

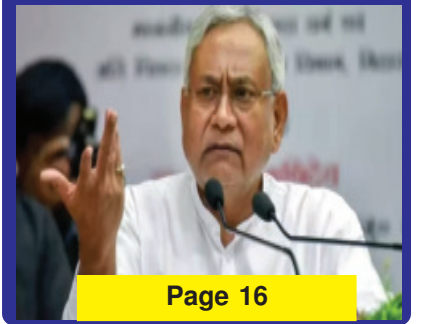
The South Asian

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Nitish Kumar's Impending Exit From INDIA



Page 16

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Ram Mandir in Ayodhya is the Biggest 'Political' and Civilisational Victory for Hindus in Centuries



Story on Page 16

Has The World Become Too Much for America?



Story on Page 15



THE INDIAN RUPEE AS INTERNATIONAL CURRENCY

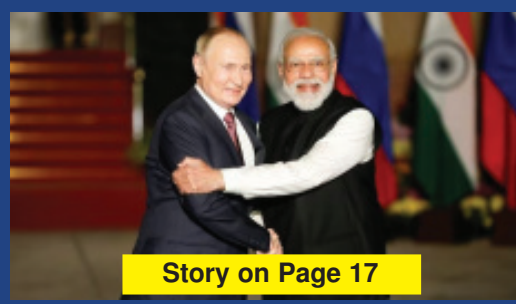
Story on Page 17

Tech layoffs balloon in January as Wall Street rally lifts Alphabet, Meta, Microsoft to records



Story on Page 15

Putin praises India's independent foreign policy, warns West not to 'play games'



Story on Page 17

For 'miracle cure', parents submerge son with cancer in Ganges repeatedly; child dies



Superstition claimed the life of a five-year-old in Haridwar. The parents of the child, who was terminally ill, submerged him in the Ganges again and again, hoping for a "miracle cure". The family ended up killing the child. The incident took place in Haridwar's Har Ki Pauri. The family from Delhi arrived at Har Ki Pauri with their 5-year-old child on Wednesday. The parents of the child were accompanied by another family member.

Story on Page 17

WORKING CAPITAL R' US



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New York Times Square is illuminated with Ram Lala And Grand Ram Mandir Ayodhya



Braving the subzero temperature in New York large number of crowd gathered at New York's Iconic Times Square to Celebrate the Pran Pratishtha of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya.

Mr Jagdish Sewhani President of the American India Public Affairs Committee said that 500 years of wait finally has come to end . Dream come true for billion plus Hindus all over the world. What we were waiting for more than 500 yrs I never imagined that this will happen in my lifetime but thanks to our prime minister modi ji that this dream of all Hindus all over the world has come true .

Mr Sewhani further said that New York has become Rammay / immersed in the spirit of Prabhu Ram.

This is a Historical event not of the decade / century but for last 5 centuries.

Under the Visionary leadership of PM bharat is not only growing economically

but also culturally and spiritually said Mr



Sewhani.

Mr Sewhani further said that We are so

lucky and so blessed that we are watching Pran Pratishtha of Ram Lala and Bhavya Ramji Mandir in Ayodhya in our lifetime , something like this I have never seen in my life .

Sabh Ko Bahut Babur Badhai

Look at this excitement/ energy in NY Times Square the most iconic place on the world, the in freezing temperature so many Ram Bhakta have come to watch Ram Lala ji and Ayodhya Temple in Manhattan .Where Ram Lala and Ayodhya Temple are illuminated on Huge screens ,thousands of miles away from Ayodhya. Today we are celebrating Diwali in NewYork said Mr Sewhani.

I distinctly remember many many years back in Ramjanmabhumi Andolan we used to say here in New York Saugandh Ram kee Khate hain Mandir Vaheen Banayenge and thanks to our PM that dream has come true . Modi hai to

mumkin hai

Golden period of bharat has started from now. This is the beginning of New Era for Bharat said Mr Sewhani .

Today here in America top fortune 500 co have CEOs of indian origin ,1/3rd if Silicon Valley engineers are Indians

Bharat is unstoppable under the leadership of Narendra bhai Modi ji .

Mr Sewhani Further said that In coming years Bharat will not only be Economical super power but also Spiritual power of the world .

Whole world will come to Bharat for Direction .

This is new bharat : true world leader under the visionary Leadership of Narendrabhai Modi ji .

Sadhvi Bhagwati , Amba Sharma and few others also spoke at this Grand Celebrations of Pran Pratishtha of Bhagwan Ram.

Canada Panel Seeks to Probe 'India Interference' In Its Elections Amid Frayed Diplomatic Ties

(Sai Bureau)A panel probing alleged foreign interference in Canada asked the Trudeau government on Wednesday to share information about possible meddling by India in its elections.

The commission was set up by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government in September to conduct an inquiry into foreign meddling after reports of alleged Chinese attempts to influence elections. In a statement on Wednesday, the commission said that it had requested the Canadian government to provide documents "relating to alleged interference by India related to the 2019 and 2021 elections."

"The commission will also examine the flow of information within the federal government in relation to these issues, evaluate the actions taken in response, assess the federal government's capacity to detect, deter, and counter



foreign interference, and make recommendations on these issues," the commission said, according to Reuters. The commission, led by Quebec Judge

Marie-Josée Hogue, is charged with conducting an independent public inquiry into allegations of attempted foreign interference in Canadian affairs

by China, Russia and others. It is expected to complete an interim report by May 3 and deliver its final report by the end of this year.INDIA AND CANADA

Ties between India and Canada have frayed in recent months over Canada's allegations linking Indian agents to the murder of Sikh separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in British Columbia last year. India has rejected that allegation and asked Canada to furnish proof. Canadian authorities have yet to charge anyone with the killing.

Last month, High Commissioner Sanjay Verma said India's approach right from the beginning was collaborative and wanted to deal with the concerns raised by Canada through diplomatic channels. "What we have been saying right from the beginning is that unless you share something specific and relevant with us, what do we look into? How do we help you?"

Modi's repeated Thrissur visits trigger speculation that next PM may be from Kerala

(News Agency)-Two visits by Prime Minister Narendra Modi early this month to Thrissur has set tongues wagging here with speculators saying that may be the next PM is from Kerala. With Rahul Gandhi all set to seek re-election from Kerala's Wayanad, the murmur on PM Modi contesting from Thrissur has started to gain momentum.

Incidentally, Modi had first reached Thrissur in the first week of January to attend an all women mammoth rally and then came again last week to attend the wedding of actor Suresh Gopi's daughter.

After the wedding, he went to a nearby Ram temple and then returned to Kochi.

The speculation of Modi contesting from Thrissur is also being linked to the luncheon meeting that he had with the Christian bishops and other



prominent leaders from the community.

Incidentally, the Catholic Church at Thrissur is a very influential factor and has an important say when it comes to electoral politics, as it was legendary Congress leader K. Karunakaran who used the Church very effectively, though he lost the 1996 Lok Sabha

polls by a slender margin of 1,480 votes.

Another matter of speculation that has now started taking the rounds, that Modi might be the BJP candidate from Thrissur is being seen from the incidents during and after the latest visits of Modi to Thrissur.

Leader of Opposition V.D. Satheesan, in response to a

question that Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan had received and gave a send off to PM Modi when he arrived last week at the Kochi airport, said, "It is a courtesy to do that when the Prime Minister comes visiting to a state. There is nothing wrong with that, but I am sure all of you would have seen the manner in which Vijayan was paying obeisance to Modi.

"Lot of things are often said about Vijayan and his tough demeanor, but those who have seen the way he was standing before Modi, eyebrows have been raised. Am sure all would have seen Vijayan's uncharacteristic body language when he greeted and bid Modi goodbye at the airport,". Another point taking the rounds is that after the visit of PM Modi, the student protests by the SFI against Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan have also

vanished. The address by Khan to the Kerala Assembly on Thursday has also been cleared, raising eyebrows of what the Congress party often says that "there is a secret pact between Modi and Vijayan".

It was Congress Lok Sabha member K. Muraleedharan who first sounded that "Vijayan will go to any extent to make Modi happy and he wouldn't even mind to ditch the CPI which contests the Thrissur Lok Sabha seat".

Congress presently holds the Thrissur seat which was won by T.N. Prathapan and the CPI candidate came second trailing by around 90,000 votes, followed by actor Suresh Gopi.

With PM Modi expected to return to Kerala again soon, the speculation will grow that Modi will contest from Thrissur.s

Delhi HC directs Google to suspend misleading Starbucks Franchise Google Forms



(News Agency)-- The Delhi High Court has issued a directive asking Google to suspend URLs associated with various Google Forms inviting the public to apply for a 'Starbucks Franchise'. Justice Anish Dayal said that Starbucks, which has filed the suit, is authorised to file an affidavit listing similar URLs of Google Forms. Google is then expected to suspend those URLs upon receiving the information. Starbucks, which has gone against unidentified entities falsely claiming to be its franchisees, reiterated that an interim injunction had been granted in favour of Starbucks in April of the previous year. The fresh application aims to restrain impostors who were posing as 'Starbucks Franchise' through Google Forms. Notably, Starbucks,

the multinational coffeehouse chain, does not operate on a franchise model in India. "Counsel for the plaintiffs, therefore, states that the imposters are seeking information from general public to apply for Starbucks Franchise opportunities, which as noted above does not exist in India," the court noted. These fraudulent forms, with headings such as 'Starbucks franchise', misled individuals into believing they could apply for Starbucks franchises in India. The court affirmed Starbucks' entitlement to relief, citing concerns about the misuse of Google Forms by impostors to gather information related to a nonexistent Starbucks franchise in India.

Additionally, the court stressed the

impropriety of seeking private information and data from the general public through such deceptive means.

It noted: "In the opinion of this Court, the plaintiffs would be entitled to the relief they seek in this application, on account of not only that these Google Forms are being posted by imposters in order to elicit information relating to Starbucks franchise (which do not exist in India) as well as seeking private information and data from the general public, which cannot be countenanced." Justice Dayal concluded that if Google has reservations about specific URLs, they can respond to Starbucks, and if necessary, approach the court for further adjudication and relief.

Nitish thanks PM Modi for Bharat Ratna conferred on Karpoori Thakur



(News Agency)- Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi after the central government conferred Bharat Ratna to Bihar's two-times chief minister Karpoori Thakur. "It is a matter of great pleasure to give the country's highest honor 'Bharat Ratna' to former Chief Minister and great socialist leader

Late Karpuri Thakur ji. This is a right decision of the Central Government," the Chief Minister said.

The Chief Minister said that this highest honor given to Late

Karpoori Thakur on his 100th birth anniversary will create positive sentiments among the Dalits, deprived and neglected sections. "We have always been demanding to give 'Bharat Ratna' to Late Karpoori Thakur ji. The years old demand has been fulfilled today. Thanks to Honorable Prime Minister Narendra Modi for this," the Chief Minister said. JD-U is organising a rally in veterinary college ground in Patna on Wednesday.

Nitish Kumar has always believed that Karpoori Thakur is his political mentor.

India's business activity surges to 4-month high at start of 2024: HSBC survey

(News Agency)-India's business activity surged to a four-month high in January with both manufacturing and services recording a robust growth, according to a private sector survey released on Wednesday. HSBC's flash India Composite Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), compiled by S&P Global, went up to 61.0 in Jan this year, up from December's final reading of 58.5, the highest since September 2023.

The index has now been above the 50-mark that separates expansion from contraction for the 30th consecutive month.

Service providers noted a stronger increase in activity than manufacturers, but growth accelerated in both cases keeping the country on course as the world's fastest growing major economy, according to the report.

The manufacturing PMI rose to 56.9 in January from 54.9 last month. Activity in the dominant services industry also accelerated at a sharper rate, with its PMI rising to 61.2 this month from 59.0 in December. "Survey participants mainly attributed the upturn to favourable economic conditions, demand strength and ongoing



improvements in new sales increased at a sharp pace in January, and one that Both manufacturing firms and business inflows. Aggregate

their services counterparts recorded quicker rates of expansion in new orders," the report states.

The rise in total new business inflows was supported by the most marked increase in international orders since last October. However, the report also notes that although overall output prices rose at a slower rate in January, input costs increased at the sharpest pace since August 2023, which reflects signs of rising price pressures that could emerge ahead.

Had demanded Bharat Ratna for Karpoori Thakur from PM last year: Tejashwi

(News Agency)- A day after the Narendra Modi Government conferred the Bharat Ratna posthumously on Karpoori Thakur, Bihar's Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav said a longstanding demand had been fulfilled on the 100 birth anniversary of the socialist leader. "When Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to Patna for the inauguration of the new

building of Bihar Vidhan Sabha last year, we raised this demand before him. Now, it has been achieved and it is a matter of great happiness. Karpoori Thakur was a great well-wisher of Dalits, the oppressed and the poor," Yadav said.

"However, the way it was given to Karpoori Thakur, after we

conducted the caste survey in Bihar and the figures of the population emerged in public domain, shows the central government got scared and announced the Bharat Ratna for him," Yadav said. When asked about such an announcement

being made just before the Lok Sabha elections, Tejashwi Yadav said that every Samajwadi leader demanded Bharat Ratna for Karpoori Thakur, whether it was Nitish Kumar or Lalu Prasad Yadav. "I personally believe that the Bharat Ratna should also be conferred on Dalit leader Kanshi Ram. It will be better for us all," Yadav said.



Six Assam Rifles jawans in Manipur injured as soldier fires at them before shooting self to death



Sajik Tampak area in Chandel district along India-Myanmar border in the wee hours of Wednesday.

Meanwhile, a Manipur Police statement said that in light of the ongoing ethnic strife in the state, it is important to share the details of

(News Agency)-At least six Assam Rifles personnel were injured after a soldier in their camp opened fire at them before shooting himself to death in Manipur's Chandel district along India-Myanmar border on Wednesday, police said. A police official in Imphal said that a jawan of the Assam Rifles opened fire on his colleagues injuring six of them and later he shot himself and subsequently succumbed to his injuries. All injured have been rushed to Military hospital for further medical treatment and are reported to be stable now. The incident took place in remote

the incident transparently to dispel any potential rumours and avoid any speculation. "This unfortunate incident should not be correlated with ongoing conflict, given the fact that none of the injured are from Manipur. Investigation into the incident has been ordered to ascertain the facts," the statement said. It said that all Assam Rifles battalions have mixed class composition including those belonging to various communities from Manipur. "All personnel have been staying and operating together despite the polarisation of society to maintain peace and stability in Manipur."

Minor girl commits suicide in B'loru, jumps off from 29th floor

(News Agency)-In a shocking incident, a 12-year-old committed suicide after jumping off from 29th floor of an apartment in Bengaluru in wee hours of Wednesday.

Police said that the victim lived with her parents in the flat near Begur locality in Bengaluru. "The girl committed suicide at 5 a.m.," police said. Police said that the girl was studying in 6th standard and her father is a software engineer and her mother is a homemaker. "The girl was found in the hall of



the flat at 4.30 a.m. Her mother had noticed her and asked her why she was up so early. "The girl did not answer her mother but said that she would go back to sleep again. After seeing her daughter returning, the mother

had also gone back to her room," police said.

Police said that after listening to a loud thud sound in the premises the

security personnel found the blood soaked body of the girl and informed the association management. "More details are yet to emerge regarding the incident. We are investigating the case," police said.

HanuMan' team meets UP CM Yogi Adityanath

(News Agency)-HanuMan' filmmaker Prasanth Varma and the film's lead actor Teja Sajja had a significant meeting with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath at his office. The meeting was an opportunity for Varma to discuss the film's impact, especially among the younger audience, and how it has successfully incorporated elements of Indian itihisas (history) into a captivating superhero narrative.

