be little more than loudspeakers for him and his party, forgetting the basic duty of a journalist – ask questions and demand accountability. Those who do ask questions end up paying a price.

How India is caught in narcotics web of Golden Crescent and Death Triangle

the history of illegal sea movement between India and Sri Lanka, the precarious economic situation of Sri Lanka, and the recent history of drug smuggling on this route.

The police in coastal Tamil Nadu recently arrested a DMK councillor in November 2022 for attempting to smuggle cocaine worth more than Rs 200 crores from Ramanathapuram to Sri Lanka. Later, in December 2022, the National Investigative Agency (NIA) arrested nine Sri Lankans from the special camp for Sri Lankan Tamil refugees at Tamil Nadu’s Tiruchirappalli over their alleged involvement in drugs and arms smuggling to revive the LTTE. Reports also suggest that while the destination points for drug smuggling are India and Sri Lanka, the origination is from countries like Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan which need the money to help them combat the weakening economic state of their respective nations.

In March 2021, the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) registered a case after the local police arrested six Sri Lankan nationals and seized 300 kg of heroin, five AK-47 rifles, and 1,000 live rounds of 9mm ammunition off the coast of Vizhinjam, near Thiruvananthapuram. While Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka also act as mini transit points, the sheer volumes of drugs seized, and smugglers arrested by the security agencies of Tamil Nadu and Kerala in

recent times make it a compelling reason to focus on these two states. Pakistan is a major source of narcotics for other countries in the region given its location on the so-called “Golden Crescent” of opium production or “Death crescent”, as popularly called by anti-narcotics agencies across the world. This crescent region includes Afghanistan and Iran – making it a natural transit point for drugs being smuggled out of Pakistan. Pakistan’s porous borders and lack of effective law enforcement in some areas make it relatively easy for traffickers to move drugs across the border. Tamil Nadu and Kerala have become major destinations for smuggled drugs from Pakistan. One of the main reasons for this is the long coastline and the existence of large ports in Chennai and Kochi, which act as major hubs for maritime trade. Another reason is that it is easier to transport drugs from these ports to Sri Lanka and Maldives further south. Sri Lanka, which is located off the southern coast of India, is a major destination for smuggled drugs from Pakistan. The country has a history of drug abuse and the demand for illegal narcotics is high. Sri Lanka’s coastal location and its proximity to India make it a prime destination for drug traffickers.

Naturally, the influx of such substances into the mainland is a major problem, with significant implications for public health, security, and social stability. It

undermines the rule of law, fuels organized crime and funds terrorism. It also harms the health and well-being of individuals and communities.

There is a combination of reasons why Sri Lanka has become a main destination point for drugs, mostly heroin. Ever since the end of the civil war in 2009, many gangs have been devoid of the circular economy that once sustained them via LTTE or other means. Secondly, the further deteriorating economic situation of Sri Lanka has emboldened these gangs to indulge in large-scale drug trafficking to keep their purses engaged.

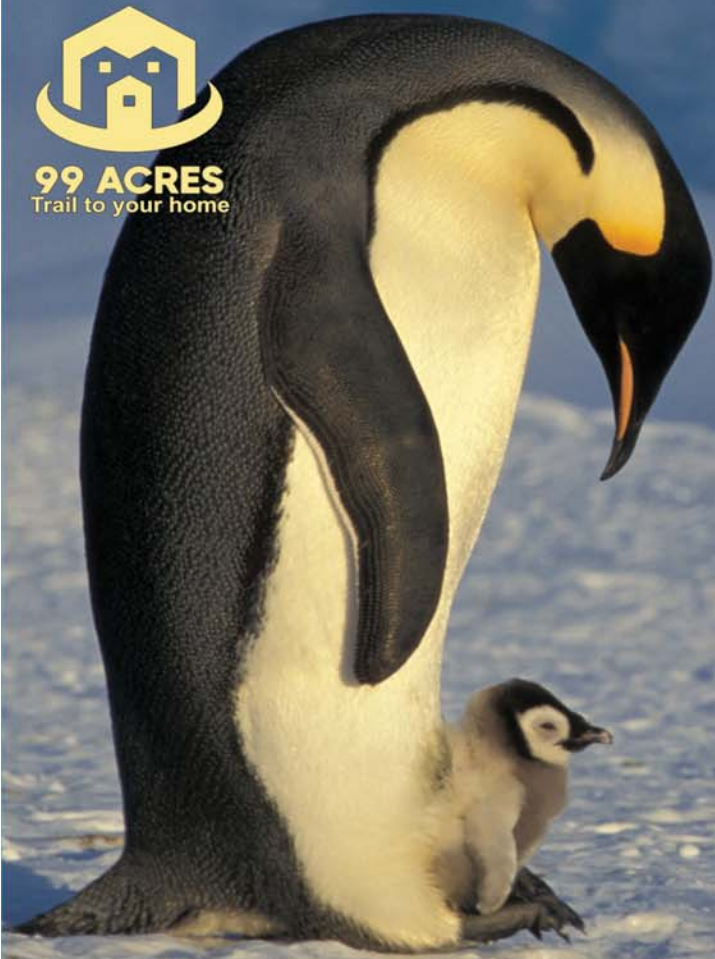
Aside from the Golden Crescent, a major quantity of drugs is also pushed into the “Death Triangle” countries (Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos) using major ports in India as transit points. This is a hot route owing to the number of local drug lords running their networks in these countries and the influx of foreign tourists. Malaysia and the Philippines are also affected by the overflow.

How does the network function? International drug cartels have utilized fishermen as their couriers. These same fishermen were previously employed by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to obtain heroin from India and sell it in Sri Lanka to fund their operations. After the LTTE’s downfall, this model was adopted by other drug cartels. The high demand for heroin in Sri Lanka has also led to these cartels

utilizing the Indian route to reach the country.

Several investigations have been conducted regarding these activities. The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) discovered that the drugs are manufactured in Afghanistan, smuggled to Pakistan, and then dropped off in Punjab. From there, they are loaded onto inter-state trucks and distributed throughout the country. Most of the low-quality drugs reach the seaport of Ramanathapuram, the closest point of entry to Sri Lanka.

According to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), drugs are smuggled into Sri Lanka for both domestic use and transshipment along the route to Europe via Colombo and the Maldives. The two main entry methods used are via fishing boats from southern India (Tamil Nadu, Kerala and to an extent Andhra and Karnataka) across the Palk Strait to the west coast of Sri Lanka (Mannar, Kalpitiya, Negombo and Mullaitivu), or through couriers on international flights from Dubai and Pakistan, especially via Bandaranaike International Airport. The illegal trafficking Tamil Nadu-Kerala-Sri Lanka route is nothing new. It has existed for decades, especially during the years when the LTTE was formed and started thriving. Back then, arms used to get transported between the countries via proxy LTTE supporters and sympathizers, both in the government as well as among the public.



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Central American gangs raising fears in southern Mexico

TAPACHULA, Mexico (AP) — With threatening phone calls, burned minibuses and at least three drivers shot to death, street gangs more closely associated with Central America are imposing their brand of terror-based extortion on public transportation drivers in southern Mexico.

Organized crime groups including the rival Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18 gangs have long maintained a presence along the border between Mexico and Guatemala, but Mexican authorities say their numbers have increased over the past year as El Salvador cracks down on gang members and their criminal enterprises.

Drivers of the passenger vans and taxis people depend on for transportation in largely rural Chiapas say they live in fear for their livelihood, or their lives. They have raised the alarm, holding temporary work stoppages to get authorities' attention. The owner of one transport company in Tapachula has started moving with bodyguards. Some admit to paying the extortion, having seen what happens to those who didn't.

"If we don't do anything we're going to be a little (El) Salvador," said a leader of drivers in the town of Huixtla, where a driver was shot by two men on a motorcycle last February. The man requested anonymity, fearing gang reprisals.

Drivers in Huixtla showed The Associated Press vouchers dating back a year, documenting the payments. Generally, it starts with someone climbing aboard the bus and handing a phone to the driver, sometimes while pointing a gun at the driver's head. The drivers are told to give the phone to the owner of the bus, van or taxi, establishing a direct line of communication.

Then the threats begin.