Varma said: "Meeting Yogi Ji was truly an honour and an inspiring moment for me. His encouragement for 'HanuMan' and recognition of our novel efforts to tell an offbeat story that merges superhero dynamics with Indian itihisas was a pat on the back.

"He discussed with us how movies help preserve our cultural legacy. It's heartening to have a leader who values the fusion of tradition and innovation in



cinema, motivating us to continue breaking new ground."

Teja Sajja, the actor portraying the superhero character in the film, expressed his gratitude after the meeting

with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

He shared, "Meeting Yogi Ji was an absolute honour, and it filled me with immense pride to discuss 'HanuMan' and

its impact on our culture. Playing the lead in 'HanuMan' was both a challenge and a privilege."

'HanuMan' that started off as a superhero film has become a cultural phenomenon with audiences worldwide, breaking away from conventional superhero tropes. Varma, driven by passion, has created India's first homegrown superhero, a character that has resonated with fans across the nation.

The film became a gateway for audiences to delve into the rich tapestry of Indian scriptures and mythology.

'HanuMan' is presented by RKD Studios, while PrimeShow Entertainment (Niranjan Reddy) is the producer of the film. Venkat Kumar Jetty is the line producer of the film.

Madras HC quashes two cases against AIADMK leader CVe Shanmugam



(News Agency)-- The Madras High Court on Wednesday quashed two cases against CVe Shanmugam, the former Tamil Nadu Minister and a senior leader of the AIADMK. Justice Anand Venkatesh of Madras High Court quashed the two cases against him while refusing to quash two others filed by the state government against the AIADMK leader.

Senior counsel Vijay Narayanan appeared for the AIADMK leader and argued that the DMK government had filed false cases against his client for having exposed the mismanagement and malfunctioning of the state.

Shanmugam had in his prayer informed the court that he had brought to public domain the DMK government's mismanagement and had pointed out and criticized the state government for allowing industries to work round the clock. He said that he had also come out heavily against the free flow of ganja in the state as also sexual harassment of women, especially students. He said that he had spoken against these in a public programme organised by the AIADMK and that he believed that it was his duty as a leader from the opposition side.

The counsel for the former Minister

argued that his client had not defamed the Chief Minister as a person but criticised the government under the Chief Minister on its misdemeanours.

However, the Advocate General P.S. Raman appeared before the court and stated that CVe Shanmugam had in fact directly defamed the Chief Minister. The A-G also produced a tape of the speech of the AIADMK leader. Justice Anand Venkatesh heard the cases and allowed the plea of CVe Shanmugam and also quashed two cases while refusing to quash the other two.

Delhi turns into 'gas chamber', air quality in 'severe' category

(News Agency)- There seems to be no relief from deteriorating air quality despite the Commission for Air Quality Management's (CAQM) Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) stage-II in force as the air quality index (AQI) dipped to 'severe' levels at several stations on Wednesday morning. The experts attribute the current weather conditions being responsible for the bad air quality and turning the national capital into a "gas chamber".

The Anand Vihar station was in the 'severe' category at 8 a.m. with PM 2.5 at 411 and PM 10 at 385 or 'very poor', while the NO plunged to 87, and CO reached 66, both in 'satisfactory' category, as per the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

However, at 10 a.m. the PM 2.5 slightly



improved at Anand Vihar station and the 'very poor' category.

reached 385 and PM 10 at 363, both in Dwarka Sector 8 witnessed PM2.5

levels at 437, and PM10 was at 403, both falling under the 'severe' category while CO was at 96, in satisfactory levels.

However, the air quality at the Indira Gandhi International Airport T3 area was 'very poor' with PM 2.5 recorded at 359 and PM 10 at 358, while the CO plummeted at 68, under 'satisfactory' category.

At Okhla Phase-II station, the PM 2.5 plunged to 411 and PM 10 was at 403, both under 'severe' category while the NO2 spiked to 78, and CO was at 62, though both in satisfactory levels. Notably, the AQI between zero and 50 is considered 'good'; 51 and 100 'satisfactory'; 101 and 200 'moderate'; 201 and 300 'poor'; 301 and 400 'very poor'; and 401 and 500 'severe'.

'Exercise Desert Knight': India, France & UAE conduct joint air drills



(News Agency)- Indian Air Force, French Air and Space Force (FASF) and United Arab Emirates (UAE) Air Force have conducted joint air drills called 'Exercise Desert Knight'.

The Ministry of Defence said that F-16, Su-30 MKI (Sukhoi), MiG 29, Jaguar, AWACS, C-130-J, Air to Air Refueller and Rafale fighter aircrafts were part of this air defence exercise.

"The exercise in Indian FIR was conducted over the Arabian Sea, with IAF aircraft operating from bases within India," the ministry said.

The Ministry of Defence informed on Wednesday that on 23 Jan 24, the Indian Air Force (IAF) conducted Exercise Desert Knight along with French Air and Space Force (FASF) and United Arab Emirates (UAE) Air Force.

"While the French participation included the Rafale fighter aircraft and a Multi Role Tanker Transport, the UAE Air Force fielded the F-16. These aircraft operated from the Al Dhafra air base in the UAE," the ministry said.

It said that the main focus of 'Exercise Desert Knight' was on enhancing synergy and interoperability between the three air forces.

The Ministry of Defence said that the interactions during the exercise facilitated the exchange of operational knowledge, experiences and best practices amongst the participants.

"Such exercises are indicative of the growing diplomatic and military interactions in the region, apart from showcasing the prowess of the IAF," the ministry said.

Delhi schoolboy's death after assault by seniors shrouded in mystery

(News Agency)- Mystery shrouds the death of a 12-year-old boy, who died nine days after being allegedly assaulted by some senior students of a government school in north Delhi. The family of the Class 6 student in Delhi government school in Shastri Nagar, has pointed fingers at what they claim to be medical negligence by a private doctor who initially treated the boy. According to Sharma, his son went to school on January 11 and was reportedly assaulted by some students from Classes 9 and 10 as he exited the washroom.

Upon returning home with visible injuries, the boy informed his parents about the incident. Sharma said that he rushed his son to a government hospital in northwest Delhi, where initial medical attention was provided. However, the orthopaedic department, crucial for addressing the severity of the injuries, was reportedly closed at the time.

Facing this setback, Sharma sought help from a private doctor in Rohini Sector-7, who prescribed medications for the injured child. As days passed, the boy's condition worsened, and he reportedly stopped eating.



Concerned about his deteriorating health, the family returned to the government hospital on January 20, where, tragically, the young boy succumbed to his injuries during treatment. In a heart-wrenching revelation, Sharma claimed that he personally visited

the school to inquire about the assault. According to him, two students corroborated his son's account, confirming that he was indeed attacked by some senior students. However, they were unable to identify the assailants.

Meanwhile, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (north) Manoj Kumar Meena said that the post-mortem by a board of doctors is being carried out to ascertain the cause of death.

"Legal action would be taken as per the autopsy report," said the DCP.

Earlier, the Delhi government on Tuesday also ordered an inquiry in the incident.

"Delhi government's heart goes out to the bereaving family, who lost their child in such a tragic incident. The alleged incident took place outside of the school's premises, as parents sought the CCTV footage that has been ascertained," said an official. "A prompt inquiry has been ordered already in the matter soliciting a report from the committee within two days and a formal report from the Head of the School is to be submitted by today itself. The Delhi government is actively taking essential measures, including counseling students, to foster a positive state of mind and prevent any potential unforeseen incidents," said the official.

ED officials enter Shahjahan's Sandeshkhali residence, marathon raid on

(News Agency)- Exactly 19 days after the attack on ED and CAPF officials at Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal, the central agency sleuths on Wednesday entered the residence of absconding Trinamool Congress leader and mastermind of that attack Sheikh Shahjahan after breaking open the lock of main entrance gate there. However, the preparation on Wednesday for conducting the raid and search operations were much more elaborate than what it was on January 5 when the attack took place.

On Wednesday morning, a team of seven ED officials escorted by 125 central

armed forces personnel reached the residence of Shahjahan at Sandeshkhali.



The entire team came in a convoy of 25

vehicles which had a combination of SUVs and buses.

First the armed CAPF personnel took position in the area around the residence of the Trinamool Congress leader to prevent loitering or gathering of the local people as it happened earlier. A group of jawans also took position in a local market named after Shahjahan, from where the initial gathering was arranged last time on the day of attack.

The CAPF jawans were sporting metal helmets, special jackets. Besides

automatic firearms, they were also carting baton-charges and tear gas shells. Later, a team of state police also reached the spot.

After the CAPF personnel had completed sanitisation of the entire area around the residence, the ED sleuths broke open the lock at the entrance gate and entered the house.

Till the time, the report was filed, the ED sleuths are searching each and every corner of the residence for clues relating to the multi-crore ration distribution case in West Bengal. Sources said that the raid and search operations are expected to continue till late night.

From Cultural to Spiritual Nationalism: PM Modi's Ayodhya Speech Marks Paradigm Shift

By: Arun Anand

"Ram is not fire, Ram is energy. Ram is not a dispute, Ram is the solution. Ram is not only ours, Ram is for everyone. Ram is not just the present, Ram is eternal." This statement by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his speech after the consecration of Ram Lalla at Ayodhya on January 22 marks the beginning of India's journey towards spiritual nationalism.

In the 1980s and 90s, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Hindu nationalists talked primarily about 'cultural nationalism' being their goal. The concept of cultural nationalism was identified with the concept of 'Hindutva' propounded by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. LK Advani, a BJP stalwart, and a leading figure of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement was the most vociferous proponent of cultural nationalism. And it became a buzzword in the public discourse primarily because of him. The quest to build a Ram Temple at Ayodhya was also equated with the ideological framework of cultural nationalism. However, Modi's speech at Ayodhya on January 22 has taken this concept to the next level of 'spiritual nationalism' as the prime minister laid it out, "this is not just a divine temple. It is a temple of India's vision, philosophy, and direction. It is a temple of national consciousness in the form of Ram. Ram is the faith of India, the foundation of India. Ram is the thought of India, the law of India. Ram is the consciousness of India, the contemplation of India. Ram is the prestige of India, the might of India. Ram is the flow, Ram is the influence. Ram is the norm, and Ram is the policy. Ram is the permanence, and Ram is the continuity. Ram is vast, Ram is expansive. Ram is all-encompassing, Ram is the universe, the soul of the universe. And therefore, when Ram is established, its impact lasts not just for years or centuries. Its impact is for thousands of years." Most significantly, Modi demonstrated how to practice spiritual nationalism not merely by his words but by his actions too, as he said, "Yesterday, with the blessings of Lord Shri Ram, I was at Arichal Munai, the starting point of Ram Setu in Dhanushkodi. The moment when Lord Ram set out to cross the sea was a moment that changed the course of time. It was my humble attempt to feel the essence of that emotional moment. There, I offered floral homage. There, a belief awakened within me that just as the course of time had changed then, similarly, the course of time will change again now and will move in an auspicious direction."

"During my 11-day fast and ritual, I attempted to touch the places where Lord Ram's feet had trodden. Whether it be the Panchavati Dham in Nashik, the sacred Tripuray Temple in Kerala,

Lepakshi in Andhra Pradesh, Ranganathaswamy Temple in Srirangam, Shri Ramanathaswamy Temple in Rameshwaram, or Dhanushkodi. I am fortunate that with this same sacred sentiment, I had the opportunity to journey from the sea to Saryu. I have had the privilege of listening to the Ramayana in various languages across the corners of the country, and especially over the last 11 days," PM Modi further said. Modi's Ayodhya speech is a watershed movement in the BJP's ideological journey also as it seems to be moving closer to Sri Aurobindo's concept of spiritual nationalism which is much beyond the earlier framework of cultural nationalism and has the potential to be the fulcrum of Bharat's global positioning. In fact, the move towards spiritual nationalism has been in offing for quite some time. In ancient Hindu scriptures, it has been mentioned that there are seven cities/towns which are the fountainhead of spirituality in India.

'Kashi, Kanchi, Maya, Ayodhya, Avantika Mathura, Dwaravati chaiva saptaita mokshadayika'

The Modi government has worked hard to revive most of these spiritual centres. Ayodhya is a major milestone and the most high-profile among them. With the consecration of Ram Lalla and the way it was celebrated in the whole country on the appeal of the prime minister, it is clear that Bharat's journey towards spiritual nationalism, which started under the leadership of PM Modi after 2014, has taken a decisive direction on January 22 at Ayodhya. The very fact that thought leaders from all walks of society gathered for the consecration is a testament to the fact that the society at large is in consonance with Modi as far as 'spiritual nationalism' is concerned. This will have a global impact too as Bharat matters in the world now and Modi gave an indication of Bharat's emerging global view within the larger framework of spiritual nationalism as he explained how Shri Ram embodies the idea of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. Modi said, "Today, as the whole world is connected with the life-infusing ceremony of the Ram temple, we are witnessing the omnipresence of Ram. The celebration in India is echoed in many countries. Today's celebration in Ayodhya has also become a festival of those global traditions of the Ramayana. This establishment of Ram Lalla is also an embodiment of the idea of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam". "Today in Ayodhya, not just the idol of Shri Ram has been infused with life. It is also the life-infusion of unbreakable faith in Indian culture as represented by Shri Ram. It is the life-infusion of human values and supreme ideals. The entire world needs these values and ideals today.

Republic Day: Centralisation Of Power And The Federal Principles Of Indian Constitution

India's brand of federalism remains to be unique. Without any mention in the Constitution, which was adopted on January 26, 1950, the country's polity follows a federal structure that is supposed to apportion the legislative power between the Centre and the States. Describing India's federal structure, Ambedkar remarked that when times are normal India is a federal structure but during emergencies, states assume a unitary character.

However, unlike what happens in a classical federal structure, where states are vested with more power than the Centre, it's the other way around in India. The legislative powers assigned to the Union, in our federal scheme however, have primacy over the powers given to the states. And with this, the current times are increasingly seeing a threat to the federal structure of the government with restricted devolution of Central powers.

The quarrels and negotiations of everyday politics have been increasingly challenging the Constitutional rules which stand to destabilise any union between the states and the Centre. Rather, the recent rulings of the Central government have deepened the divide between the Centre and the State, while the Opposition even struggles to see any union among each other.

Despite being described as a 'Unity in Diversity', India has witnessed a growing obsession with 'oneness' of everything --- the idea of 'One Nation, One Election', 'One Nation, One Tax', 'One Nation, One Ration Card', the push for 'Union Civil Code', propagating a 'double-engine sarkar' of the BJP, and the implemented GST and so on --- disregarding and undermining the very essence of the country's federal structure eroding the fiscal and, therefore, economic

policy space of State governments.

Though B R Ambedkar, the chairperson of the drafting committee, was cautious while replacing the word 'Federation' with 'Union' to invoke the 'indestructible' unity among differences and diversity, his next-generation compatriots started looking for the elusive 'oneness'.

In 'Is One Nation, One Election A Threat To Federalism?', Abhik Bhattacharya explains how 'One Nation, One Election', the recent-most debated policy of the government is an attempt to undermine the federal principles that form the bedrock of the basic structure of the Constitution.

Supported by opinions of constitutional experts, federalism scholars and political leaders, the article argues that federalism may become the biggest casualty of the 'oneness' which is already straining the relationship between the states and the Centre.