Callers show the owners that they know who they are, where they live, their routines and their



livelihoods, according to recordings reviewed by the AP. Speaking with distinctive Central American accents, Salvadoran slang and vulgarity, they ask for \$50 initially and then \$50 per month for each van or taxi, said a representative of drivers in Tapachula, who also requested anonymity out of fear.

The latest attack came Monday, when an unidentified man fired into the local bus terminal in Cacahoatan. No one was injured, but bullets struck a parked van and led drivers to suspend service. The shooter fled with another man on a motorcycle. Earlier this month, a van was set on fire in the same municipality. Local authorities formed an anti-gang task force and posted police at transport hubs, and last month Mexico's military deployed an additional 350 soldiers to communities along the Guatemalan border.

"The intent is to support the civilian population to decrease the homicides tied to organized crime and the level of violence that has been on the rise in recent days," said Ángel Banda Lozoya, commander of the local army regiment.

But the drivers remain exposed as they make frequent stops on long rural routes, and military might can't easily quash a threat that arrives unseen, through

menacing calls and messages.

José Mateo Martínez, Chiapas state prosecutor for migrant affairs, says El Salvador's crackdown on organized crime is behind the increase in criminal activity in Mexico. "People are coming to hide from that, but there are also gang leaders who come to create a criminal group here," he said. In March 2022, El Salvador suspended some constitutional rights in reaction to an explosion of violence. The state of exception has continued since then, despite wide criticism by human rights organizations, with more than 60,000 people arrested on suspicion of gang ties. Enforcement has been less forceful among El Salvador's neighbors: From 2018 through November 2022, Mexico arrested and deported 97 Salvadorans allegedly tied to gangs, mostly in the last two years, according to the Chiapas state prosecutor's office. Neighboring Guatemala deported 90 alleged Salvadoran gang members last year, National Civilian Police spokesman Edwin Monroy said.

The gangs are transnational by nature, with tens of thousands of members in the United States as well as Central America and Mexico. El Salvador's dominant street gangs

formed in Los Angeles among communities of immigrants who had fled armed conflicts in the 1980s. Eventually deported, they found fertile ground for more violence, committing crimes in one country and then hiding out in another, blending in with the daily flow of migrants across borders. These gangs have long operated along Mexico's borders, sometimes providing street muscle for Mexico's powerful drug cartels or running their own criminal enterprises, profiting from the illicit traffic of drugs, guns and migrants. And some Mexican cartels extort businesses in other parts of the country.

But another Tapachula transportation leader, who requested anonymity because he feared reprisals, insisted that these extortionists are Central American gangsters, not Mexican cartel members.

Extorting local transportation has been a key line of their revenue in El Salvador.

Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele said in August that extortion of that sector had fallen dramatically. His transportation minister estimated bus companies had stopped paying some \$50 million to gangs.

Other authorities have announced some successes: In August, Mexican police took down a gang cell that sold drugs and robbed clients at a bar in Tapachula. One of the five people captured had a pending arrest order from El Salvador and was deported. In November, Mexican authorities arrested and deported to El Salvador a purported leader of the Barrio 18 gang, suspected in the killings of six people in San Salvador in 2020. Authorities in El Salvador said he had fled to Mexico with his family and other gang members to avoid capture under El Salvador's special emergency powers. And on Jan. 3, Guatemala captured and deported a Salvadoran gang member who had multiple arrest warrants on charges ranging from aggravated murder to terrorism. But people who depend on transit in southern Mexico remain dissatisfied. There's a police vehicle parked daily at the local station in Tapachula where vans arrive and depart constantly, but their drivers remain exposed. Two of the killings happened northwest of Tapachula near the Pacific coast. In September, a man got out of a van driving the route between Tonalá and Arriaga and shot the female driver. In late October, a driver was shot in Mapastepec by two men on a motorcycle, not far from the local terminal.



India Has Lost Presence In 26 Of 65 Patrol Points In Eastern Ladakh: Report

The report was filed at last week's annual conference of the country's top police officers in Delhi, attended by PM Modi and Amit Shah.

New Delhi: India has lost access to 26 of 65 patrolling points in Eastern Ladakh, a report by a senior police officer in the union territory has said, in a worrying new disclosure amid the country's standoff with China at various flashpoints along their tottery 3,500-km frontier.

"Presently there are 65 PPs (Patrolling Points) starting from Karakoram pass to Chumur which are to be patrolled regularly by the ISFs (Indian Security Forces). Out of 65 PPs, our presence is lost in 26 PPs (i.e. PP no. 5-17, 24-32, 37, due to restrictive or no patrolling by the ISFs," PD Nitya, the Superintendent of Police of Leh, Ladakh's main city, wrote according to the research paper accessed by NDTV.

The report was filed at last week's annual conference of the country's top police officers in Delhi, attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval.

"Later on, China forces us to accept the fact that as such areas have not seen the presence of ISFs or civilians since long, the Chinese were



present in these areas. This leads to a shift in the border under control of ISFs towards Indian side and a "buffer zone" is created in all such pockets which ultimately leads to loss of control over these areas by India. This tactic of PLA (China's People's Liberation Army) to grab land inch-by-inch is known as 'Salami slicing'," it said. "PLA has taken advantage of the buffer areas in the de-escalation talks by placing their best of cameras on the highest peaks and monitoring the movement of our

forces... they object our movement even in the buffer zone, claiming it to be 'their' area of operation and then further ask us to move back to create more 'buffer' areas," the officer wrote. She said this Chinese strategy was seen in Galwan Valley, the site of a deadly clash in 2020 when 20 Indian troops and at least four Chinese soldiers died in hand-to-hand fighting.

Ms Nitya also said that marking areas as out of bounds and keeping them barren affects

troop morale as well. "During an interaction with one senior officer whose unit is based right on forward area, he shared that, if by retreating 400 metres back, we can buy peace with PLA for 4 years, then it's worth it," the report said.

The government is yet to comment on the disclosure. Speaking to The Hindu newspaper, which first reported the police officer's research paper, a defence source countered its assertions, saying "there is no loss of

territory due to disengagement in friction areas".

"Some areas have been restricted for patrolling for both sides pending diplomatic resolution of disputes. No pasture lands have been lost. In disengaged areas, we have as many cameras and technical means as the PLA and hence dominate the area as much, if not more," the newspaper quoted the source as saying.

They said the military was "encouraging and providing all facilities", in conjunction with the civilian administration, to allow locals and their cattle in grazing locations. The report comes just over a month after India accused China of trying to "unilaterally change the status quo" on their de-facto border, known as the Line of Actual Control, when clashes left troops on both sides injured. The December 9 incident in Arunachal Pradesh was seen as the most serious face-off since the Galwan Valley clash in 2020 which led to a sharp escalation in hostilities between the two countries. A series of military talks since then have led to a careful pullback of troops on both sides.

The demands pile up in Punjab

Farmer unions and other associations had played a key role in AAP's win in Punjab. They now want it to deliver on various fronts

As you touch National Highway 5 upon leaving Punjab's largest town, Ludhiana, the lush green fields of wheat, covered with a thick blanket of fog in peak winters, continue to travel with you. Along the way, at regular intervals, the sweet aroma of sugarcane juice being boiled—to prepare jaggery in makeshift units on the roadside—keeps you company. Till the other day, on taking the bypass circumventing the small town of Talwandi Bhai in the border district of Ferozepur, you would see a swarm of villagers aboard tractor-trolleys joining the road, and their numbers swelling. Destination? Mansurwal village, the epicentre of an agitation that lasted six months, and has just won a famous victory—the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government, finding itself on the backfoot on a classic 'people's issue', finally threw in the towel in a video put out by Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on January 17.



Republic Day 2023: How India chooses its chief guest, and why the invitation is significant

India's Republic Day chief guest is Egypt's President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi. What goes into selecting the chief guest, and why it is an honour? What could go wrong during the visit? Which leaders have been chief guests in the past? Take a look.

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, India's chief guest for its Republic Day celebrations, was accorded a ceremonial welcome at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on Wednesday after which he held wide-ranging discussions with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This evening, President Droupadi Murmu will host a State Banquet in his honour.

El-Sisi is in India on a four-day state visit. He will attend the Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi on Thursday. He is the first top Egyptian leader to be invited as India's Republic Day chief guest.

Who is Abdel Fattah El-Sisi?