Next, comes the debate of UCC. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which has largely pushed for the immediate common civil code, views it as an instrument of mitigating the 'differences' between communities (Hindu, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Scheduled Castes and Tribes) by yielding to one common code or law for governance. In 'Uniform Civil Code In India: Uniformity Or Conformity?', professor Tanvir Aejaz says that for the BJP, uniformity is not the priority but it seeks conformity under the umbrage of 'one nation, one law' and demands for the UCC to be predicated on Hindu laws. In this high-pitch cacophony of UCC, he asks whether the common civil code does justice to a plurinational and multi-religious nation like India, it may not be the best option.



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The Guardian view on Modi in Ayodhya: an alarming new era for India

Monday's inauguration of the new Ram Mandir in Ayodhya by India's prime minister, Narendra Modi, was a moment decades in the making. Yet it also came too early. Despite the grand spectacle of the ceremony, with celebrities, tycoons and politicians in attendance, the temple is still incomplete. There is an obvious explanation for this rushed endeavour, and it is not religious. India will go to the polls in late spring and while Mr Modi is all but guaranteed to win a third term, he wants a large majority for his Bharatiya Janata party (BJP). Mr Modi rode to power, and has entrenched it, on the back of rightwing Hindu nationalism.

On Monday he went beyond the exploitation of ethno-religious sentiment. He did not merely attend the ceremony; he carried out rituals. Religion and authoritarianism have proceeded hand-in-hand in recent years. But few strongmen have melded the political and religious to quite this degree. As his biographer, Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, observed, the event cast him as "the high priest of Hinduism", disquieting some religious



leaders. The constitution still calls India a secular republic. But the facts on the ground suggest otherwise. Mr Modi's supporters treat the idea of secularism as a foreign imposition on a grand civilisation, and as camouflage for the mistreatment and suppression of Hindus. In reality it is their aggressive chauvinism that has cost Indian society dearly, and it is Muslims who are treated as second-class citizens. Human Rights Watch warned

last year of the government's "systematic discrimination and stigmatisation of religious and other minorities, particularly Muslims" and of increasing violence by BJP supporters against targeted groups. The new temple is not just a symbol of these political struggles, but part of them. It stands on the site of the 16th-century Babri Masjid mosque, built by the Mughal emperor Babur, and razed in 1992 by a Hindu nationalist mob

who believed a temple previously stood there; Ayodhya is said to be the birthplace of the deity Lord Ram. The BJP had inflamed sentiment and BJP politicians stood and watched as thousands tore down the mosque. Its destruction sparked communal violence in which more than 2,000 people died. Then, in 2019, the supreme court ruled that the demolition of the mosque had been illegal – but that nonetheless the site belonged to

Hindus, allowing the new building's construction.

Ayodhya's story was central to the BJP's rise. But while Congress and other opposition parties boycotted the ceremony, they have failed to mount an effective challenge to Mr Modi's dangerous majoritarianism and have at times succumbed to its dominance. The message is not simply of Hindu triumph, but of grievance and revenge. "We must not bow down any more. We must not sit down any more," Mr Modi said on Monday.

Despite the lengthy history of the Ayodhya dispute, he described the consecration as "the beginning of a new era". It is not merely that thousands more mosques are being targeted nor that Muslims in Ayodhya and beyond feel more vulnerable than ever. Many believe that the prime minister will rewrite the constitution if he gains a sufficient majority, though he has dismissed such speculation. Monday may mark another fateful step towards that moment. It may also indicate that he does not need to change the words on paper when he has reshaped his country so effectively already.

Canada cap

Reality check abroad and at home

CANADA'S two-year cap on international student permits will come as a dampener for prospective candidates. The talking point should be the reasons given by the Immigration Minister. A careful perusal would underscore the harsh realities that await the young Indians aspiring for the study visa. Some private institutions, the minister said, have taken advantage of international students by operating under-resourced campuses and charging high tuition fee. This certainly cannot qualify to be the dream passionately pursued by students and parents alike. It would likely lead to a switch to other countries. The subtext remains the same — any place but India, no matter the cost it

entails. Only the limited opportunities at home matter in the final analysis. In the third quarter of 2023, Canada's population grew at its fastest pace in six decades. Over eight lakh foreign students were in the country in 2022, up from 2.14 lakh a decade earlier. Opinion polls show that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau would lose the election if it were held now. His government is under pressure to address unaffordable housing crisis, linked to a spike in immigration. The cap could result in a decrease of 35 per cent study permits from last year. It is expected to ease the burden on housing and other services.

The discouraging job prospects and the fear of missing out on a better life abroad make it a no-



brainer for many to board the flight to just about anywhere, unmindful of what lies ahead. Indian households are projected to spend \$70 billion annually on

their children's foreign education by 2025. The surge is predominantly attributed to non-metros and small towns. It's a sad commentary on the subpar

higher education landscape in India. The lack of qualitative and quantitative choices is stark. Students must prioritise quality education first. Jobs will follow.



How PM Modi's 'Sadhana', 'Tapasya' United India for the Return of 'Prabhu Ram'

By: Akhilesh Mishra

The moment of Ram Lalla's 'pran pratishtha' on January 22, 2024, could have gone two ways.

First, the usual way as any other high-profile event in January. There are several such events throughout the year and, more so, in January – National Youth Day (January 12), Parakram Diwas (January 23) and Republic Day (January 26), to name just a few. This approach was the relatively simpler option. The second way was significantly much tougher – unite the entire country. Across classes, from those living in penthouses to people living in tents; across regions, castes, demography; generate a unique and unparalleled festive celebration across the country; ignite a sense of civilisational fulfilment in the entire population.

Despite best intentions, it could all have gone the first way. But, we know that what panned out is not just the second way but a phenomenon that none could have imagined. How did this happen? The main reasons behind this are the 'sadhana' and 'tapasya' of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the ground mobilisation of the RSS. First consider what the prime minister has done since the beginning of this month.

FROM BHAJANS TO 11-DAY 'ANUSHTHAN'

It all started innocuously, or so it would seem on January 3 with Prime Minister Modi posting a

Ram bhajan. And then he also posted on January 4 and 5, and then again and again. This one simple act was a catalyst that broke the self-restraint of Ram bhakts, mentally ingrained through decades or even centuries of conditioning. It was no longer uncool to proudly proclaim our reverence for the 'maryada purushottam' in the lingua franca of the masses. The bhajans and songs that the PM posted soon became a national rage, igniting a chain of all forms of digital adoption. New bhajans were written and shared, old ones started topping national charts and, in a matter of days, the airways were echoing with 'Ram aayenge'. Then came PM Modi's 11-day special 'anushtan' that began on January 12 from the Panchavati dham in the holy city of Nashik. The 'yama-niyama' that he committed to in the run-up to the 'pran pratishtha' entailed strict adherence to moral and ethical conduct. At 73 years of age, with hectic duties of the office of the PM, that Modi would choose to uphold the mandate of the scriptures, galvanised the entire nation – from sages to gurus and from ordinary people to celebrities in blessing him in his 'yug anushtan'. He not only gave up grain for 11 days, but slept on the floor and observed the entirety of the 'yama-niyama'

mandate. And, with the beginning of the 'yama-niyama' came the 11-day crisscross across our sacred geography. Uniting all our people, even with their differing traditions, worship methods, languages, local culture, practices into one common, unbroken chain of the oldest continuously living human civilisation. The ambition of this endeavour was audacious. On January 12, Modi was in Kala Ram Mandir in Panchavati. It is believed that this temple is located at the same spot where Ram stayed with Sita and Laxman. He offered prayers at the temple and listened to the 'Bhavartha Ramayana' written in Marathi. It is from this place that Modi also started the cleaning drive in temples across the country.

On January 14, an auspicious day across India, Modi undertook 'gau puja' at his residence in Delhi. Revered by Hindus since time immemorial, Gaumta along with Ram have been accepted as foundational to Sanatan Dharma. From our sacred texts to Mahatma Gandhi, all have averred to this faith and belief. The same day, he also took part in Pongal celebrations.

On January 16, Modi visited Lepakshi temple in Andhra Pradesh. Located near the well-known spiritual town of Puttaparthi in Anantapur district, this village is famous for the

temple constructed for Veerabhadra, the fiery incarnation of Shiva and the divine bird Jatayu. Lepakshi, which means 'Rise, oh bird' in Telugu, is intricately connected with Ramayana. It is believed that it is at this place, Ram and Laxman met the grievously injured Jatayu and gave agni to its mortal remains. In this temple, Modi chanted bhajans and heard verses from the 'Ranganatha Ramayana', the Telugu rendition of the Ramayana.

Modi later performed aarti and puja at the Veerabhadra temple, followed by a puja to Durga and Shiva in the temple premises. Later, a TTD (Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams) team of Carnatic music artistes rendered Ram bhajans while artistes from Nimmalakunta in Dharmavaram mandal of Satya Sai district performed a puppet show on the Ramayana.

On January 17, Modi was first in Guruvayur temple in Kerala. Dedicated to Guruvayurappan, a form of Vishnu, but locally more popularly as Krishna. Ram is known to be the seventh avatar of Vishnu. This is one of the holiest temples for devotees from the southern states.

Modi prayed at this temple, observing all the formalities, including wearing the prescribed 'vastram' of 'mundu' and 'veshti'. At the temple, he performed a 'thulabharam' (an offering) with lotus buds. On the same day,

Modi also visited the Thriprayar Shree Ramaswami temple in Kerala's Thrissur district. The temple is called 'Dakshin Ayodhya'. Devotees believe that Karimpuzha, on whose banks this temple is located, is the Sarayu river that flowed through Ayodhya in the Treta Yuga.

Ram is believed to have renounced his life here by entering the waters of Karimpuzha and devotees believe that it is the same as Sarayu; poet-saint Thunchaththu Ramanujan Ezhuthachan is believed to have stayed in the premises of this temple while composing his epic 'Adhyatma Ramayana'. The Thriprayar temple is one of the four in the Nalambala Darshanam (four-temple pilgrimage), where devotees go on a pilgrimage to four temples devoted to Ram, Lakshman, Shatrughan and Bharat during the month of 'Karkidakam', also known as month of Ramayana.

Apart from offering prayers as per all rituals and practices, Modi, in the one hour he spent at the temple, attended a Vedic chanting session of children and various bhajans in Malayalam. He also took part in the 'meenoottu' ritual (offering food to fish).

On January 18, Modi released a series of commemorative postage stamps dedicated to the Ram Janmabhoomi Mandir in Ayodhya and an album featuring stamps from around the world in honour of Ram. The intricate design of the stamps captures the essence of the temple, with six distinct components: the Ram temple itself, the timeless 'choupai' 'Mangal Bhavan Amangal Hari', a radiant depiction of the sun, the sacred Sarayu river, and sculptures found in and around the temple. On January 20, he visited two temples and holy places innately connected with Ram. First, he visited the Ranganathaswamy temple at Srirangam in Tamil Nadu's Tiruchirappalli. It is believed that at this exact place Vibhishana placed the family deity of Ram in a reclining posture, which is also worshipped to this day. Modi was the first prime minister to visit the place. On his arrival, Modi was accorded a ceremonial 'purna kumbha' welcome amid Vedic chanting. Honouring our great traditions, the PM listened to the recitation of verses of the 'Kamba Ramayanam' by scholars at the temple.

Ram Mandir - Where Do We Go From Here?

By Nishtha Gautam

It's done. The wheel of time willed it. A Ram temple in Ayodhya is firmly in place now. It tells us the tale of how empires and civilisations rise and fall. This moment in India's history is characterised by a strange euphoria earlier witnessed, perhaps, only in 1947 or 1971 - both times of tragic bloodshed, bereavement, and broken promises.

It's done. Ram Lalla is in Ayodhya, all is well with the world. Or is it? Has Ram Rajya really come to India? If the government of the day is to be believed for government is an honest institution, it indeed has.

So, where do we go from here: chaos or community? Martin Luther King (Jr.) was at his optimistic best in his last book before he was assassinated in 1968. One of the lines from this iconic book ought to guide us. "In the days ahead we must not consider it unpatriotic to raise certain basic questions about our national character."

If the majority of this country has chosen Ram Rajya, can we at least begin to behave accordingly, starting from the highest office of governance? Ram ji's name is enough to purge all evil. Gandhi believed in it. Those who claim to follow Ram ji and Gandhi ought to go



back to this basic premise.

Now that there is an unprecedented mobilisation of the masses that cuts across political party lines, is there a mechanism in place to harness it for ushering in a way of life that Ram ji would have liked? At this moment, it is counterproductive to reject or revile the matters of faith.

It's done. And we have to move forward. Can the scenes of unadulterated joy and ecstasy that dotted the final phase of Ram Lalla's 'arrival' at his new abode be replicated for the process of nation-building based on the principles of equality and

justice? Ram ji had suffered in his personal life to uphold the law of the land not once but many times. Can every devotee of him do the same at least once in their lifetime? Can this become a moment where the nation collectively vows that dharma - duty - indeed reigns supreme?

It's done. Ram ji is here. Because this is not a moment that ought to be tarnished with tawdry telling of not-so-flattering statistics. This is also not a moment for academic litanies and dogmas. But there is a wishlist that has been waiting for this second coming. Can every Ahilya now be brought back to

life, can every labouring squirrel get her stripes?

It's done. We now need to allow ourselves a moment of reflection to assess the trajectory of our stride and make course corrections. Because it's now or never. The tone we set now will resonate for at least two generations. If faith be the answer, let's move forward with it with a liberal smattering of doubt! When Ram ji rejected absolutism and arrogance, who are we to embrace them? Is it not disrespectful to the symbol of our collective consciousness? We need to be ready to emulate the humility of Ram ji. And

compassion. And an unwavering commitment to justice. We should be able to glance around and say it loud and clear, "I witness injustice, I reject and decry it in the name of Ram. I demand justice" even when the victim is not perfect. Let this moment be a memory of when India chose and moved decisively towards the ideals of Ram Rajya. Let us move in the knowledge that Ram Rajya is not a project founded in exclusion. Neither is it an easy nor a permanent state to achieve. Every single act of injustice delays and tears it. There was no Ram Rajya before or after Ram ji. If he's here now, nothing should be stopping us from achieving those ideals. And if we squander this moment, this euphoria, what hope?

A cursory glance at our recent history ought to give us the knowledge of where we went wrong. And whom we wronged. After such knowledge, what forgiveness?

Ritual alone won't establish Ram Rajya. An adherence to Maryada - honour - in its truest form will.

Circling back to Martin Luther King, "We can no longer afford to worship the God of hate or bow before the altar of retaliation.

Have Congress-Trinamool ties reached a point of no return?

Congress leaders, of all hue and shade, are unanimous that the current war of attrition between the grand old party and Trinamool Congress (TMC) is beyond Kharge's capacity to retrieve the situation.

By Rasheed Kidwai

After some strong words and seemingly irrevocable parting, the INDIA alliance is struggling to put seat-adjustment talks back on the rails. A number of INDIA alliance constituents such as RJD, NCP, NC, Samajwadi Party and AAP want AICC chief Mallikarjun Kharge to become proactive, placate Mamata Banerjee and send out a signal of "all is well" within the bloc. However, within the Congress, all eyes are on 10, Janpath. Congress leaders, of all hue and shade, are unanimous that the current war of attrition between the grand old party and Trinamool Congress (TMC) is beyond Kharge's capacity to retrieve the situation. Congress leaders feel party matriarch Sonia Gandhi alone has the capability to calm Mamata down. But the big

question is whether Sonia, currently enjoying semi-retirement from active politics, would step in. Some party leaders, known to read Sonia's mind, say she would prefer to go by Rahul Gandhi's assessment and lean on Kharge to take the necessary steps, such as pulling up Bengal Congress Unit Chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury whose anti-Mamata utterances have reportedly triggered a crisis. Intriguingly, there is stoic silence from Rahul Gandhi, currently leading Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra. Is Rahul Gandhi for Mamata? Nobody within the Congress or outside is absolutely certain about it. In some ways, the absence of good, functional ties between Rahul and Mamata has been a root cause of the problem. On various political and economic

issues, Rahul finds CPM General Secretary Sitaram Yechury's world view so appealing and similar that it is beginning to affect his political acumen. This issue has increasingly been gaining currency within the Congress with a degree of antagonism and disquiet. There is a buzz within the INDIA alliance that the Samajwadi Party and AAP may also find common cause with Mamata. If the informal alliance among the three parties gains currency, the Congress may find itself isolated within the bloc.

At another level, much like the Gandhi-Bachchan saga of friendship and subsequent psychological distance, Mamata-Sonia-Rahul-Priyanka relations are mired in emotions, one-upmanship and lack of communication.

Informed sources say a lot of



misunderstandings cropped up during Mamata's meeting with Sonia on July 28, 2021 at 10, Janpath. The Trinamool side had thought it to be a 'one-on-one' meeting between the two women. However, Rahul Gandhi was in attendance too, participating in deliberations. Some of the things Mamata reportedly had planned to convey, remained unsaid due to Rahul's 'idealistic' and 'impractical world view.' Mamata Banerjee's relationship with the Gandhis goes

back many decades. As a first-time MP, she was made MoS for Sports and Youth Affairs by the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, who later exhorted voters during a 1989 poll rally in Calcutta to vote for her "even if you don't vote for the Congress". Later, when she broke away to float her own Trinamool Congress, her relations with Sonia Gandhi remained warm. Interestingly, Mamata used to repeatedly say she would return to Congress if Sonia took charge of the party.

Beyond Ayodhya Ram Mandir



**Five Things
Bharat Must
Change as a
Hindu
Rashtra**

By: Abhijit Majumder

Hindu spiritual assertiveness is a strange and beautiful thing. It does not convert one by the sword. It does not scream from loudspeakers, “Raliv, chaliv, ya galiv (convert, leave, or die).” It does not fire on defenceless devotees or set them on fire in a train. It does not let water from its feet smear someone else’s objects of worship. It simply overwhelms the world with songs, dance, chants, mantras, smiles, colours, and an explosion of celebration.

The Pran Pratishtha ceremony of Shri Ram, in his birthplace Ayodhya, 496 years after a commander of the marauding Islamic invader Babur ordered the destruction of the temple and building of the Babri Masjid on its remains, brings history a full circle. It has never been so awake or unapologetic about its dharma perhaps in the last thousand years of relentless invasions and colonialism.

Many argue that a Hindu rashtra is already in motion in Bharat that is India. Bharat is Hindu in spirit. And that is not a bad thing. People of other religions can still coexist with all basic rights, cultural diversity, and dignity. There are more than 125 Christian-majority nations, of which about 20 are declared Christian states like the UK or Denmark. Many more, while declaring secularism as state policy, run by Christian ideals. The American President, for instance, takes the oath of affirmation of office by raising his right hand, with the left hand on the Bible, saying the words: “So help me God.”

More than 50 Muslim-majority nations run on Islamic ideals, often Sharia laws. Two



Muslim rashtras were, in fact, torn out of India.

Jews have a home in Israel. Buddhism is the state religion of Myanmar, Cambodia, Bhutan and Sri Lanka.

There is no exceptionalism in more than a billion Hindus asking for a Hindu rashtra in the land where the ancient faith was born and still breathes. Trying to shame Hindus or Indic religions for wanting a Hindu rashtra is hypocrisy.

But to attain the ideals of a Hindu rashtra and not have it merely as tokenism, a few things need to change. Most of these changes need to be constitutional in order to back up the cultural revival and consolidation which we are witnessing. First, one needs to do away with the concept of ‘minority’, especially in the context of religious minorities. The Constitution of India uses the word ‘minorities’ in its plural form in Articles 29

to 30 and 350(a) to 350(b). But does not define it anywhere. Muslims and Christians as religious minorities is just an interpretation. How can 200 million people, with an Umma of 2 billion, claim minority benefits? The Parliament needs to scrap the term ‘minority’. After assessing numbers and vulnerabilities, it should clearly define special categories which need the State’s help. It also needs to take off the creamy layer in cases of affirmative action and reservation so that only the needy avail of these.

Second, declare Bharat as the natural home for people of Indic religions — Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains and the indigenous people. Just like Israel is the natural home for Jews across the world. Any Hindu suffering persecution anywhere in the world should get shelter in India without having to wait endlessly. Third, India needs to legally end mass

conversions from the Indic faiths. Only individual cases, after proper scrutiny, could be allowed. Reconversions or ghar wapsi, however, should be allowed because of the wanton demographic shifts and dispossession which have historically taken place.

Amend Article 25 which deals with religious freedom. In its current form, it skews the playing field in favour of Abrahamic religions which aggressively convert and disadvantages Indic faiths which so far did not have a well-developed conversion or reconversion mechanism. Fourth, scrap the Waqf Act, 1995. It is a singularly sinister piece of legislation which allows the Waqf Board to arbitrarily grab land from individuals and organisations without much of a redressal. It has the potential to create Gazas within India in the future.

Fifth, the Places of Worship Act, 1991, must go. It prohibits Hindus from claiming their shrines which have been robbed before 1947, forcing instead a political status quo. It is a badly thought-out law which is unlikely to stand scrutiny.

Sixth, temples need to be freed from state control and minority educational institutions must be brought under the Right to Education. Both are highly discriminatory against Hindus. One facilitates the robbery of temple funds for non-community activities and lining the pockets of corrupt politicians and bureaucrats. The other cripples non-minority educational institutions with quotas for the economically weak but spares minority ones from accountability. Seventh and last, bring a fool-proof nationwide NRC and a strict, universally executed population law. The NRC should be able to bust documents procured through bribing, ascertain nationality through generational verification, and promptly disenfranchise and deport illegals. The population law should punish the first instance of breach by taking away government benefits and disenfranchising in the next instance.

India's Herbal Diplomacy: Ayurveda in UAE

By: Dr Jajati K Pattnaik & Dr Chandan K Panda

India's herbal diplomacy, which gained momentum under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has effectively used Ayurveda as a soft power tool to secure enduring relations with countries overseas. India is the largest producer of global Ayurvedic products and is emerging as an export hub for international markets.

The country's ancient medicinal wisdom, unparalleled in the history of age-old knowledge systems, has become the new therapeutic model, augmenting the scope for alternative medicines in the global healthcare system. The Charaka Samhita, a Sanskrit text of Indian medicine that was translated into Arabic in the eighth century, has resurfaced as 'Rising Ayurveda' in the medicinal space of the Gulf countries as a holistic wellness and sustained therapy to overcome the impending healthcare challenges. Moreover, a significant presence of Ayurvedic companies and burgeoning demand for such products in the UAE entails India's robust herbal diplomacy with the Emirates.

The word Ayurveda etymologically means 'knowledge of life'. This compound Sanskrit word is composed of two words, 'Ayur' meaning 'life' and 'Veda' denoting 'knowledge'. This medicinal tradition, mainly based on herbal compounds, is a gift of Bharat to the world. It gives a comprehensive cure with non-chemical intervention. Its healing involves physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. The great Indian antiquity enjoyed a special status in Asia, Africa, and Europe for exploring remedies to human pathology in the world of nature. Its historicity began at least three thousand years ago or way above the projected temporality. The continuity of this chemical-free, organic, and sacred medicinal tradition experienced neglect during the colonial introduction of modern medicine. Allopathic medicine and its chemical



content have indubitably made significant progress as modern medicine but carry no permanent cure and is clueless for several diseases. The lifestyle change, high consumption of junk and other unhealthy food without any regulative restriction, and sedentary culture in the workspace have given rise to strange ailments that find no effective cure in the chemically reliant medicinal system.

This has shifted the global attention to the alternative modes of cure. They include Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy (AYUSH). This shift in attention does not mean the end of chemically reliant modern medicine. It means relying on other modes of cure and remaining healthy. In this context, the UAE has made significant efforts to attract alternative modes of cure. It has issued a professional licence to give clearances to Traditional, Complementary, and Alternative Medicine (TCAM). India's traditional medicinal practices of Ayurveda have greatly interested the Emiratis. Its effectiveness in curing diseases has enhanced its popularity. India organised the ninth World Ayurveda Congress and Arogya Expo in Goa on December 8, 2022, and several countries participated in observing the therapeutics of Ayurveda by Indian healthcare professionals. The critical aspect of this exercise was to give Ayurveda a global outreach and secure for India the prestige of maintaining the continuity of its

ancient healing heritage against challenges of all kinds, especially colonial modernity.

Prime Minister Modi's herbal diplomacy has seen definite success as the sale of Ayurvedic products, especially Indian AYUSH, and other herbal products, made a quantum jump by 2023. This is India's achievement in projecting Ayurveda as a comprehensive, enduring, and effective curative. This has also given India a diplomatic heft on the global stage. Politics apart, the urgency of revamping the international healthcare order seems more crucial in this connection. Pathology is not a comprehensive response to a health disorder. A holistic healing that includes equitable attention to the physical, mental, spiritual, and measured lifestyle and avoiding stress and indulgences is the perfect recipe for happy and healthy living. Ayurveda, as a natural curative procedure, aims at delivering it. Keeping this in mind, the Government of India has developed a New Health Policy 2017, embodying the vision of a healthy and happy India. This can be the best blueprint for other nations to seek inspiration from. In this direction, the Government of India has signed an agreement with WHO in 2022 to set up the Global Centre for Traditional Medicine (GCTM) at Jamnagar, Gujarat.

This collaborative exercise aims to provide low-cost and effective traditional medicine to the United Nations member states to ensure global health. This also conjoins

with initiatives such as "Heal in India" and "Heal by India". The "Heal in India" exercise invites people worldwide to get cured in India through Ayurveda and its herbal and spiritual modalities. The "Heal by India" entails exporting Ayurvedic medicine, herbal products, and Indian medicinal knowledge to the world through its qualified professionals. This explains India's concern and care for global health and a happy earth. This is India's herbal diplomacy. Through non-chemical herbal cures, India gives the world Ayurveda and wins global confidence as a bankable partner. The UAE has made definitive efforts to ensure the circulation of Ayurveda products and their purchase, usage, and extension of its treatment modalities in its Emirates to obtain a healthy life. The clearances given to TCAM indicate the Emirati openness and acceptance of this chemical-free treatment modality with the most negligible side effects.

The number of clinics and centres that follow the Ayurvedic treatment modes using herbal and non-chemical materials is phenomenal. They are Ayurmana Ayurveda & Panchakarma (Dubai), Swasthya Ayurveda (Dubai), Kottakkal Ayurvedic Treatment Centre (Dubai), Santhigiri Holistic Health Centre (Dubai), Pearl Ayurveda (Ras al Khaimah), Meznah Ayurveda, (Sharjah), Kottakkal Treatment Centre (Ajman), Mantra Ayurveda (Dubai), Dr Jasna's Ayurveda Clinic & Treatment Centre (Dubai), 22 Ayur (Dubai), Ayurcare

Ayurvedic Wellness Centre (Dubai), Herbal Park Ayurvedic Health Centre (Abu Dhabi), etc. Several of them are based in Dubai and provide nature-based holistic treatment. This shows the importance Ayurveda had received across the UAE. It has also generated employment space for many Indians who have studied and practised Ayurveda as an effective way of treating human ailments. The robust bilateralism that has been witnessed between India and the UAE since 2014 and Prime Minister Modi's determination to globalise Ayurveda like Yoga to ensure global health, happiness, peace, and well-being constitute India's herbal diplomacy and Ayurveda as a soft power modality in renewing India's international image as a caregiver and curing nation that believes in its perennial wisdom of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam.

The UAE also sees rising demand for Indian herbal products, from cosmetics to capsules. The made-in-India herbal products, which include Hamdard, Baidyanath, Dabur, Kama Ayurveda, Vicco, Biosync, Charak, Just Herbs, Patanjali, Vee, Forest Essentials, Hope Ayurveda, Himalaya Wellness, Navayur, Arlak, Swastik, Surya Herbal, etc, dominate the global wellness and cosmetic market space and the UAE is no exception to this market appetite. The global demand for herbal products and the supply in India build a solid international profile for India as a land of herbal medicine. It cures through time-tested, nature-based traditional practices. This constitutes India's herbal diplomacy which embodies, on one hand, health, happiness, and effective cure and also, on the other, gives India political dividends to prove its strength and genuineness of concern for global wellbeing along the line of its ancient wisdom: Om Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah, Sarve Santu Nir-Aamayaah/ Sarve Bhadraanni Pashyantu, Maa Kashcid Duhkha-Bhaag-Bhavet/ Om Shaanthi Shaanthi Shaanthi (May all beings be at peace, may no one suffer from illness, May all see what is auspicious, may no one suffer. Om! Peace Peace Peace).

Historic Moment: Lord Ram's Pran Pratishtha Marks The Realisation of a 500-Year-Old Dream

By: Ashutosh Mishra

In a historic moment, the Pran Pratishtha of Ram Mandir on January 22, 2024, marks the realisation of a 500-year-old dream, a testament to faith, cultural strength, and the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This article explores the historical importance of Ram Mandir, the rituals surrounding the Pran Pratishtha, and Prime Minister Modi's pivotal role in bringing this cherished dream to fruition. Additionally, it delves into the nationwide celebration and unity as the nation comes together in various ways to commemorate this significant occasion.

The Ram Mandir in Ayodhya holds unparalleled historical reverence, tracing its origins back to a 500-year-old dream cherished by millions. As the sacred Pran Pratishtha ceremony unfolds on January 22, it signifies not just the inauguration of a temple but the revival of an ancient cultural heritage. This event resonates deeply with the collective consciousness of the nation,



symbolising the restoration of a cherished legacy. The Pran Pratishtha ceremony is the consecration of the deities within the temple, breathing life into the sacred idols. On this auspicious day, priests perform intricate rituals, invoking divine blessings and ensuring that the temple becomes a sanctum of spiritual energy. The significance of this ceremony extends beyond religious boundaries, embodying the spirit of unity and shared cultural values.