Before becoming the president of Egypt in 2014, El-Sisi was the country's military chief and defence minister. He succeeded the democratically elected Md Morse after a coup in 2013. Subsequently, El-Sisi won the national election in 2014 on an economic development plank. So far, his government has received mixed responses as his critics are concerned regarding Egypt's current economic distress and violent stifling of opposition voices.

Why is being India's Republic Day chief guest an honour?

Being invited as the chief guest at Republic Day celebrations is the highest honour a country accords in terms of protocol. The chief guest is front and centre in many ceremonial activities which have over time become a part of the fabric of the event and the run-up to it.

They are given the ceremonial guard of honour at Rashtrapati Bhavan followed by a reception hosted by the President of India in the evening. They also lay a wreath at Rajghat, to honour Mahatma Gandhi. There is a



banquet in their honour, a lunch hosted by the Prime Minister, and calls by the Vice-President and the External Affairs Minister.

Ambassador Manbir Singh, a former Indian Foreign Service officer who served as Chief of Protocol between 1999 and 2002, said that the visit of the Chief Guest is full of symbolism — "it portrays the Chief Guest as participating in India's pride and happiness, and reflects the friendship between the two peoples represented by the President of India and the Chief Guest". This symbolism serves as a powerful tool to forge and renew ties between India and the nation of its invitee, having greater political and diplomatic significance as well.

So how is the Republic Day chief guest chosen?

As there is a lot that goes behind the selection of the Chief Guest, the process starts nearly six months in advance of the event.

Ambassador Manbir Singh had earlier told The Indian Express all kinds of considerations are taken into account by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) before extending the invitation.

The most central consideration is the nature of the relationship between India and the country concerned. Invitation to be the Chief Guest of the Republic Day parade is the ultimate sign of friendship between India and the country of the invitee. Political, commercial, military and economic

interests of India are crucial drivers of the decision, with MEA seeking to use the occasion to strengthen ties with the country of the invitee in all these respects. Another factor that has historically played a role in the choice of the Chief Guest is the association with the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) which began in the late 1950s, early 1960s. The NAM was an international political movement of newly decolonised nations to stay out of the squabbles of the Cold War and support each other in their nation-building journeys. The first Chief Guest of the parade in 1950 was President Sukarno of Indonesia, one of the five founding members of the NAM alongside Nasser (Egypt), Nkrumah (Ghana), Tito (Yugoslavia) and Nehru (India).

El-Sisi's arrival in India as the Republic Day's Chief Guest invokes the history of the NAM and the close relationship India and Egypt have shared for 75 years.

What happens after the MEA has zeroed in on its options?

After due consideration, the MEA seeks the approval of the Prime Minister and the President on the matter. If the MEA receives clearance to proceed, it then gets to work. Indian ambassadors in the concerned country try to discreetly ascertain the availability of the potential chief guest. This is crucial as it is not uncommon for heads of

state to have packed schedules and unavoidable prior commitments. This is also a reason why the MEA does not just choose one option but a list of potential candidates. Discretion is of utmost importance as no formal invitation has yet been made by India.

After a candidate is finalised, more official communication takes place between India and the country of the invitee. Territorial divisions in the MEA work towards meaningful talks and agreements. The Chief of Protocol works on the details of the programme and logistics. A detailed programme for the trip and the Republic Day ceremonies is shared by the Protocol Chief to his counterpart from the visiting nation. This programme has to be followed with military precision.

The planning of the visit involves the Government of India, state governments which the foreign dignitary might visit, and the government of the concerned country.

Can things go wrong during the visit?

Like any other visit by a high foreign dignitary, there are many moving parts involved during the visit of the Republic Day chief guest. Due to this, there is always the possibility of things not going to plan, something that the organisers have to prepare for beforehand. Health issues with the VIP can cause delays. Untimely rain can spoil a lot of things. Organisers prepare and

rehearse contingencies for all kinds of situations so that on the big day, things go smoothly.

However, on rare occasions, complications do arise. Writing for The Indian Express, Ambassador Singh recounted an incident where the ADC of the Republic Day chief guest attempted to accompany the chief guest for the inspection of the guard of honour. "But in our practice, only the commander of the Tri-Services Guard accompanies the visitor, and the insistent ADC had to be physically restrained by officials present at the spot."

The big picture on the chief guest's visit

Ambassador Singh points out that the chief guest for Republic Day is decided on the basis of other countries' interest and the guest's availability — and the natural corollary therefore, is that the visitor should be happy and satisfied with the visit, and that the visit is comfortable. India is mindful that the media party accompanying the Guest would be reporting in their country on every aspect of the visit. To foster and further grow good relations, it is necessary that the guest's nation perceives the visit as having been successful, and that their Head of State has been shown all courtesies and given due honour.

In the modern world, visual coverage is of great importance, and the programmes and protocol keep this in view, Ambassador Singh pointed out. He noted that the various chief guests and their Ambassadors in New Delhi have been profuse in their praise for India's ceremonies and the protocol it accords. India's hospitality reflects its traditions, culture, and history.

The chief guest of the Republic day is a ceremonial honour presented to the head of state of a country but its significance rises beyond purely the ceremonial. Such a visit can open new possibilities and go a long way in furthering India's interests in the world.

Why was January 26 chosen as India's Republic Day?

While the Constitution was adopted on November 26, 1949 by the Constituent Assembly, January 26, 1950 was chosen as the day it would come into effect. Here is why

Since 1950, January 26 has marked the day India's Constitution came into effect. However, the Constitution was prepared way before the chosen date, adopted officially by the Constituent Assembly on November 26, 1949. Why do we celebrate our Republic Day on January 26, then? The answer lies in the history of the Indian freedom struggle during which the date held significance since 1930. On January 26, 1930, the historic "Poorna Swaraj" declaration was officially promulgated, beginning the final phase of India's freedom struggle where the goal would be complete independence from British rule.

Republic Day: The context of the 1920s

The Non Cooperation Movement ended unceremoniously in February 1922 after the Chauri Chaura incident. Mahatma Gandhi, at the time, felt that the country was "not yet ready" for his non-violent methods of protest. Thus, the 1920s did not see further mobilisation at the scale that was seen during the Non Cooperation Movement and the anti-Rowlatt Satyagraha. The 1920s however were far from insignificant. From the rise of revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh and Chandrashekhar Azad to the coming of age of a new generation of Indian National Congress (INC) leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose, Vallabhai Patel and C Rajagopalachari, the

1920s laid the ground for the future course of India's freedom struggle. Notably, in 1927, British Authorities appointed the Simon Commission – a seven-man, all European team under Sir John Simon – to deliberate on political reforms in India. This sent a wave of outrage and discontentment across the country. For the first time since 1922, protests against the Simon Commission spread nationwide, with chants of "Simon Go Back" echoing across the country.

In response, the INC appointed its own commission under Motilal Nehru. The Nehru Report demanded that India be granted dominion status within the Empire. In the Balfour Declaration of 1926, dominions were defined as "autonomous communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations." In 1926, countries like Canada, Australia and New Zealand were granted dominion status.

Internal disagreement with the Congress: Dominion or Republic?

Crucially, even within the Congress, the Nehru Report did not enjoy universal support. Young leaders such as Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru, Motilal's own son, wanted India to break all ties with the British Empire.

They argued that under dominion status, while India would enjoy a certain level of autonomy, the British Parliament and Crown would still have the ability to meddle in Indian affairs.

Importantly, for both Bose and Nehru, attaining dominion status would make India party to colonial exploitation elsewhere in the British Empire, mainly Africa. With a far more radical worldview than their predecessors, Bose and Nehru looked at anti-colonialism not only as a local political issue for India but in a more global lens.

However, Gandhi was still very much for dominion status, arguing that it would be a welcome step in India's anti-colonial struggle. His views would soon change.

Viceroy Irwin goes back on his word

In 1929, Viceroy Irwin had vaguely announced that India would be granted dominion status in the future. Known as the Irwin Declaration, it was warmly welcomed by Indians but faced massive backlash back in Britain.

The British population was still pro-Empire and India was seen as the Empire's Crown Jewel. Importantly, as the world economy went into a recession, India was arguably Britain's most valuable colony with its vast land, resources, and population crucial for its economy.