At the core of the realisation of this historic dream is the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. His steadfast commitment to the construction

of the Ram Mandir reflects a profound understanding of the cultural tapestry that binds the nation together. Furthermore, under the leadership of PM Modi, Ayodhya has witnessed significant economic development. The construction of the Ram Mandir has not only fulfilled a long-standing cultural and religious aspiration but has also acted as a catalyst for economic progress in the region. The government, under PM Modi's vision, has implemented various initiatives to boost infrastructure, tourism, and overall economic growth in Ayodhya. The establishment of the Ram Mandir has attracted pilgrims and tourists

from across the country, contributing to the local economy. Additionally, the associated development projects have created employment opportunities, further enhancing the socio-economic landscape of Ayodhya. Prime Minister Modi's commitment to balancing cultural heritage with economic development reflects a comprehensive approach to nation-building, ensuring that Ayodhya reaps the benefits of both spiritual significance and economic prosperity. The construction of the Ram Mandir faced numerous challenges over the years, including legal complexities and societal debates. The role of the then Chief Justice of India, Ranjan Gogoi, in the Ayodhya Ram Mandir case was crucial and marked by a commitment to upholding justice and delivering a historic judgement. Chief Justice Gogoi presided over a five-judge bench that heard the complex and emotionally charged case involving the title dispute over the Ayodhya land. Under his leadership, the Supreme Court conducted extensive hearings, considering arguments from all parties involved. Chief Justice Gogoi played a key role in steering

the proceedings towards a mediated resolution. The judgement, delivered on November 9, 2019, ruled in favour of the construction of a Ram Mandir at the disputed site, while also ensuring the allocation of an alternative plot for the construction of a mosque. His efforts in navigating this sensitive case demonstrated a commitment to justice, religious harmony, and the legal principles essential for resolving long-standing disputes. The Pran Pratishtha of the Ram Mandir is not merely a religious event but a celebration resonating across the nation. People from diverse backgrounds join together in joyous celebration, transcending religious and cultural boundaries. Streets are illuminated, and cities echo with the sounds of bhajans and hymns. The unity is palpable as citizens, irrespective of their backgrounds, participate in various ways to mark this historic occasion. In various regions, people are organising community feasts, sharing traditional sweets, and adorning their homes with diyas and rangoli.

How Pakistan's Deep State is Turning Elections into a Farce

Written By: Arun Anand

As Pakistan is gearing up for its 12th general elections on February 8, its deep state is leaving no stone unturned to ensure its own 'victory', turning the whole electoral process into a farce. A former prime minister (apparently the popular one) is in jail under various charges. And another ex-PM (the favoured one), who was previously imprisoned and then in exile, has now returned. The criminal cases against the latter are being conveniently dropped. While Pakistan's deep state's meddling with elections is nothing new, the crackdown by state authorities against Imran Khan and his party Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) have left even seasoned Pakistan analysts and political class baffled. With less than a month to go for the polling, it is clear that Pakistan is heading towards its most manipulated general elections ever.

There are ample instances of PTI being subjected to 'systematic dismemberment' and 'pre-poll rigging'. Its top leader Imran Khan has been in jail since August 2023, facing multiple charges of corruption, compromising state secrets and vandalising military facilities. Many of his party's leaders have abruptly left it, allegedly under duress, with some of them even floating their PTI's rival factions. Imran Khan was forced out of the chairmanship of his own party because of his imprisonment. The nomination papers of multiple electoral nominees from the PTI including that of Imran Khan have been rejected by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), the so-called autonomous body which is responsible for conducting the elections. And most recently, the Supreme Court of Pakistan upheld the decision of ECP to deny the PTI its election symbol — a 'cricket bat'. These



brazen collusive attempts of Pakistan state authorities, the election body and the judiciary have raised serious doubts over the fairness of upcoming polls.

The Pakistani awaam (predominantly its youth population) believes that the Pakistan Army is behind Khan's disqualification and the numerous cases being slapped against him. Pakistan's history is riddled with many such instances of the Army establishing its dominance over the civilian government. In the past, even when the Army generals were not officially in power, they continued to influence the country's decision-making and its political leadership. It is the persistent military's meddling with politics over the decades that has sustained a perpetual political crisis in Pakistan, leading to the establishment of a deep state.

Today, Pakistan's deep state need not maintain direct or overt political control, as it has a de-facto control over every strategic decision made in the country. In

fact, the present political engineering by Pakistan's deep state is nothing new but a repeat of the 2018 election scenario. Just prior to the 2018 elections, Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-N, or PML(N), was similarly at the receiving end of the establishment's wrath and subsequently, with the establishment's blessings, the PTI had come to power. Imran Khan thereafter quickly built up a close relationship with the Pakistan Army. During his prime ministerial tenure, he pretty much toed the military's agenda in terms of his stand on the Kashmir issue (Abrogation of Article 370), improving relations with the US and somewhat managing to pull in funds to sustain the bloated military expenditure, eventually leading to a major economic crisis. However, Imran Khan's power consolidation under military backing remained short-lived.

The fallout with the establishment first came out in the open in 2021 when former Army Chief Qamar Javed Bajwa appointed Lieutenant General Nadeem Anjum as the Director General of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Khan opposed it in favour of his own choice of General Faiz Hameed. However, he subsequently failed to make any difference. Later, both Khan and Bajwa began to have disagreements on the issues of foreign policy. Moreover, Khan started openly speaking of his private discussion with the Army on various political forums, which probably was not received well by the establishment, thereby leading to the incarceration of Imran Khan. In the present scenario, it seems the establishment has come full circle.

Modi, Ayodhya and the Call for Civilisational Resurgence

By: Yuvraj Pokharna

As golden flames leapt into the crisp January sky, heralding the sacred homecoming of Maryada Purushottam Shri Ram to his rightful abode in Ayodhya after centuries in the wilderness, Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled his vision of a culturally reintegrated and materially prosperous India poised to regain its civilisational glory on the world stage. His audience was global and the contour of his speech was all-pervasive and exhaustive, the content being transcendently sublime. Embedded in his eloquent words lies a clarion call for ushering in a new era of peace, prosperity and purposeful nation-building. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was to deliver the most momentous speech of the decade, succinctly capturing India's civilisational essence while outlining the developmental path ahead.

CULTURAL PRIDE AND STRATEGIC PROWESS COMBINED

In a speech that will undoubtedly be etched among the most iconic oratories of the 21st century, Prime Minister Modi struck an intricate balance between soaring poetry



celebrating India's cultural grandeur and strategic clarity regarding his vision of national development. Channelling the epochal significance of the occasion, Modi addressed the gathering not just as the prime minister but also as an ardent Rambhakt.

THE MYSTIC AND THE VISIONARY MERGED

Seamlessly blending history and visionary statecraft, philosophy and prudent policymaking, the prime minister outlined his doctrine of leveraging India's spiritual reserves accumulated over centuries of tapasya to engender her material ascent in the coming era, powered by the aspirational energy of youth. As he elaborated his roadmap for

India's civilisational resurgence in the 21st century and beyond, the occasion marked a coming together of ancient Indian wisdom and modern governance philosophy, catalysed by the supreme blessings of Ram Lalla.

MESSAGE FOR DETRACTORS: FEEL THE UNIFYING ENERGY

In a remarkably conciliatory pronouncement that instantly magnified his stature as a global statesman, Prime Minister Modi invited even ideological critics of the temple movement to visit Ayodhya to imbibe the unifying energy firsthand. Countering voices that predicted communal unrest, he remarked that the temple has infused fresh inspirational energy towards a

better collective future, fostering unity through diversity.

POWER OF DEMOCRATIC ETHOS

This large-hearted welcoming of dissenters perfectly encapsulates the democratic ethos at the core of India's civilisational consciousness, inviting honest ideological opponents for open debate aimed at discovering common ground. Contrary to western notions of siloed identity politics, the occasion highlighted the assimilative impulse that has sustained Indic thought for aeons, powering diversity through an underlying unity of purpose.

CHANNELLING ANCIENT WISDOM FOR MODERN PROGRESS

Elaborating his vision of harnessing India's timeless cultural wisdom for furthering her developmental ambitions in the period ahead, the prime minister gave a clarion call for ambitious nation-building to usher in an era of global excellence.

Citing the contributions of tribals, farmers and other sections of society that formed the foundation of Shri Ram's ideal state, he elaborated on the collaborative approach required at the societal level for national

development. Urging citizens to surpass mediocrity in contributing their utmost towards the motherland, Modi ignited the latent spiritual energies that have sustained India over millennia of challenges.

Indeed, India stands at the cusp of history, with ancient cultural wisdom primed to propel youthful ambitions as we inch towards the collective actualisation of the India of our dreams.

A THOUSAND YEARS HENCE, VIKSIT BHARAT

Channelling the boundless aspirational energy of India's youth during this watershed moment, Prime Minister Modi called for overcoming lingering limitations that constrain national progress across diverse fields. Outlining his vision for sculpting a 'Vishwaguru' Bharat that leverages its civilisational essence to achieve global excellence, the pronouncement carried unmistakable overtones of the Chanakya school of statecraft. This clarion call for excellence across spheres ranging from sciences, technology and innovation to arts, culture and sports builds on the enhanced geopolitical heft accruing from India's rise as a leading power on the world stage.

South Africa's Genocide Case Against Israel: The Role of International Court of Justice

By: Abhinav Mehrotra and Dr Biswanath Gupta

As the International Court of Justice (ICJ) commenced hearing South Africa's genocide case against Israel on January 11, issues surrounding the competence of the ICJ, the enforceability of its judgement, and the options in case Israel does not adhere to the judgement have assumed significance. According to existing international law, genocide is a jus cogens norm of international law. Jus cogens norms are those which protect the basic value of human civilisation or core to humanity in general. Therefore, genocide is a global norm and needs protection.

If genocide is happening in any place on Earth, every state has the responsibility to protect and stop such acts by any means. States can approach ICJ by virtue of the principle erga omnes (responsibility of everyone) to protect the core principle of



humanity. By erga omnes and jus cogens principle of international law, South Africa or any other state has the right to move to ICJ against Israel.

In the current scenario, South Africa brought a case against Israel to the ICJ under the UN's 1948 Genocide Convention. In its application, South Africa argued that Israel, in its ongoing Gaza assault, has transgressed from the provisions of Article 2 of the Genocide Convention. This article defines the term 'genocide' to mean "acts

committed with intent to destroy, wholly or partly, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group".

The ICJ will eventually decide whether Israel is committing genocide or not, which may take years. But first, it will decide whether it has jurisdiction on this matter and whether the alleged acts fall under the 1948 Convention.

The ICJ held a two-day hearing to decide whether it will order "provisional measures" (the equivalent of seeking urgent interim relief in pending cases in

Indian courts) in a case that South Africa has filed against Israel for violating its obligations under the Genocide Convention concerning Palestinians in Gaza. The ICJ is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations that settles legal disputes between States in accordance with international law. It is not a criminal court, and it does not try individuals. The ICJ cannot automatically decide all cases involving breaches of international law. It can only decide cases that are brought before it by States that consent to its jurisdiction. The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide is an international human rights treaty that codified the crime of genocide for the first time. The Genocide Convention was the first human rights treaty adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 9, 1948, and has been in effect since January 12, 1951.

The Convention defines genocide as five acts including killing members of a group; causing serious bodily or mental harm; inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about their physical destruction; imposing measures intended to prevent births within a group; and forcibly transferring children of the group to another group committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. In the past, the ICJ gave its legal opinion on the construction of Israel's wall in the West Bank. The issue of Israel-Palestine's ongoing war has historical roots as Palestine's borders have arisen from agreements that Israel signed with both Jordan and Egypt in 1949. Palestine was divided into the state of Israel (including West Jerusalem), the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), and the Gaza Strip which is the site of the ongoing war.



Has The World Become Too Much for America?

By: Narain D Batra

Would America let down the world in 2024? Looking at the disorder and chaos of 2023, it seems more than ever that the American global leadership is indispensable. Nonetheless, every year commentators and pundits utter the same shibboleths that the post-World War II global system which the United States built and sustained with its economic, military, and soft power, is now breaking up amidst regional challenges, chaos, disorder, and strife — and not least the rise of China, its global ambitions, and its alliance with an aggressive and authoritarian Russia under Vladimir Putin. Apart from raging global conflicts, multiplying and proliferating, there is the developing crisis of debt incurred by poor countries, the threat of climate catastrophe, the crisis in West Asia, and the Ukraine-Russia lose-lose war stalemate. And then there's the danger that Donald Trump might return to the White House, which would create havoc not only in the United States but also rattle the world. Many countries, especially in the global south, are questioning whether Western values and rules of engagement have any relevance, especially when the world faces tremendous challenges of poverty, unending conflicts, pandemics, and climate disaster. The poor state of global governance, especially in Latin America and Africa, is leading to massive immigration crises not only in America's southern border but also in Europe leading to right-wing populism in many countries. Despite the decline of its economy and demographic challenges, China remains a most formidable political and economic power. Its role in global affairs in shaping economic, technological, and geopolitical issues must not be underestimated. The recent Taiwan elections that affirmed the Taiwanese people's determination to be free and maintain the political status quo have not pleased China's leaders. Nor have China's overarching ambitions for establishing its dominance in the South China Sea and the Indo-Pacific region been diminished anyway due to its economic slowdown. Then there's West Asia sitting on a powder keg. The shock and awe of the horrendous attack by Hamas on October 7 on Israel, which

resulted in the vicious killing and taking hostages of hundreds of people including women and children, led to the ferocious Israeli retaliation with bombardments and the invasion of Gaza, which brutalised the Palestinian people. The initial overwhelming sympathy for the Israeli victims that the horrific Hamas attack had aroused globally began to dissipate because of the daily media showcasing of the suffering of the people of Gaza. While the Israeli hostages are still suffering in captivity in Gaza under the control of Hamas, the war has killed more than 25,000 Palestinians including children and women and the elderly in Gaza. The conflict has spread to Lebanon, the West Bank, Syria, Iraq,

and most notably Yemen where the Houthi rebels supported by Iran have been blocking the Red Sea Suez Canal, a vital artery for global trade. The Iranian missile attack in Pakistan's Balochistan region and Pakistan's tit-for-tat retaliation, for war against terrorist hideouts in each other's country, forebode ill and create apprehensions that the conflict might get wider and more dangerous.

Russia's war against Ukraine enters its third year and the fear of a long-drawn-out conflict continues in the minds of policymakers in Europe, the United States, and other major countries around the world. While Europe and NATO are doing their best to prop up

and support Ukraine's war efforts, in the United States, political parties are squabbling about how much to fund and how long to fund Ukraine in its fight against Russia.

There's a growing section of people in the United States and elsewhere who believe that a partitioned Ukraine along the existing lines of actual control may be a feasible solution for ending the conflict, and maybe a lesser evil. With the prospects of Trump returning to power, the question has become very crucial especially because Trump has shown an inclination towards favouring Putin's Russia. He also thinks that Europe should take care of itself, questions the relevance of NATO, and believes that Ukraine is Europe's problem. Amidst the mounting geopolitical challenges, there is the rise of Generative Artificial Intelligence. The rapidly evolving and complex landscape of Artificial General Intelligence presents both transformative opportunities and significant challenges. AI serves as a powerful tool for enhancing productivity, disseminating information, and aiding decision-making, while simultaneously posing a potential threat as a conduit for misinformation and disinformation, particularly in sensitive areas such as the forthcoming US presidential elections. The pressing issues include responsibly harnessing the power of AI, understanding the implications of ongoing technological trends for politics, and safeguarding democratic integrity in a digital information-driven era.

Tech layoffs balloon in January as Wall Street rally lifts Alphabet, Meta, Microsoft to records

The S&P 500 is trading at a record and the Nasdaq is at its highest in two years. Alphabet shares reached a new pinnacle on Thursday, as did Meta and Microsoft, which ran past \$3 trillion in market cap. Don't tell that to the bosses.

While Wall Street cheers on Silicon Valley, tech companies are downsizing at an accelerating clip. So far in January, some 23,670 workers have been laid off from 85 tech companies, according to the website Layoffs.fyi. That's the most since March, when almost 38,000 people in the industry were shown the exits.

Activity picked up this week with SAP

announcing job changes or layoffs for 8,000 employees and Microsoft cutting 1,900 positions in its gaming division. Additionally, high-valued fintech startup Brex laid off 20% of its staff and eBay slashed 1,000 jobs, or 9% of its full-time workforce. Jamie Iannone, eBay's CEO, told employees in a memo that, "We need to better organize our teams for speed — allowing us to be more nimble, bring like-work together, and help us make decisions more quickly."