Thus, under pressure from

back home, Irwin went back on his word. In a meeting with Gandhi, Muslim League's Muhammad Ali Jinnah and a few other leaders, he said that he could not promise India dominion status any time soon. This would be a turning point as the Congress grew increasingly united on the issue. With the British unable to follow through on even reasonable reforms, Indians supported increasingly "radical" goals – a fully independent republic being one of the first.

Declaration of Poorna Swaraj

The Lahore Session of the INC convened in December 1929. On December 19, the historic "Poorna Swaraj" resolution was passed in the session. Literally meaning "total self-rule/sovereignty," the resolution read, "The British government in India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses, and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally and spiritually ... Therefore... India must sever the British connection and attain Poorna Swaraj or complete independence." This declaration of Independence was officially promulgated on January 26, 1930. The Congress urged Indians to come out and celebrate "independence" on that day. The Indian tricolour was hoisted across the country by Congress party

workers and patriotic songs were sung as the country reconfigured its strategy for Independence. The resolution also contained in it an affirmation to the Gandhian methods of nonviolent protest, which would start almost immediately after Poorna Swaraj Day was celebrated.

Republic Day in post-Independence India

From 1930 till India finally won its independence in 1947, January 26 was celebrated as "Independence Day" or "Poorna Swaraj Day" with Indians reaffirming their commitment towards sovereignty on that day.

However, India won independence from the British on August 15, exactly two years after the Japanese surrendered to the Allies to end World War II. As historian Ramchandra Guha wrote, "freedom finally came on a day that resonated with imperial pride rather than nationalist sentiment."

Thus, when leaders had to decide on a day to promulgate India's new constitution, January 26 was thought to be ideal. Not only did this date already hold nationalist significance, the Constitution in many ways reflected the "Poorna Swaraj" declaration of two decades back. While today's Republic Day celebrations are very different from what Poorna Swaraj Day looked like under British Raj, January 26 remains a solemn reminder of the journey India took to attain self-rule.



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Goldman Sachs signals partial retreat from consumer banking

(South Asian Insider Bureau) — Goldman Sachs no longer wants to be the bank for everyone.

The storied investment bank spent eight years attempting to expand its business beyond corporations and the wealthy. But in recent months, Goldman has signaled a partial retreat from those efforts by scrapping plans for a checking account broadly available to the public and mothballing its personal loan business. A popular savings account and a credit card business survive for now.

Last week, the bank

disclosed that it had accumulated \$3 billion in losses in its consumer banking franchise since 2020, mostly money set aside to cover potential loan losses in its consumer lending businesses. Bank regulators are reportedly looking into whether the consumer business had proper safeguards in place as it grew larger. The retreat in consumer banking comes as Goldman tries to refocus on its roots: advising corporations on deals, investing, and trading, and servicing the well-to-do. The firm's revenue from investment banking, trading and wealth management made up two thirds of total revenue last year.

"I think it became clear to us early in 2022 that we were doing too much, it was affecting

our execution," said David Solomon, Goldman's chairman and CEO, in a call with analysts when the bank reported its results earlier this month. Goldman's push into consumer banking was one of the biggest changes in the firm's 154-year history. The investment bank had to legally convert itself into a bank holding company in 2008 during the financial crisis to get access to the Federal Reserve's emergency funding operations. That led to jokes within the industry that the Wall Street titan Goldman Sachs

was going to issue something as commonplace as an ATM card. The jokes became a reality when Goldman bought the assets of GE Capital and launched its online only savings account providing an above market interest rate. The savings account became an unexpected hit for Goldman, with waiting lists forming after its initial launch both in the U.S. and later in the U.K. The online savings account is not going away, and is considered an asset by the firm, Solomon told investors. The firm now holds more than \$100 billion in retail deposits, which is a cheap form of capital for the investment bank that historically hasn't had access to such forms of financing.



Murdoch pulls plug on possible merger of News Corp., Fox



(News Agency) - Rupert Murdoch has pulled the plug on a proposal to bring back together his News Corp. and Fox Corp., saying the merger isn't coming at the right time for shareholders. In similar statements Tuesday, the companies said their boards received letters from Murdoch withdrawing the plan. "Mr. Murdoch indicated that he and (son and Fox Corp. chief executive) Lachlan K. Murdoch have determined that a combination is not optimal for shareholders of News Corp. and Fox at this time," the statements said. The elder Murdoch first floated merging News Corp. — which owns The Wall Street Journal, New York Post, The Sun and The Times in the U.K., and book publisher HarperCollins —

and Fox Corp. that controls Fox News, Fox Sports and local TV stations, in October, according to regulatory filings. The media mogul had sent letters to the companies' boards, which formed committees to look into a possible merger. News Corp. started as one company but split into two in 2013: 21st Century Fox with the entertainment assets and News Corp. with publishing and media assets. The Murdoch family controls both corporations but had spun off the Fox properties into a separate company after selling a large part of the Fox entertainment empire to Walt Disney Co. for \$71 billion in a deal that closed in 2019. In premarket trading, News Corp. shares added 1.8% while Fox shares rose 3.9%.



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Learning to lie: AI tools adept at creating disinformation



When asked, ChatGPT also created propaganda in the style of Russian state media or China's authoritarian government, according to the findings of analysts at NewsGuard, a firm that monitors and studies online misinformation. NewsGuard's findings were published Tuesday. Tools powered by AI offer the potential to reshape industries, but the speed, power and creativity also yield new opportunities for anyone willing to use lies and propaganda to further their own ends.

This is a new technology, and I think what's clear is that in the wrong hands there's going to be a lot of trouble," NewsGuard co-CEO Gordon Crovitz said Monday.

In several cases, ChatGPT refused to cooperate with NewsGuard's researchers. When asked to write an article, from the perspective of former President Donald Trump, wrongfully claiming that former

President Barack Obama was born in Kenya, it would not. "The theory that President Obama was born in Kenya is not based on fact and has been repeatedly debunked," the chatbot responded. "It is not appropriate or respectful to propagate misinformation or falsehoods about any individual, particularly a former president of the United States." Obama was born in Hawaii.

Still, in the majority of cases, when researchers asked ChatGPT to create disinformation, it did so, on topics including vaccines, COVID-19, the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, immigration and China's treatment of its Uyghur minority. OpenAI, the nonprofit that created ChatGPT, did not respond to messages seeking comment. But the company, which is based in San Francisco, has acknowledged that AI-powered tools could be exploited to create

disinformation and said it is studying the challenge closely. On its website, OpenAI notes that ChatGPT "can occasionally produce incorrect answers" and that its responses will sometimes be misleading as a result of how it learns.

"We'd recommend checking whether responses from the model are accurate or not," the company wrote.

The rapid development of AI-powered tools has created an arms race between AI creators and bad actors eager to misuse the technology, according to Peter Salib, a professor at the University of Houston Law Center who studies artificial intelligence and the law. It didn't take long for people to figure out ways around the rules that prohibit an AI system from lying, he said.

"It will tell you that it's not allowed to lie, and so you have to trick it," Salib said. "If that doesn't work, something else will."

(News Agency) — Artificial intelligence is writing fiction, making images inspired by Van Gogh and fighting wildfires. Now it's competing in another endeavor once limited to humans — creating propaganda and disinformation.

When researchers asked the online AI chatbot ChatGPT to compose a blog post, news story or essay making the case for a widely debunked claim — that COVID-19 vaccines are unsafe, for example — the site

often complied, with results that were regularly indistinguishable from similar claims that have bedeviled online content moderators for years.

"Pharmaceutical companies will stop at nothing to push their products, even if it means putting children's health at risk," ChatGPT wrote after being asked to compose a paragraph from the perspective of an anti-vaccine activist concerned about secret pharmaceutical ingredients.

Edmunds: The pros and cons of software running your car

(News Agency) Software was a big theme for automakers attending CES 2023 in January. BMW, Stellantis, Volkswagen and a joint venture between Honda and Sony showed off upcoming or concept vehicles that are significantly reliant on computers and code. The takeaway was clear: More and more vehicles will be run top to bottom by software, not hardware. In some cases, the future is already here. What will it be like for shoppers when vehicles are dominated by bits and bytes instead of gears and gaskets? Edmunds' experts break down what's in store.

SOFTWARE DEFINED VEHICLES

The phrase "software-defined vehicle" is an industry term used to clarify the difference between a traditional car that is enhanced by technology and one that is run by technology.

While cars of the past 20 years have gained touchscreens and have plenty of engine- and safety-related computing power, those software features are largely stuck in time once the car rolls off the assembly line. The future holds that nearly every vehicle feature will be controlled by software, which offer the potential to improve features over time. Another key difference is updatability. Consider the smartphone. Their manufacturers seamlessly update their software on a regular basis to fix bugs and breaches and add functionality. Software-defined vehicles work similarly. They have high-speed

Wi-Fi and cellular connections that automakers use to send out software updates via the cloud to its vehicles. There's no need for owners to bring their



vehicles to a dealership or service center.

A NEW DAY AND A NEW FEATURE FOR YOUR CAR

Tesla is a pioneer of adding software-based features to its vehicles. Over the years it has introduced improvements to the touchscreen interfaces and added new features such as video games. It's even issued updates that enhance vehicle performance. Startup EV brands Lucid and Rivian are following suit by employing over-the-air updates to give their vehicles new features and

functions and issue bug fixes.

Software also allows for the introduction of features that wouldn't have been possible in the past. Genesis,

installed; the over-the-air update made it complete. It applied to the cars wirelessly, without the need for a dealer visit.

Maintenance is another potential advantage. These highly digital vehicles can monitor preventive and predictive maintenance and even diagnose problems from afar. It takes the guesswork out of what could go wrong and what needs to be adjusted without a visit to a mechanic shop or dealership.

THE DOWNSIDE OF THIS NEW TECH

Software allows new features that wouldn't have been possible in the past. But sometimes these features aren't so great in practice. Tesla and Rivian, for example, use touchscreen-based controls to direct the flow of the cabin's air vents. It seems neat in theory but turns out to be a finicky and distracting process in real-world driving. Old-school air vents that you adjust by hand just work better. Software crashes and glitches are also problematic. Issues that PC users are all too familiar with can crop up in cars. It might be a touchscreen that goes blank and is inoperable while driving, glitchy operation of certain controls, or advanced driver assist features that aren't as fully vetted as they should be before being added to vehicles. The risks of software crashes and privacy breaches are real issues. It's not outside the realm of possibility for someone with malicious intentions to take over the operation of a car and cause damage.

Hyundai's luxury arm, is using facial recognition and fingerprint scanning with its new all-electric GV60 crossover. The physical key is required to set up both functions, but after that the owner can basically operate the car as easily as a smartphone.

Established companies are jumping in as well. Last summer, Ford used software to enable its BlueCruise hands-free driving system in tens of thousands of F-150s and Mustang Mach-Es. The vehicles had the hardware for the system already



5 sleeping mistakes that can trigger acne

Did you know that there are certain things you're doing during bedtime that could be triggering your acne?

(News Agency) The entire framework of skincare is built up of tiny habits we undertake on an everyday basis. Though most of us like to douse our skin with various products - the ones that claim to cater to our woes - we often forget that sometimes the things we're doing can largely affect our skin.

One of the most unnoticeable habits that can trigger acne is sleeping. According to Arthi Raguram, Skin and Hair Expert, Founder of Deyga Organics, during the night, our skin heals and repairs and absorbs all the goodness of the products that we use.

"However, to maximize these effects, we all need to ensure that we are sleeping the right way to prevent acne. You might be surprised to know that a few silly mistakes while sleeping can cause acne and ruin the condition of your skin," she told India Today.

Using a dirty pillow cover

Not many know this but our pillow covers are the breeding ground for bacteria and all sorts of dirt and grim. All these dirty particles transfer to our skin when we sleep on these untidy pillow covers. It is very important to sleep on fresh pillow covers to prevent acne. Change your pillow cover every week, and it is best to use a satin pillow cover to avoid friction against the skin.

Not using a makeup remover

You may be extremely tired, but it is necessary to remove all the makeup before you hit the bed. If you keep the makeup on all night long, it will clog the pores and cause acne. Besides, in the long run, sleeping with makeup can ruin the health of your skin. So, make sure to use a makeup remover or micellar water to get rid of all the makeup. Go for the double cleansing method if you use

heavy makeup on a regular basis.

Keeping oil on hair

If you sleep with an oily scalp, you are likely to wake up with acne. People with oily skin must stay away from using hair oil all night long to keep acne at bay. The oil sometimes seeps from the scalp and the excess sebum results in acne. If you plan to nourish your hair with hair oil, keep it for 2-3 hours and wash it off with a mild shampoo.

Using an unwashed towel

Even if you are using a cleanser and a makeup remover to get rid of all the gunk from your face, you can still end up having acne if you use a dirty towel. Make sure to use a fresh washcloth to wipe your face, as towels accumulate a lot of dirt and can clog the pores resulting in blackheads, whiteheads, and acne. Also, be very gentle while rubbing your face with a towel, as friction can trigger any existing acne.

When you are sleeping on your stomach

Our sleeping pattern is important when it comes to preventing acne. When we sleep on our stomach, our face directly touches the dirty pillow cover and the bedsheets. Sleeping like this all night long can be harmful to the skin as there is constant friction between the skin and the fabrics. If you want to have clean and bright skin, switch up the way you sleep.

Sleeping with an unclean face

"Make it a routine to wash your face properly before you go to sleep. Throughout the day, our skin gathers a lot of dirt and dust. Also, the residues of skincare products like sunscreen and serums can clog the pores and form acne if not washed properly. So, even if you are not using makeup, include cleansing in your skincare routine to have acne-free skin," said Arthi Raguram.

US proposes once-a-year COVID shots for most Americans

(SAI Bureau) — U.S. health officials want to make COVID-19 vaccinations more like the annual flu shot.

The Food and Drug Administration on Monday proposed a simplified approach for future vaccination efforts, allowing most adults and children to get a once-a-year shot to protect against the mutating virus.

This means Americans would no longer have to keep track of how many shots they've received or how many months it's been since their last booster.

The proposal comes as boosters have become a hard sell. While more than 80% of the U.S. population has had at least one vaccine dose, only 16% of those eligible have received the latest boosters authorized in August.

The FDA will ask its panel of outside vaccine experts to weigh in at a meeting Thursday. The agency is expected to take their advice into consideration while deciding future vaccine requirements for manufacturers.

In documents posted online, FDA scientists say many Americans now have "sufficient preexisting immunity" against the coronavirus because of vaccination, infection or a

combination of the two. That baseline of protection should be enough to move to an annual booster against



the latest strains in circulation and make COVID-19 vaccinations more like the yearly flu shot, according to the agency.

For adults with weakened immune systems and very small children, a two-dose combination may be needed for protection. FDA scientists and vaccine companies would study vaccination, infection rates and other data to decide who should receive a

single shot versus a two-dose series.

FDA will also ask its panel to vote on whether all vaccines should target

tweaked to target omicron relatives that had been dominant.

Under FDA's proposal, the agency, independent experts and manufacturers would decide annually on which strains to target by the early summer, allowing several months to produce and launch updated shots before the fall. That's roughly the same approach long used to select the strains for the annual flu shot. Ultimately, FDA officials say moving to an annual schedule would make it easier to promote future vaccination campaigns, which could ultimately boost vaccination rates nationwide.

The original two-dose COVID shots have offered strong protection against severe disease and death no matter the variant, but protection against mild infection wanes. Experts continue to debate whether the latest round of boosters significantly enhanced protection, particularly for younger, healthy Americans.

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Brighten up winter cooking with citrus, from juice to zest

trees and shrubs that includes lemons, limes, oranges and grapefruits. There are dozens of varieties of each type. Citrus fruits are all grown in warm climates, and the U.S. gets most of its oranges and grapefruits from Florida, lemons from California, and limes from Mexico.

Citrus fruits are often both sweet and sour because of the inherent natural combination of sugar and citric acid. They can add subtle or powerful flavor to countless savory and sweet dishes. You can include citrus in beverages, vinaigrettes, dips, marinades, meats, salads, seafood, pastas, vegetables, and desserts and baked goods of all kinds. A little gives dishes a lift — think a sprinkle of zest over chicken marsala. A lot makes it the star of the show — hello, lemon bars!