Earlier in the month, Google confirmed that it cut several hundred jobs across

the company, and Amazon

has eliminated hundreds of positions spanning its Prime Video, MGM Studios, Twitch and Audible divisions. Unity said it's cutting about 25% of its staff, and Discord, which offers a popular messaging service used by gamers, is shedding 17% of its workforce.

The swarm of activity comes ahead of a barrage of tech earnings next week, when Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, Meta and Microsoft are all scheduled to report quarterly results. Investors lauded the cost-cutting measures that companies put in place last year in response to rising inflation, interest rates hikes, recession concerns and a brutal market downturn in 2022. Even with an improving economic outlook, the thriftiness continues. Layoffs peaked in January of last year, when 277 technology companies cut almost 90,000 jobs, as the tech industry was forced to reckon with the end of a more than decade-long bull market. Most of the rightsizing efforts took place in the first quarter of 2023, and the number of cuts proceeded to decline each month through September, before ticking up toward the end of the year.

One explanation for the January surge

as companies budget for the year ahead: They've learned they can do more with less. At Meta, in CEO Mark Zuckerberg's words, 2023 was the "year of efficiency," and the stock jumped almost 200% alongside 20,000 job cuts. Across the industry, artificial intelligence was the rallying cry as new generative AI technologies showed what was possible in automating customer service, booking travel and creating marketing campaigns.

'Reposition themselves for AI'

The AI hype raised concerns in many corners of the economy about the declining need for human labor as technology gets smarter. But it's having a more immediate impact on the workforce. AI demand is so great that some tech companies are cutting headcount in parts of the business to invest more heavily in developing AI products.

"These companies, in general, are reducing numbers of employees associated with product lines or divisions that have not been successful because they want to reposition themselves for AI," said Art Zeile, CEO of DHI group, which owns the tech recruiting platform Dice.

Ram Mandir in Ayodhya is the Biggest 'Political' and Civilisational Victory for Hindus in Centuries

Yes, these issues are not in our agenda at this time. However, that is because we do not have a majority in the house. We bow our heads in front of the number strength. However, we assure you that the task that we have taken in our hand, unless that national objective is fulfilled, we will not rest."

These were the words of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The day was May 26, 1996. Today, Vajpayee's promise has been fulfilled. The promise of a Ram Mandir was not just one for reviving the soul of Bhartiya civilisation, but also a core political vow of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Bhartiya Janata Party. The opposition back then, led by the Congress, was trying to corner the BJP-led government for not fulfilling its three core ideological promises — of making a Ram Mandir at Ayodhya, revoking Article 370 and introducing a Uniform Civil Code. The opposition even ridiculed the fact that these promises did not feature in the then presidential address to parliament. Twenty-eight years later, a civilisational renaissance is underway. Narendra Modi is Prime Minister and the BJP commands a handsome majority in the Lok Sabha. Article 370 is now history, and a Uniform Civil Code is on its way. 10 years since he first came to power, Bharat now has a bhavya Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, at the very site where Shri Ram was born. Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday performed the Pran Pratishtha of Ram Lalla in the Mandir which has been built in accordance with a Supreme Court judgement. The dream of a Ram Mandir has been fulfilled legally. The national mood is pulsating and exuberant.

The opposition gave the consecration ceremony at Ayodhya a miss. Perhaps, it was too much for them to see the promise which Vajpayee made three decades ago being fulfilled by Narendra Modi.

Saffron flags with Shri Ram portraits can be seen across the length and breadth of the nation. Crores of families are celebrating the return of Shri Ram to his rightful abode by lighting diyas, performing puja and of course, lighting up the sky. It's Deepawali all over again, only that this festival of lights is much grander and has evoked so many emotions among the people of India, especially Hindus. The myth of Shri Ram being a "North Indian" phenomenon has been shattered wide open. Prime Minister Modi's pilgrimage to various temples in Southern Indian in recent days has shown how Shri Ram is the common binding factor for not just India, but the entire subcontinent. RAM MANDIR MOVEMENT WAS ALWAYS POLITICAL Amid the celebration, there are the party poopers as well. The opposition is making a huge fuss about the Ram Mandir Pran Pratishtha ceremony having been turned into a "political spectacle" by the BJP to earn electoral brownie points. The Congress, from denying the existence of Shri Ram to now worrying about the spiritual essence of the Mandir being eroded by politics, has certainly come a long way — albeit in the wrong direction. For a party that had no role to play in the Mandir movement, and whose Samajwadi allies in Uttar Pradesh are known for firing mercilessly at

karsevaks, the Congress is certainly going out of its way to call out the supposed politicisation of the consecration ceremony. Perhaps this would help: Yes, the Ram Mandir movement was always political. The Ram Mandir itself, apart from being a holy site of worship and a spiritual centre for Hindus, is also a living symbol of Bharat's civilisational resilience. It is a testament to Dharma always prevailing over injustice and adharma. That is truly the essence of Shri Ram himself. Even if it takes over 500 years to reestablish, the final victory of right over wrong is a given. In this case, the wrong was the demolition of the original Ram Mandir by Babur and his army of marauders. It was an out and out act of adharma. The reestablishment of dharma and restoration of any civilisational glory is impossible without a movement being political in nature. Of course, it need not necessarily be exclusively political. It can have many dimensions, including religious and cultural. Bharat is not a Western nation. Neither does India have a sense of unquestionable admiration for the model of democracy provided to it by the West, nor does it deem it necessary to wear the pretentious mask of separating "Church and State".

In Bharat, politics can never be divorced from either religion or culture. Bharat has its own way of practising democracy. Today, its ancient culture and civilisational ethos are finding their rightful place in the national political discourse. This is what makes India different. Unlike others, Indian democracy is neither hollow nor without a solid foundation. The concept of "Raj Dharma" is now part of the main-

stream narrative. The Ram Mandir Pran Pratishtha ceremony marks the culmination of a national political movement. There can be no denying the fact that the RSS, BJP and VHP have played an instrumental role in making the dream of a Ram Mandir come true for crores of Hindus. Karsevaks laid down their lives for the Mandir. When such sacrifices have been made by so many people for a Mandir, it becomes practically impossible to not see the movement as political in nature. After the events of December 6, 1992, BJP governments in four states were dismissed by the Congress, which was in power at the Centre. After having acted with such brazen unconstitutionality, it does become a bit rich for the Congress to now preach against the politicisation of the Ram Mandir and the mass movement that preceded its construction. Now that the Mandir has been built, we must be brave enough to accept certain facts. First, why is it that the Ram Mandir dispute was fast tracked at the highest levels of judiciary, and a favourable verdict was won only after 2014? The answer is simple. First, Hindus made it clear that their core beliefs were not subject to judicial oversight. Second, the BJP being in power with a majority on its own meant that the highest levels of government in India were pushing for an early resolution of the dispute. Third, the Modi government indicated that it would be open to the ordinance route to build a Mandir at the Ram Janmabhoomi should the Supreme Court return with an unfavourable verdict. Fourth, the BJP kept the issue of the Ram Mandir alive for three decades, and that itself is no small feat.

Nitish Kumar's Impending Exit From INDIA Bloc One Month In Making, Bharat Ratna For Karpoori Thakur Part Of Deal With BJP

The pejorative 'Paltu Ram' (turncoat), used for Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar by his opponents, may become synonymous with his political trustworthiness if recent political developments in the state are any indication. Over the past few days, speculation has been rife in the political corridors that the Janata Dal-United (JD-U) chief could once again join hands with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The possibility of these rumours being true grew on Tuesday when Bihar state BJP chief Samrat Chaudhary was summoned to Delhi by his party's leadership, while prominent JD (U) leaders held several rounds of discussions at Nitish's residence.

However, these overtures are not as sudden as they may appear, but rather a culmination of a month of manoeuvres, with Nitish Kumar praising Prime Minister Narendra Modi following the Centre's decision to confer the Bharat Ratna upon former Bihar CM and late socialist leader Karpoori Thakur. Subsequently, Nitish took a dig against dynasty politics — seen to be a veiled reference to the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leadership — without any immediate context, marking another twist in the plot.

A source from the INDIA bloc tells Outlook on the condition of anonymity that the decision to confer the Bharat Ratna upon Thakur may have been part of a deal between the JD (U) and the BJP, which includes

two or three more agreements, such as the Centre fulfilling the long-standing demand of Bihar being granted special status (along with Jharkhand and Odisha) and assembly elections being held in the state simultaneously with the upcoming general elections. Political analysts suggest that the dramatic resignation of former JD (U) President and MP Rajiv Ranjan Singh aka Lalan Singh during the party's national executive meeting held in Delhi on December 29, 2023, may have been linked to the changing political affiliations in the state. Nitish was announced as the president barely minutes after Singh's resignation. Reports claim that the latter was made to resign due to his proximity with the RJD.

According to sources, Nitish's move to rejoin the NDA has divided the party in two camps: leaders such as Ashok Choudhary, Vijay Chaudhary and Sanjay Jha back joining hands with the BJP, while the Lalan Singh camp is against this.

A History Of Changing Sides

Although the developments surrounding Nitish Kumar's possible switch may have been on for a month, the national media picked up this news prominently only after the Bihar CM visited Governor Rajendra Arlekar at the Raj Bhavan on January 23 and remained there for hours. Meanwhile, the JD (U) has also turned down an invitation to join Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay

Yatra in another clear signal.

Right from the 1990s, RJD Chief Lalu Prasad Yadav has time and again taken jibes at Nitish, saying it is difficult to trust his foe-turned-friend. If Nitish once again parts ways with the RJD and comes together with the BJP, he would be doing this for the fourth time in the past 10 years.

In 2013, the JD(U) leader broke his 17-year-old ties with the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) over Narendra Modi being named the PM candidate. Two years later, he fought the assembly elections with his traditional rival Lalu Prasad and formed the government after a landslide victory. However, within just 20 months, he dumped the RJD in April 2017 and once again formed the government with the BJP's help. The JD(U) fought the September 2020 assembly elections under the NDA fold and retained power, but, in August 2022, Nitish joined hands with the RJD once more. Now, all indications are that Nitish may be ready for another switch.

Nitish's history of changing allegiances goes even farther back to 1994 when he parted ways with fellow socialist Lalu Prasad and the Janata Dal, and formed the Samata Party with George Fernandes. In 1996, he formed his first coalition with the BJP, which lasted for 17 years, including eight years in power in Bihar between 2005 and 2013.

THE INDIAN RUPEE AS INTERNATIONAL CURRENCY

Asian markets have discussed the need for other currencies as viable alternatives to the US dollar for some time. The "Joint Statement of the BRICS Ministers of Foreign Affairs and International Relations" released after the meeting of the foreign ministers of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) in Cape Town, South Africa, on June 1, 2023,¹ underscored the importance of encouraging the use of local currencies in international trade and financial transactions among BRICS members as well as with their trading partners. In fact, the need for alternate currencies has been emphasized by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a while². The IMF has identified the Indian rupee (INR) as a potential international currency alongside China's RMB (renminbi). In 2016, China's RMB was included in the IMF's Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) basket. Recently, the IMF raised the RMB's weightage to 12.28 percent.

Being an accepted international currency would mean the Indian rupee is freely used in transactions by residents and non-residents and as a reserve currency for global trade. All export and import transactions (current transactions) would be invoiced in Indian rupees. It would also be used to facilitate capital-account transactions. The C. Zhang (2014)³ model showed that welfare is unambiguously higher for a country when its currency is accepted abroad. The benefits of the internationalization of the Indian rupee derive from both seigniorage gains from foreigners and the expansion of trade opportunities.

On July 5, 2023, the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI)'s Inter-Departmental Group (IDG) presented a roadmap for internationalizing India's currency⁴. Approximately a week before the RBI's report was released, Dr. Y. V. Reddy, a former governor of the RBI, also articulated his views on the Indian rupee as an international currency and suggested required policy changes.

The rupee as a reserve currency India moved toward partial convertibility in the late 1990s and made subsequent progress with multiple reforms. India has also enabled capital-account transactions, such as permitting corporate entities to raise resources through external commercial borrowings and Masala bonds (rupee-denominated bonds issued by Indian entities outside India).

The significance of the rupee for international-trade settlement gained more attention with the RBI's scheme of July 2022, permitting rupee settlement of external trade by creating a more comprehensive framework, including the flexibility of investing surplus rupees in Indian bond markets⁵. Following this, in December 2022, India pioneered its first settlement of foreign trade in rupees with Russia as part of the International Trade Settlement in Indian Rupees (INR) mechanism initiated by the Reserve Bank of India. This milestone transaction is slated to save dollar outflows estimated at \$30 billion on crude-oil imports.

The benefits are clear, and not only from a strategic point of view. Invoicing and settlement of international-trade transactions in Indian rupees with oil-exporting countries or countries with which India has trade deficits will lead to reductions in India's current account deficit (CAD) and reduce the burden of maintaining large foreign-exchange reserves.

The RBI permitted banks from 22 countries to open Special Vostro Rupee Accounts (SVRAs) for settling payments in Indian rupees. According to India's Minister of External Affairs (state) Rajkumar Ranjan Singh's reply to the Parliament of India's questions on July 21, 2023, these countries are Bangladesh, Belarus, Botswana, Fiji, Germany, Guyana, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kenya, the Maldives, Malaysia, Mauritius, Myanmar, New Zealand, Oman, Russia, Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda and the United Kingdom. This action will help Indian traders make payments in rupees for all imports, which will be credited to Vostro accounts (special rupee accounts in Indian banks) of the corresponding banks of the partner countries, while Indian exporters will be paid from the balances in the designated Vostro accounts. Any surplus rupee balances in Vostro accounts may be used for investments, including Government of India securities.

An agreement was signed between India and Iran to undertake eligible trade transactions using the Indian rupee. In terms of the existing Arrangement for Bilateral Trade Payments between India and Iran (2018), the Indian rupee Vostro accounts of Iranian banks are credited 100 percent in Indian rupees by Indian importers against invoices payable for the supply of goods and services from entities in Iran, without the requirement of any additional certification or authorization. Other countries, such as Cuba and Luxembourg, are also interested in rupee-based trade settlements. India is largely a net importer, and the value of the Indian rupee against the dollar has been declining historically.

In August 2022, Sri Lanka also made Indian Rupee a designated foreign currency, facilitating Indian rupee-based bilateral trade between Sri Lanka and India.

The Indian rupee is accepted to some extent in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the United Kingdom, among others. It is a legal tender in Nepal and Bhutan. The central banks of Nepal, Bhutan and Malaysia also hold Government of India securities and Treasury bills. Some sovereigns, such as Singapore, hold Indian equity and bond assets (including G-secs) through their sovereign wealth funds⁶.

Bilateral swap arrangements (BSAs) India currently has a bilateral swap arrangement (BSA) with Japan for up to US\$75 billion as a backstop line of support in case of any balance-of-payments issues. The RBI also provides liquidity to the South Asian Association for Regional

Cooperation (SAARC) countries under the SAARC swap framework. Under the SAARC swap agreement, the requesting central bank can withdraw in US dollars, euros and Indian rupees. Bilateral currency swap arrangements may provide blueprints for reducing dependence on the US dollar for settling trade transactions, leading to exchange-rate stability and minimizing liquidity mismatches. As stated in the IDG report, India needs a standardized approach and must be prepared to engage with interested central banks for local-currency settlements, swaps and line of credit (LCs).