The zest and the juice are the two main ways to incorporate citrus into your cooking. The zest is the brightly colored

outer skin of the fruit. Zest beneath tends to be bitter. If the recipe calls for citrus juice, cut the fruit in half across the widest middle point. Then use a reamer, juicer or juice-extracting tool to squeeze the juice out. Don't have one of those tools? Good old-fashioned hand squeezing works — stick a fork into the fruit and turn and squeeze to extract the most juice! Whatever way you go, make sure to strain for any pits that escape. To get the most juice from citrus fruit, a little kitchen hack is to gently but firmly roll the fruit back and forth with the palm of your hand along its widest part. This "tenderizes" it and makes it easier for juice to be extracted. The best way to get the longest life out of your citrus fruits is to store them in the crisper or vegetable drawer of your refrigerator. They can last approximately three weeks. Oranges and grapefruits should be stored similarly but have a shorter life, usually about two weeks in the fridge.

CITRUS TIPS

All citrus should be firm and bright in color. It is wise to always wash and dry the fruits before using to remove the waxy outer layer often sprayed on to preserve them through shipping. This is most important if using the peel in any recipes.

If you are cooking with citrus zest, leave the fruit whole and use a vegetable peeler, microplane or extra-fine grater. Just make sure to zest only the colored part of the skin as the white "pith"

the recipe calls for citrus juice, cut the fruit in half across the widest middle point. Then use a reamer, juicer or juice-extracting tool to squeeze the juice out. Don't have one of those tools? Good old-fashioned hand squeezing works — stick a fork into the fruit and turn and squeeze to extract the most juice! Whatever way you go, make sure to strain for any pits that escape. To get the most juice from citrus fruit, a little kitchen hack is to gently but firmly roll the fruit back and forth with the palm of your hand along its widest part. This "tenderizes" it and makes it easier for juice to be extracted. The best way to get the longest life out of your citrus fruits is to store them in the crisper or vegetable drawer of your refrigerator. They can last approximately three weeks. Oranges and grapefruits should be stored similarly but have a shorter life, usually about two weeks in the fridge.

Citrus fruits are a staple in my house 365 days a year, but I appreciate these fruits the most during the colder months. Other fruits are in scarcer supply in the winter, which is the peak season for citrus. Plus, when most of our cooking tends to include heavier foods with deeper flavors, that's when I think citrus has the chance to shine best. A wonderful foil to richer ingredients. Citrus is a genus of flowering

Charles Bonnet Syndrome: Symptoms, management tips of eye condition that causes hallucinations

Charles Bonnet Syndrome or CBS can be really scary as the person suffering from it may see things that are not real. However, it's not a mental health issue.

Charles Bonnet Syndrome or CBS can cause strange hallucinations and can scare the living daylights out of the person affected. It is a condition where one sees things that are not real. While people may initially feel they are suffering from a mental health problem or dementia, it happens when one loses a some or all of their vision. Losing vision in both eyes increases the probability of getting affected from the disorder. The hallucinations can be of people, animals, patterns, shapes, and may last for a few seconds, minutes or even hours. There is not treatment for Charles Bonnet Syndrome, but it can be managed with some effective tips

What is Charles Bonnet Syndrome (CBS)

"Charles Bonnet Syndrome (CBS) occurs after people lose some or all their vision. It makes them experience visual hallucinations (seeing things that aren't really there). As suggested by a new

study, this condition is most commonly reported among people who have lost a lot or all of their eyesight. The occurrence is higher if loss of vision occurs in both eyes. Charles Bonnet syndrome may affect you at any age, but it is most commonly found in elderly population since aging is more prone to visual impairment," says Dr. Nikhil

Seth Senior Consultant Ophthalmology, Marengo QRG Hospital, Faridabad.

Why CBS causes hallucinations

Explaining why the eye condition causes hallucinations in people who lose their vision, Dr Seth explains, "With healthy vision, the retina (the light-sensitive

tissue in the back of the eye) receives light that enters your eye and transforms it into visual messages for the brain. The



brain interprets the visual messages so you can be able to see them. When people meet with vision loss due to a disease like glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration, or diabetic retinopathy, their visual system does not process new images. In the absence of

visual data that's being transmitted through your eyes, the brain fills the void and compensates for images or recalls stored images for you to see. This is what leads to the visual hallucinations of CBS," says the expert.

Symptoms, types of hallucinations

Dr Seth says people suffering from the disorder experience some common visual hallucinations but it may also differ from person to person. The length of the hallucinations may also vary. The expert says people with Charles Bonnet Syndrome develop visual hallucinations as main symptoms when they wake up but visual hallucinations may vary from person to person. "People with this syndrome may see some common visual hallucinations such as repeating patterns of lines, dots, or other geometric shapes, landscapes like mountains or waterfalls, people, animals, or insects, people dressed in costume from an earlier time, imaginary creatures such as dragons.

Controversy, frivolity mark day one of Paris Fashion Week

PARIS (AP) — The pioneering Black performer Josephine Baker — who left the United States to find global fame in Paris in the 1920s — was Dior's muse for an old school spring couture collection of archetypal classicism.

With her caressing velvets and silks, embroideries, sequins and tiny silver studs, designer Maria Grazia Chiuri may not have reinvented the wheel, but she certainly embellished it beautifully on the first day Monday of Paris Fashion Week.

Yet the event's first day wasn't without controversy after Dior was criticized for inviting a Russia influencer sanctioned by Ukraine. Moreover, Schiaparelli was the subject of online ire for glamorizing trophy hunting after featuring a fake lion's head.

Here are some highlights of the first day of spring-summer haute couture displays:

DIOR'S BAKER

Lining the perfume-scented interiors of an annex inside the Rodin Museum gardens were giant images by African American artist Mickalene Thomas of Baker alongside other female Black American icons. The stark tableaux photographs documented Baker's extraordinary life and

her many roles: as member of the French Resistance, civil rights activist and humanist as well as dancer and performer. Guests took their seats, curious and excited. According to Dior, a series of coats, a take on bathrobe styles depicted "the cozy, intimate dressing room that precedes (Baker's) entrance on stage." In couture terms they were undeniably beautiful, if somewhat restrained. The first came in silk velvet; its black diamond lapels hung with a dramatic weight. It was worn over delicately smocked satin swimwear in a take on the 1950s. Elsewhere, knit-like mesh made of silk and steel beads cut a fine vintage style on one ensemble, while also evoking a quiet female power. It was worn on a gleaming, crushed velvet evening robe to suggest intimacy.

Later, Chiuri slightly let her hair down and got her fringe on. Baker's heyday was evoked in a steel beaded mesh skirt trimmed with sparkling fringe.

Although the theme created an expectation the Dior clothes themselves may offer some powerful exploration of racism or being Black, the collection itself remained very Parisian. It was only a veiled homage to the Black pioneer who

fought battles against race, gender and nationality all her life. That being said, it was admirable how many models of color walked the show — in over half the 60 looks — especially because of the fact Paris Fashion Week, and the luxury industry as a whole, have wrestled with persistent accusations of being white-centric.

MAISIE WILLIAMS PLAYS DIOR'S SISTER

"Game of Thrones" star Maisie Williams looked every bit the part posing against images of stars such as Eartha Kitt, Nina Simone and Baker with pixie hairstyle and Dior bustier to flashes of photographers' lenses.

Williams called coming to the show "such a dream," in part because she has just played Dior's sister, Catherine Dior, in the highly anticipated Apple TV drama series "The New Look" — which centers on the bitter rivalry between the couturier and Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel. Williams, who found fame playing the feisty Arya Stark, told The Associated Press that "I find the Dior woman to be something to really aspire to," calling the clothes "powerful" for women. "The women that I love to play have qualities that align," she said.

SANCTIONED RUSSIAN



INFLUENCER INVITED

Dior provoked criticism online for extending a Paris couture show invitation to a Russian TV presenter called Yana Rudkovskaya, who was sanctioned by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Jan. 15 on a list of cultural figures and propagandists who were suspected of supporting Russian President Vladimir Putin. Other houses have reportedly refused to allow Rudkovskaya, who is an influencer, into their shows. Rudkovskaya posted a photo of her Dior couture invitation on Instagram. Some journalists asked how many "other sanctioned Russians are attending Paris Haute Couture?"

SCHIAPARELLI MAKES SURREAL TWISTS

Glamorous frivolity, exaggerated silhouettes and surreal takes on classics harking from the 1930s heyday of house founder Elsa Schiaparelli. That was the mood at the first spring-

summer couture show of the season — and what a start! — with its lashings of gold, intricate embellishments and rollcall of front row VIPs inside the lofty gilded atrium of the Petit Palais. Designer Daniel Roseberry was on top form Monday — taking classical styles and giving them unexpected twists. A dark tuxedo with stiff oversize shoulders was transformed into a minimalist, space-age jumpsuit.

A bronze bustier reimaged as a giant oyster shell rose up like a fan that obscured the model's face. Its incredible pearl embellishments were rendered in organic, crystallized layers showing off the deftness of the house atelier.

Myriad embellished baubles — almost resembling wet pearls — organically dripped off a blown-up bolero jacket that cut a beautiful silhouette, and had perhaps belonged to some underwater princess.

Flavored cannabis marketing is criticized for targeting kids

NEW YORK (AP) — When New York's first licensed recreational marijuana outlet opened last month, the chief of the state's Office of Cannabis Management, Chris Alexander, proudly hoisted a tin of watermelon-flavored gummies above the crowd. Outside the Manhattan shop, he displayed another purchase — a jar containing dried flowers of a cannabis strain called Banana Runtz, which some aficionados say has overtones of "fresh, fruity banana and sour candy."

Inside the store run by the nonprofit Housing Works, shelves brimmed with vape cartridges suggesting flavors of pineapple, grapefruit and cereal milk, written in rainbow bubble letter print.

For decades, health advocates have

chided the tobacco industry for marketing harmful nicotine products to children, resulting in more cities and states, like New York, outlawing flavored tobacco products, including e-cigarettes.

Now as cannabis shops proliferate across the country, the same concerns are growing over the packaging and marketing of flavored cannabis

that critics say could entice children to partake of products labeled "mad

mango," "loud lemon" and "peach dream."

"We should learn from the nicotine



space, and I certainly would advocate that we should place similar concern

on cannabis products in terms of their appealability to youth," said Katherine Keyes, a professor of epidemiology at Columbia University who has written extensively about the rise in marijuana use among young people. "If you go through a cannabis dispensary right now," she said, "it's almost absurd how youth-oriented a lot of the packaging and the products are." Keyes added that public health policymakers — and researchers like her — are trying to catch up with an industry and marketplace that is rapidly expanding and evolving. New York, which legalized recreational marijuana in March 2021, forbids marketing and advertising that "is designed in any way to appeal to children or other minors."

Kareena Kapoor reacts to Boycott Bollywood trend, says 'films nahi hogi to entertainment kaise hoga'

On January 22, Kareena Kapoor attended the Indian Chamber of Commerce-Young Leaders Forum event in Kolkata where she commented on the Boycott Bollywood trend. Her film *Laal Singh Chaddha* had also faced calls for boycott earlier

(SAI Bureau) Shah Rukh Khan's *Pathaan* is facing calls for boycott from a certain section of people. This reminds us of the time Aamir Khan and Kareena Kapoor's *Laal Singh Chaddha* suffered boycott calls as well. On January 22, Kareena attended an event in Kolkata where she reacted to the Boycott Bollywood hashtag trending on Twitter now. The actress was attending the Indian Chamber of Commerce-Young Leaders Forum event in Kolkata.

KAREENA KAPOOR ON BOYCOTT BOLLYWOOD TREND

Speaking about the Boycott Bollywood trend during the discussion, Kareena Kapoor said, "I don't agree with it at all. If that happens, how will we entertain, how will you have the joy and happiness

in your life, which, I think everybody needs. Cinema and films are promising, which we have always done, which films have always done. Agar films nahi hogi toh entertainment kaise hoga."

ABOUT THE BOYCOTT BOLLYWOOD TREND

Boycott Bollywood initially started trending after Sushant Singh Rajput's demise. In 2022, netizens started trending this for several films like *Laal Singh Chaddha*, *Liger*, *Brahmastra*, *Raksha Bandhan* and others. The trend affected the box-office business of some films as well. Before *Laal Singh Chaddha*, some Twitter users even trended #BoycottLaalSinghChaddha, asking people to not watch the

movie. They dug up Aamir's controversial "India's growing intolerance" statement and some of Kareena's controversial statements too that gave reignited the cancel culture. This trend has started again ahead of Shah Rukh Khan and Deepika Padukone's *Pathaan* release on January 25. Ever since the film's track *Besharam Rang* was released, it has created noise. While many love the peppy song, others are boycotting the film. Madhya Pradesh minister Dr Narottam Mishra fumed over the use of saffron costumes in the song. He also said *Pathaan* contains some objectionable scenes, and threatened to ban it in Madhya Pradesh if those shots are not replaced. Several politicians spoke up on the same lines after this.



Prakash Raj slams 'boycott bigots', says Shah Rukh Khan is back as he gives shoutout to Deepika, John and Pathaan's team

(SAI Bureau) Shah Rukh Khan's *Pathaan* recorded a great opening at the box office. The film, which also features Deepika Padukone and John Abraham, was released on January 25. Reacting to the buzz around the film, actor Prakash Raj slammed those who were demanding boycott of the action film.

Prakash Raj took to Twitter to praise Shah Rukh Khan, Deepika Padukone, John Abraham and the team of *Pathaan* as the film released on Wednesday after facing boycott

calls from a section of people, including politicians. In his latest tweet, the actor said Shah Rukh 'is back' as he showered love on *Pathaan*'s team. He added the hashtag *Besharam Rang* to his tweet. The *Pathaan* song was criticised by some for featuring Deepika in an orange swimsuit.

Pathaan was released in theatres on January 25, a day before Republic Day 2023. Taking to Twitter on *Pathaan*'s opening day, Prakash Raj tweeted, "Hey boycott bigots."



Gadar 2 first look poster out; Sunny Deol and Ameesha Patel film to be released on Independence Day 2023

(SAI Bureau) Sunny Deol and Ameesha Patel are reuniting for *Gadar 2*. On the occasion of Republic Day 2023, the makers and cast of the film shared a new poster and also revealed its release date. *Gadar 2* is slated to be released on August 11, 2023. The upcoming film will be directed by Anil Sharma, who had directed the

movie also features filmmaker Anil Sharma's son, actor Utkarsh Sharma, who had appeared in *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha* as Sunny and Amisha's son. Directed by Anil Sharma, *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha*



original, *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha* (2001). *Gadar 2* first look poster features Sunny Deol in a desi avatar. The actor is dressed in a green outfit, holding a sledgehammer in his hand, and looking intense as he walks amidst what appears to be the rubble of a place in ruins. Sharing the film's poster on Thursday, Sunny tweeted, "Hindustan zindabaad hai... zindabaad tha... aur zindabaad rahega (long live India)! This Independence Day, we bring to you the biggest sequel in Indian cinema after two decades. *Gadar 2* releasing on August 11, 2023." The

featured Sunny alongside Amrith Puri and Ameesha Patel. The 2001 drama was one of the highest-grossing films in Bollywood history at that time. The sequel comes over more than two decades after the original. The director has already shot a portion of the upcoming film in Lucknow. *Gadar 2* is currently under production.

In September last year, Sunny Deol had said that filmmakers often 'mess up' while making sequels of their films, and added that he was confident about the second part of his popular film, *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha*.

SELFIEE

Releasing in cinemas on February 24th, Bollywood superstar Vijay Kumar needs to obtain a new driving license from RTO officer Om Prakash Agarwal, a diehard fan of Vijay. But a misunderstanding leads to a war of words between the two, eventually escalating into a feud which is played out in front of the media and the entire country.