GIFT City

India established its first International Financial Services Centre (IFSC), Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City), with a vision to provide all the financial services, markets and transactions relating to India currently completed outside of the country. GIFT-IFSC has the potential to develop as a competitor to International Financial Services Centres for rupee products and, more specifically, rupee derivatives, as exchange-traded rupee derivatives are among the most-traded

contracts globally.

The rupee as a payment currency India's centralized payment systems, such as real-time gross settlement (RTGS) and National Electronic Funds Transfer (NEFT), have gained significance in global payment systems. The new payment architecture, Unified Payments Interface (UPI), evolved as the widely accepted last-mile connection in the domestic market, enabling every Indian citizen to complete remittances.

Further, the RBI, in collaboration with the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), is reaching out to jurisdictions to increase the global outreach of the UPI system to facilitate cross-border transactions, including remittances. Linkages between fast-payment systems across jurisdictions can enhance cross-border payment arrangements and ensure faster remittances. As stated in the IDG report, the RBI also selected a "cross-border payments" theme in the second cohort under its regulatory sandbox initiative to spur innovations capable of recasting the cross-border payments landscape.

Putin praises India's independent foreign policy, warns West not to 'play games'

Russian President Vladimir Putin has praised India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi for following an independent foreign policy, keeping in mind its own national interest. "India pursues an independent foreign policy, which is not easy in the modern world. But India, with a population of one and a half billion, has the right to this," Russian news website Sputnik quoted Putin as saying during a meeting with students in Kaliningrad, Russia, on Thursday. Putin also warned "outside forces" (the West) not to "play games" for political clout in India. "Playing games with India related to influence on its politics from outside has no future," the Russian leader said. Putin also said that Rus-

sia can rely on India as a trusted partner. "We have very good relationships with India, and our faith in India is demonstrated by the fact that Moscow is New Delhi's greatest foreign investor... and it is just the beginning," Russia Today quoted Putin as saying. Putin also praised the 'Make in India' initiative and said that it is making massive waves under PM Modi. The Russian President pointed out that India has a great culture, calling it interesting, diverse, and colourful. "Russia is probably one of the few countries where Indian films are regularly broadcast on national television channels. I don't know of any other country like that. There are a lot of things that connect us," Putin said.

For 'miracle cure', parents submerge son with cancer in Ganges repeatedly; child dies

They took the child for a dip in the holy river, but the child died in the process. A video from Haridwar shows a woman sitting with the child's body, with the onlookers condemning her. The woman, seen laughing in a half-crazed manner, can be heard saying, "This child will stand up. That is my promise."

Upon receiving the information, the police rushed to the scene and took the child to the district hospital, where the doctors declared the child dead. The child's body has been sent for post-mortem.

According to Superintendent of Police (City) Swatantra Kumar Singh, the couple had brought their son, who was suffering from blood cancer, for a dip in the Ganges River in Haridwar. The child's parents revealed that they had consulted doctors at

Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, but the doctors had given up on the child. In their blind faith, the family took the child to Haridwar, hoping a dip in the Ganges would cure him. The locals present at the spot, however, grew suspicious of the family's behaviour and a commotion took place.

The locals accused the family of drowning the child.

According to the taxi driver who drove the family from Delhi to Haridwar, the child appeared unwell right from the beginning of the journey, and by the time they reached Haridwar, the child's condition had worsened. The taxi driver said that the family spoke about the child's deteriorating health and bathing in Ganges.

The police have registered a case and further investigation in the case is underway.

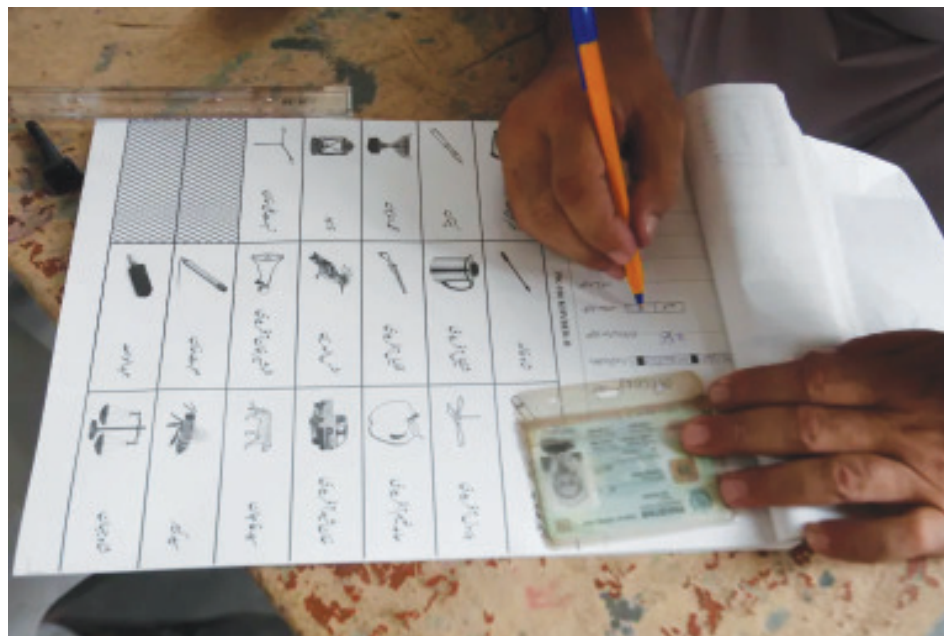
Pakistan ex-PM's party loses election symbol. Will it hurt its prospects?

Besides making voting accessible to voters who are unable to read, electoral symbols form the basis of party campaigns

(News Agency)- Electoral symbols play an important role in a democratic process. As Pakistan gears up for general elections due next month, posters with party symbols can be seen plastered on utility poles and roadside walls across cities and towns.

Political parties have kicked off campaigning, plastering walls with propaganda posters but the symbol of what many believe is the country's most popular party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), seems to be missing, thanks to an unprecedented crackdown on the PTI and its jailed leader, former Prime Minister Imran Khan. Khan's party has been barred from using the party symbol in the elections scheduled for February 8. PTI members and supporters say the blocking of its symbol, a cricket bat, is a ploy by the military-backed caretaker government to ensure the party's defeat.

Meanwhile, the leader of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, has also alleged that seven of his party's national and provincial assembly candidates have been assigned the wrong



electoral symbols in the eastern Punjab province. Bhutto claimed the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) acted under pressure from former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who has been accused of cutting a deal with the country's military that controls most levers of power from behind the scenes. Sharif, who returned

to Pakistan in October after several years of self-imposed exile, has rejected the allegations.

So why are party symbols important, and will the ban on the PTI symbol harm the party?

Why did PTI lose its bat?

The ECP on December 22 omitted PTI's

bat symbol on the technical grounds that the party had not held intra-party elections – required under law. This rendered the party ineligible for having a symbol for the 2024 elections.

An intra-party election conducted by the PTI on June 8, 2022 was not recognised by the ECP on the grounds that it was not "just and fair". The ECP also passed similar orders against 13 marginal political parties. Critics and supporters of PTI have deemed it a deliberate attempt to curtail the party's success in the elections. "The cricket bat was unjustly revoked through an illegal order," PTI lawyer Syed Ali Zafar said. An attempt by the PTI to get the ban overturned failed as Pakistan's Supreme Court last week upheld the election commission's decision, which is significant to the PTI because it is reminiscent of Khan's success as a former cricketer.

Khan, who was the national team captain when the country won its only World Cup trophy in 1992, leveraged his successful sporting career to gather popular support as a politician.

Iran's Missile Strikes Reveal Its Weakness

(News Agency)-Since the Israel-Hamas war began, Iran and its archipelago of proxies have steadily advanced a collective campaign against Israel and U.S. forces in the Middle East. That campaign—which has included Hezbollah's strikes into northern Israel from Lebanon, the Houthis' attempted blockade of shipping through the Red Sea from Yemen, and near-daily rocket

On Jan. 16, using a combination of ballistic missiles and drones, Iran struck targets in Syria, Iraq, and Pakistan that its officials claimed had been associated with Israeli intelligence and anti-regime terrorist groups. The assaults were ostensibly in response to the suicide bombing attacks in the southern city of Kerman earlier this month, which killed at least 84 Iranians. Although the Islamic

State claimed responsibility for that carnage, which hit a crowd commemorating Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Maj. Gen. Qassem Suleimani, who had been assassinated in a U.S. drone missile strike four years earlier, Iranian officials also blamed Israel and the United States. In its brazen response, the IRGC launched a barrage of ballistic missiles



attacks by Shiite militias on U.S. forces in Iraq and Syria—has threatened to drag the United States into an expanding conflict. With its recent missile strikes on three neighboring states, Iran signaled a potential new phase in the evolving turmoil, one that seemingly inched the Middle East closer toward a regionwide war.

In those attacks, Iran was attempting to showcase its military strength and resolve. Yet, it also betrayed something else: Iran's inherent weakness and strategic limitations.

and drones that struck buildings in northwestern Syria, destroyed the villa of a prominent Kurdish businessman in Erbil, Iraq, who Iranian officials implied was an Israeli asset, and hit the mudbrick house of a Baluch family in the rural Pakistani town of Koh-e Sabz, which Iranian officials claimed was linked to the anti-regime Jaish al-Adl (Army of Justice) terrorist group. The actions showcased Iran's refined missile capabilities and underscored that Tehran could violate the sovereignty of neighboring states at will and free of meaningful consequence.

All of Bangladesh is drinking water containing unsafe levels of carcinogenic arsenic

(News Agency)-Nearly half of the water that Bangladeshis are drinking contains dangerously high levels of arsenic, a new study has revealed. A team of scientists found that 49 per cent of the water, which an overwhelming majority of the population depends on, contains unsafe limits of

Wednesday in journal PLOS ONE. When saltwater from the ocean mixes with freshwater, it causes arsenic to be released from sediments. The researchers collected water samples from wells across Bangladesh to test for oxygen concentration, pH, and temperature to understand the dynamics behind the arsenic release.



the carcinogenic contaminant. The discovery highlights a looming public health crisis in the South Asian country, which routinely faces heavy flooding and is one of the most vulnerable to the impacts of a spiralling climate crisis.

In 2018, Bangladesh was left one-third underwater after Cyclone Amphan. On average, 21 per cent of the country gets flooded annually due to intensifying monsoon rains.

The increased levels of arsenic were directly linked to rising sea levels and more severe seasonal flooding, according to the study published on

They found that approximately 49 per cent of Bangladesh's groundwater had arsenic concentrations exceeding the 10 micrograms per litre ($\mu\text{g/L}$) safe limit set by the World Health Organisation for drinking water. In some samples, the arsenic concentration recorded

was as high as $450\mu\text{g/L}$ - exceeding the WHO guidelines by 45 times. The crisis is not limited to Bangladesh. Dr Seth Frisby, the author of the study and a professor at Norwich University said the chronic arsenic poisoning has also been impacting residents of India's West Bengal, a state neighbouring Bangladesh. "The same chemical processes from rising sea levels that release arsenic from sediments into Bangladesh's drinking well water will also very likely release arsenic from sediments into West Bengal's drinking well water," he told The Independent.

Saudi Arabia opens its first liquor store in over 70 years as kingdom further liberalizes

(News Agency)-A liquor store has opened in Saudi Arabia for the first time in over 70 years, a diplomat reported Wednesday, a further socially liberalizing step in the once-ultraconservative kingdom that is home to the holiest sites in Islam. While restricted to non-Muslim diplomats, the store in Riyadh comes as Saudi Arabia's assertive Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman aims to make the kingdom a tourism and business destination as part of ambitious plans to slowly wean its economy away from crude oil. However, challenges remain both from the prince's international reputation after the 2018 killing of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi as well as internally with the conservative Islamic mores that have governed its sandy expanses for decades. The store sits next to a supermarket in Riyadh's Diplomatic Quarter, said the diplomat, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a socially sensitive topic



in Saudi Arabia. The diplomat walked through the store Wednesday, describing it as similar to an upscale duty free shop at a major international airport.

The store stocks liquor, wine and only two types of beer for the time being, the diplomat said. Workers at the store asked customers for their diplomatic identifications and for them to place their mobile phones inside of pouches while inside. A mobile phone app allows purchases on an allotment system, the diplomat said.

Saudi officials did not respond to a request for comment regarding the store. However, the opening of the store coincides with a story run by the English-language newspaper Arab News, owned by the state-aligned Saudi Research and Media Group, on new rules governing alcohol sales to diplomats in the kingdom. It described the rules as meant "to curb the uncontrolled importing of these special goods and liquors within the diplomatic consignments."

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The rules took effect Monday, the newspaper reported.

For years, diplomats have been able to import liquor through a specialty service into the kingdom, for consumption on diplomatic grounds.

Those without access in the past have purchased liquor from bootleggers or brewed their own inside their homes. However, the U.S. State Department warns that those arrested and convicted for consuming alcohol can face "long jail sentences, heavy fines, public floggings and deportation." Drinking alcohol is considered haram, or forbidden, in Islam.

Saudi Arabia remains one of the few nations in the world with a ban on alcohol, alongside its neighbor Kuwait and Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates.

Saudi Arabia has banned alcohol since the early 1950s. Then-King Abdulaziz, Saudi Arabia's founding monarch, stopped its sale following a 1951 incident in which one of his sons, Prince Mishari, became intoxicated and used a shotgun to kill British vice

consul Cyril Ousman in Jeddah.

Following Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution and a militant attack on the Grand Mosque at Mecca, Saudi Arabia's rulers soon further embraced Wahhabism, an ultraconservative Islamic doctrine born in the kingdom. Strict gender separation, a women's driving ban and other measures were put in place.

Under Prince Mohammed and his father, King Salman, the kingdom has opened movie theaters, allowed women to drive and hosted major music festivals. But political speech and dissent remains strictly criminalized, potentially at the penalty of death.

As Saudi Arabia prepares for a \$500 billion futuristic city project called Neom, reports have circulated that alcohol could be served at a beach resort there.

Sensitivities, however, remain. After an official suggested that "alcohol was not off the table" at Neom in 2022, within days he soon no longer was working at the project.

Hungary won't back down and change LGBTQ+ and asylum policies criticized by EU, minister says

(News Agency) Hungary's government will not change policies the European Union believes infringe on LGBTQ+ rights and those of asylum seekers, even if doing so would unfreeze billions in funding the bloc has withheld from Budapest, a government minister said Thursday.

The EU has frozen funding to Hungary over concerns its right-wing nationalist government has trampled on minority rights and academic freedoms, failed to rein in official corruption and undermined democratic values.

The release of those funds has been tied to Hungary carrying out reforms to bring it into line with the EU's democratic standards.

Gergely Gulyas, chief of staff to Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, told a news conference on Thursday there were "limits" to reaching an agreement with the bloc's executive, since modifying policies on LGBTQ+ and asylum rights would contradict the will of Hungarian voters.

Hungary's government has also implemented a policy of turning away asylum seekers at its borders and requiring them to begin their asylum



process at Hungarian embassies in Serbia and Ukraine — a practice that was declared unlawful last year by the EU's top court.

The EU in December released more than

10 billion euros (\$10.9 billion) to Hungary after it undertook reforms to ensure the independence of its judicial system, but more than 20 billion euros remain frozen pending further legal changes.

On Wednesday, European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, said those funds "will remain blocked until Hungary fulfills all the necessary conditions." "The Hungarian government is willing to reach an agreement with the Commission, but in cases where people have expressed a clear opinion, it would be undemocratic and unacceptable," Gulyas said in Budapest, adding that there are "red lines" when it comes to reforms Hungary is willing to make.