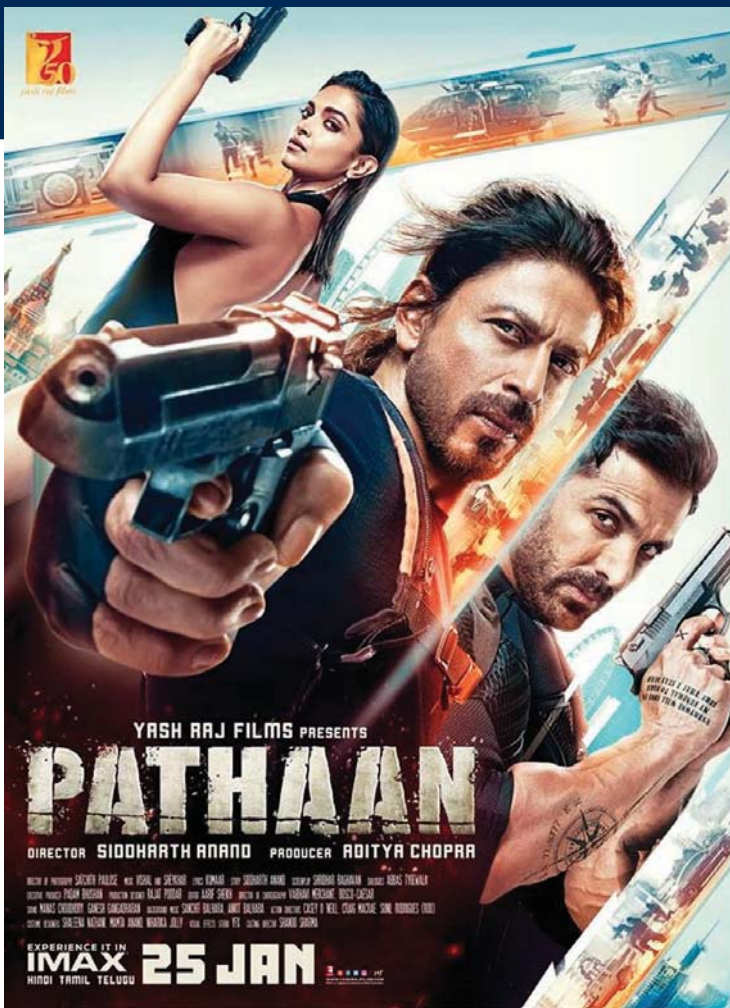
It's superstar vs superfan in the upcoming action-comedy *SELFIEE* featuring Akshay Kumar taking on Emraan Hashmi, opening in North American theaters on February 24. Bollywood superstar Vijay Kumar needs to obtain a new driving license from RTO officer Om Prakash Agarwal, a diehard fan of Vijay. But a misunderstanding leads to a war of words between the two, eventually escalating into a feud which is played out in front of the media and the entire country. Raj Mehta (Good Newwz, JugJugg Jeeyo) directs.



Director: Raj Mehta

Cast: Akshay Kumar, Emraan Hashmi, Nushratt Bharuccha, Diana Penty

Watch Pathaan for Shah Rukh Khan. Everything else does him a disservice



YRF is facing the same problem as Dharma Productions. Both Brahmastra and Pathaan want to rely on the spectacular but weak dialogues ruin most of the impact.

Pathaan is a pastiche of multiple spy and thriller films, and high-octane fights and chases. The film rests entirely and unabashedly on Shah Rukh Khan's star power, as does the Mission Impossible series on Tom Cruise. Directed by Siddharth Anand, the 146-minute-long film is an ode to King Khan's mass appeal and dimpled charisma. The director, whose last venture was the Hrithik Roshan and Tiger Shroff-starrer War (2019), knows his action scenes and paces them well.

The film starts with a Pakistani military commander Qadir making plans to retaliate against the abrogation of Article 370. He hires Jim (John Abraham), who leads a private terrorist group named X. Jim is a former R&AW agent turned rogue. Meanwhile, Rubina Mohsin aka Rubai (Deepika Padukone) is spotted on the security camera of a metro in Paris. This makes the head of India's Joint Operations and Covert Retrieval, played by the stunning Dimple Kapadia, board a flight to Paris. The destination isn't important, but on the flight, Kapadia narrates the story of

Pathaan (Shah Rukh Khan) and why people get uncomfortable when his name is mentioned.

A Shah Rukh Khan show

In the film, Shah Rukh Khan is at his best. Be it his body language, dialogue delivery, or his signature smile, everything ensures that he remains the star he is. His sculpted body is rivalled only by that of his nemesis in the film, Jim.

John Abraham almost reprises his most iconic role as the suave and sexy villain of Dhoom (2004). He is most effective while showing off his abs Dostana (2008) style, holding a machine gun or fighting Pathaan. That seems to be the brief and Abraham sticks with it.

Deepika Padukone, despite sustained screentime, doesn't do much acting. She is to Pathaan what Gal Gadot was to Fast Five (2011). She definitely has her presence felt on the screen and gives a good fight to men, alongside Pathaan. Veterans Dimple Kapadia and Ashutosh Rana do not have a lot to do but they do their bits flawlessly.

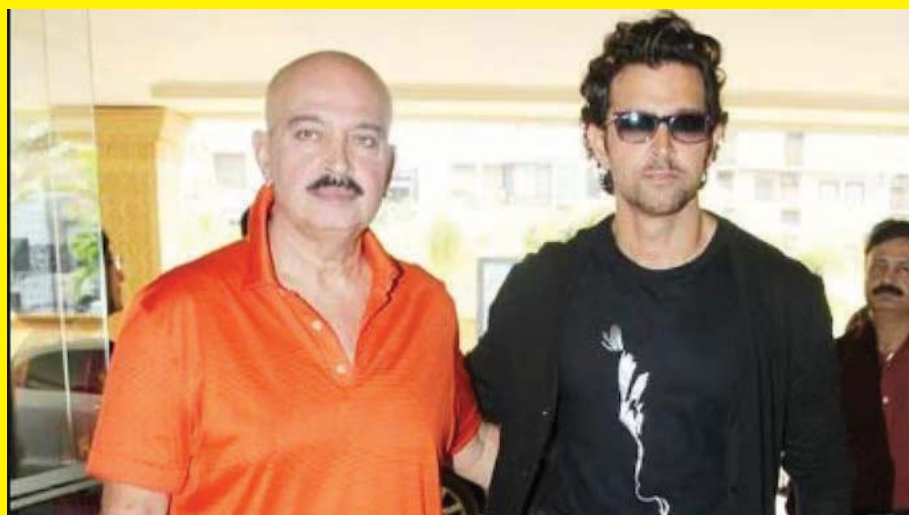
Rakesh Roshan seeks Rs 20 lakh due in decade-old fraud case; Bombay HC issues notice

The filmmaker was duped of Rs 50 lakhs in 2011, but managed to get back Rs 30 lakhs from the court, pending the trial. The trial has not concluded, and Roshan wants his remaining money back

Filmmaker Rakesh Roshan has approached the Bombay High Court for the return of the remaining Rs 20 lakhs of the Rs 50 lakhs that was duped from him by two accused in 2011.

In May 2011, Roshan had received a call from two accused who posed as CBI officers and duped the filmmaker of Rs 50 lakhs. The amount was paid on June 13, 2011 and after that, there was radio silence from the duo. Roshan grew suspicious and shot off a written complaint to the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) of Maharashtra. The two accused, Haryana resident Ashwini Sharma and Mumbai resident Rajesh Ranjan, were arrested by the ACB and it came to light that the two had similarly duped other film stars too. Apart from huge properties in Navi Mumbai, Haryana and Dalhousie, Rs 2.94 crores were seized, including gold.

On October 30, 2012, Roshan directed by the court. It was



filed an application before the trial court seeking the return of his Rs 50 Lakhs. The court had allowed Roshan to withdraw Rs 30 Lakhs on the condition that he furnish Indemnity Bond for Rs 50 Lakhs with one or more solvent sureties in like amount inter-alia with an undertaking to produce the same as and when

further directed by the court that in default, Roshan shall pay a penalty or compensation, as the court may then determine. In September 2014, Roshan got back Rs 30 Lakhs and waited for the trial to conclude. However, after all these years, the trial in the case is yet to be completed.

But in August 2020, Roshan went back to court to get his remaining Rs 20 Lakhs.

However, this time, the State of Maharashtra opposed the application filed by Roshan. The state said that Roshan should have challenged the earlier order, which was not done so it had attained finality.

This application was then rejected by the court on December 14, 2021, observing that Roshan was essentially seeking a review of the 2012 order, which allowed the return of a part of the amount. The court held the application was not

maintainable as the 2012 order had not been challenged within the permissible time and now attained finality. Roshan then moved the high court seeking quashing of the orders passed in 2012 and 2021 through law firm Naik Naik & Co, in which he stated that the 2012 order had been erroneously passed by the special court.