"For Hungary, even despite the will of the European Commission, it is unacceptable to spread LGBTQ propaganda among children, and we also cannot abandon our position on migration issues," Gulyas said.

The EU takes issue with a Hungarian law passed in 2021, which forbids the display of homosexual content to minors in media, including television, films, advertisements and literature.

The law, which has been decried by rights groups and foreign governments as discriminatory, also prohibits the discussion of LGBTQ+ topics in school education programs and forbids public display of products depicting or promoting gender deviation.

Asante Gold: UK to loan back Ghana's looted 'crown jewels'

(News Agency)The UK is sending some of Ghana's "crown jewels" back home, 150 years after looting them from the court of the Asante king.

A gold peace pipe is among 32 items returning under long-term loan deals, the BBC can reveal.

The Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) is lending 17 pieces and 15 are from the British Museum.

Ghana's chief negotiator said he hoped for "a new sense of cultural co-operation" after generations of anger.

Some national museums in the UK - including the V&A and the British Museum - are banned by law from



permanently giving back contested items in their collections, and loan deals such as this are seen as a way to allow objects to return to their countries of origin.

But some countries laying claim to disputed artefacts fear that loans may be used to imply they accept the UK's ownership.

Tristram Hunt, director of the V&A, told the BBC that the gold items of court regalia are the equivalent of "our Crown Jewels".

The items to be loaned, most of which were taken during 19th-Century wars between the British and the Asante, include a sword of state and gold badges worn by officials charged with cleansing the soul of the king. Mr Hunt said when museums hold "objects with origins in war and looting in military campaigns, we have a responsibility to the countries of origin to think about how we can share those more fairly today.

"It doesn't seem to me that all of our museums will fall down if we build up these kind of partnerships and exchanges."

However, Mr Hunt insisted the new cultural partnership "is not restitution by the back door" - meaning it is not a way to return permanent ownership back to Ghana.

The three-year loan agreements, with an option to extend for a further three years, are not with the Ghanaian government but with Otumfo Osei Tutu II - the current

Asante king known as the Asantehene - who attended the Coronation of King Charles last year.

The Asantehene still holds an influential ceremonial role, although his kingdom is now part of Ghana's modern democracy. The items will go on display at the Manhyia Palace Museum in Kumasi, the capital of the Asante region, to celebrate the Asantehene's silver jubilee.

The Asante gold artefacts are the ultimate symbol of the Asante royal government and are believed to be invested with the spirits of former Asante kings. They have an importance to Ghana comparable to the Benin Bronzes - thousands of sculptures and plaques looted by Britain from the palace of the Kingdom of Benin, in modern-day southern Nigeria. Nigeria has been calling for their return for decades.

Nana Oforiatta Ayim, special adviser to Ghana's culture minister, told the BBC: "They're not just objects, they have spiritual importance as well. They are part of the soul of the nation. It's pieces of ourselves returning."

She said the loan was "a good starting point" on the anniversary of the looting and "a sign of some kind of healing and commemoration for the violence that happened".

UK museums hold many more items taken from Ghana, including a gold trophy head that is among the most famous

pieces of Asante regalia.

The Asante built what was once one of the most powerful and formidable states in west Africa, trading in, among others, gold, textiles and enslaved people.

The kingdom was famed for its military might and wealth. Even now, when the Asantehene shakes hands on official occasions, he can be so weighed down with heavy gold bracelets that he sometimes has an aide whose job is to support his arm.

Europeans were attracted to what they later named the Gold Coast by the stories of African wealth and Britain fought repeated battles with the Asante in the 19th Century.

In 1874 after an Asante attack, British

It's a very political act".

The British Museum is also returning on loan a total of 15 items, some of them looted during a later conflict in 1895-96, including a sword of state known as the Mpomponsuo.

There is also a ceremonial cap, known as a Denkyemke, richly decorated with gold ornaments. It was worn by senior courtiers at coronations and other major festivals.

The British Museum is also lending a cast-gold model lute-harp (Sankuo), which was not looted, to highlight its almost 200-year-old connection with the Asantehenes.

The sankuo was presented to the British writer and diplomat Thomas Bowdich in 1817, who said it was intended as a gift from the Asantehene to the museum to demonstrate the wealth and status of the Asante nation.

'Cut through the politics'

Can you loan objects back to a country that says you stole them?

It's a solution to UK legal restrictions that may not be acceptable to countries which say they want to right a historic wrong.

The issue of the Parthenon Sculptures, or Elgin Marbles as they were named in the UK, is the best-known example.

Greece has long demanded the return of these classical sculptures that are displayed in the British Museum. Its chair



troops launched a "punitive expedition", in the colonial language of the time, ransacking Kumasi and taking many of the palace treasures. Most of the items the V&A is returning were bought at an auction on 18 April 1874 at Garrards, the London jewellers who maintain the UK's Crown Jewels.

They include three heavy cast-gold items known as soul washers' badges (Akrafokonmu), which were worn around the necks of high ranking officials at court who were responsible for cleansing the soul of the king.

Angus Patterson, a senior curator at the V&A, said taking these items in the 19th Century "was not simply about acquiring wealth, although that is a part of it. It's also about removing the symbols of government or the symbols of authority.

of trustees, George Osborne, recently said that he was looking for a "practical, pragmatic and rational way forward" and was exploring a partnership that, in essence, puts the question of who actually owns the classical sculptures to one side. This agreement with the Asantehene is another version of that; a compromise that works for the Asante king and is possible within the parameters of British law. Just as Nigeria would be unlikely to accept a loan of the Benin Bronzes, it would have been difficult for Ghana's government to accept this kind of agreement.

But Mr Hunt said the deals between the V&A, the British Museum and the Manhyia Palace Museum "cut through the politics. It doesn't solve the problem, but it begins the conversation".

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia hold joint military training



(News Agency) A joint military training between the Pakistan Army and Royal Saudi Land Forces kicked off in Okara district in Pakistan's eastern Punjab province, the Pakistani military said. At the inauguration of the training in

Okara Garrison organised by the Multan Corps of the Pakistan Army, the contingents of both countries displayed remarkable military drill, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the media wing of the Pakistani military, said on Sunday in a statement as quoted by news agency report. Through the joint training programme, the troops of the two countries would get the opportunity to refine their skills in classroom sessions and in collective combat skills, it added.

At the end of the inauguration ceremony, badges of joint training were affixed to the officers and soldiers of the two sides, according to the ISPR.

5 killed in shooting in southern Sri Lanka

(News Agency) Five persons were killed in a shooting incident on Monday morning in Beliatta in Southern Province of Sri Lanka, police said.



Police spokesman Nihal Thaldewa said the incident occurred near the Beliatta interchange on the Southern Expressway. Four people were killed on the spot, while another died upon admission to the hospital, he said as reported by news agency. The shooting took place

around 7:45 a.m. local time (0215 GMT) when an unidentified group, traveling in a vehicle, opened fire at another group in a jeep, he said.

The police suspect that the shooting was carried out by members of organized criminal gangs. Sri Lanka has launched an operation since Dec. 17 to curb drug trafficking and organized criminal activities, with over 40,000 suspects being arrested as of last week.

47 buried in China's landslide



(News Agency) A total of 47 people were buried in a landslide that struck southwest China's Yunnan Province early Monday. More than 200 rescuers together with 33 firefighting vehicles and 10 loading machines were combing the debris to search for the missing, after the disaster happened in the Liangshui Village, Tangfang Town in the city of Zhaotong at 5:51 a.m. on Monday, news agency

reported. The buried villagers were from 18 households, according to the headquarters for the disaster relief. More than 200 residents were evacuated as the provincial commission for disaster reduction activated a Level-III emergency response for disaster relief. Local weather forecast said there will be light snow in the town on Tuesday, with the lowest temperature expected to reach minus three degrees Celsius.

Thousands march in Brussels for Gaza ceasefire before EU meetings

(News Agency)- Nearly 9,000 people, according to the police, participated in a march in Brussels, demanding concrete measures from Belgium to establish an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and ensure justice for the Palestinian people.

As the current President of the EU Council, Belgium is called upon to play a central role in promoting a fair solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, news agency reported.

On Monday, the EU Foreign Affairs Council will discuss the situation in the Middle East in Brussels. The 27 EU Foreign Ministers will meet with Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz before separate talks with the top diplomat of the Palestinian Authority, Riyad al-Maliki.



The mobilisation on this Sunday was initiated by a diverse coalition of Belgian civil society organisations, including major NGOs. The organisers, advocating for peace, warned against any promotion of war crimes, attacks on civilians, anti-Semitism or racism. According

to the organisers, in the past three months, more than 24,000 Palestinians, mainly women and children have lost their lives. Nearly 1.9 million people have been forcibly displaced, and a significant portion of civil infrastructure has been completely destroyed.

Pak ECP releases list of nominees for Feb 8 polls

(News Agency)- Islamabad : Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has finally released the list of much-awaited list of contesting candidates, media report said. As per the Pakistan ECP, Jan 12 was the last date for withdrawal of candidature and publication of the revised list of candidates. However,

it was delayed due to litigation. "On Feb 8, PML-N supreme leader Nawaz Sharif and PTI's former provincial health minister Yasmin Rashid will face off in NA-130, Lahore, in a heated electoral battle. Sharif is also contesting from NA-15 (Mansehra) where the opponents include Gustasif Khan of the PTI and

JUI-F's Mufti Kifayatullah," Dawn newspaper reported. Reports said that PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif will run from NA-123 (Lahore) and NA-132 (Kasur). In Lahore, he will face Afzaal Azeem of the PTI and Liaqat Baloch of the Jamaat-Islami (JI).

"Maryam Nawaz will contest the election from NA-119 (Lahore), where she will be facing Mian Abaad Farooque of the PTI and Iftikhar Shahid of the PPP," media reports said. Similarly, Hamza Shehbaz is vying for NA-118 (Lahore), where he will be up against vocal PTI

leader and former parliamentary secretary Aliya Hamza, Mohammad Afzal Khan of the JUI-F, and Shahid Abbas of the PPP. "Maryam and Hamza are also contesting on provincial assembly seats from Lahore," media reports said.

Shefali Jariwala: Delhi's Chole Bhature, CP's street chaat are my favourites

New Delhi- Actress Shefali Jariwala has expressed her love for the national capital, and its unique charm, revealing that the 'chole bhature' and street chaat from Connaught Place (CP) are her absolute favourite delicacies. Best known as 'Kaanta Laga' girl, Shefali made her television debut with wedding fantasy thriller 'Shaitani Rasmein', and is seen as 'Kapalika' in the supernatural drama.

The actress, who was in Delhi for the promotions of the show, took a delightful detour of the city, and discussed her culinary cravings. She also spoke about the sacrifice the actors make for their work commitments.

Shefali is not just a fitness enthusiast, but also someone who appreciates the flavours of the diverse Indian cuisine.

While in Delhi, the city known for its rich culinary heritage, Shefali couldn't resist expressing her fondness for the local delights, particularly chole bhature, and street-side chaat from the iconic Connaught Place.

Despite her tight work commitments during this visit, Shefali lamented missing out on the opportunity to relish these Delhi delicacies.

Talking about the same, the actress known for her work in 'Mujhse Shaadi Karogi' said: "Delhi's chole bhature and street chaat from CP are my absolute favourites. Unfortunately, my

schedule didn't allow me to indulge this time, but the next time I'm in Delhi, I'm making it a point to spare some time and savour these local treats."

Shefali, who was a part of the reality show 'Bigg Boss' season 13, further said: "As much as I understand nobody should refrain from eating from what makes them happy but as actors our work comes first and sometimes to we have to let go from eating many favourite

foods in order to stay fit as our role demands it."

Shefali, who frequents Delhi two-four times a month due to work commitments, expressed her love for the city and its unique charm. "Delhi holds a special place in my heart. The vibrant energy, the delicious food, and even the winter chill - everything about Delhi is charming. I always look forward to my visits here," she added.

'Shaitani Rasmein' airs on Star Bharat.

Mark Ruffalo hid brain tumour diagnosis from wife until treatment

Hollywood star Mark Ruffalo's wife believed he was joking when he told her he had a brain tumour. The actor told the news of his potentially fatal condition to his partner Sunrise 'Sunny' Coigney a few days

aceshowbiz.com. Ruffalo discovered he had a tumour 23 years ago when actress Sunrise, 51, was around nine-and-a-half months pregnant with her and actor's son Keen, who is now 22 and arrived in June 2001. Ruffalo



added he made the decision to wait until after the boy's birth to break the news of his condition. He said, "I was just like, 'I can't,' she's already like, 'Oh God, him again,

after she gave birth to their first child in 2001. "When I told Sunny about it, at first she thought I was joking, and then she just burst into tears and said, 'I always knew you were gonna die young,' " he told the 'Smartless' podcast, reports

does everything gotta be about him?' And so I just couldn't." Ruffalo also said a week after his baby arrived he had to meet a neurologist and figure out a plan for his treatment, so he told Sunrise the night before his appointment.



Akshay, Tiger bring out best in action, thrill & entertainment in 'Bade Miyan Chote Miyan' teaser

Mumbai- Stars Akshay Kumar and Tiger Shroff's 'Bade Miyan Chote Miyan' teaser, which dropped on Wednesday, is perfectly packed with entertainment, thrill and of course lots of high-octane action. Speaking about the teaser, director Ali Abbas Zafar said: "Extreme hard work and commitment of shooting in multiple countries with the most talented crew from different parts of the world has gone behind bringing 'Bade Miyan Chote Miyan' to the audiences and who better than Akshay Sir and Tiger, India's original action heroes who would translate the challenging sequences so effortlessly and yet root the film to its target mass



audience."

"More than thrilled to bring this film for their fans and audiences on big screens on Eid April 2024."

'Bade Miyan Chote Miyan' is shot across stunning locations such as Mumbai, London, Abu Dhabi,

Scotland, and Jordan.

The film features Prithviraj Sukumaran in an intriguing villainous role, while also starring actors Sonakshi Sinha, Manushi Chhillar, and Alaya F in significant parts. As the days count, the

excitement is building for the film's theatrical release on Eid 2024.

Producer Jackky Bhagnani said: "The teaser tells its own story with larger-than-life action and the perfect portrayal of

iconic roles by Akshay Sir and Tiger Shroff. Additionally, Prithviraj adds a surprising twist, making him the hidden gem.

"I am thrilled to have our action heroes on board; Ali's magic is evident once again. We hope audiences feel the dedication of our entire team and appreciate the efforts we've put into this project." The teaser already speaks volumes about the film, but a lot more is yet to come as the film is packed with powerful scenes, peppy songs, great landscapes, and much more.

The film releases in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada. Vashu Bhagnani and Pooja Entertainment present 'Bade Miyan Chote Miyan' in association with AAZ films.

Doing a single shot film is very difficult

Actress Hansika Motwani, who will be soon seen in a one-shot Telugu film '105 Minutes' has opened up on working in such a unique cinematic narrative, saying she loves challenges and wanted to do something different.

The entire movie unfolds seamlessly in a single, uninterrupted shot, pushing the boundaries of filmmaking.

Hansika, who is known for her work in 'Koi... Mil Gaya' takes on the challenge of a one-shot film, revealing her versatility and superb acting abilities.

This experimental film takes place in real time, drawing viewers into a suspenseful horror story that lasts for 105 minutes without a single cut.

Talking about the same, Hansika said: "I

have never done something like that, like a single shot. We do have a few here and there, stitches in the film. Um, but yes, the longest takes. The whole idea of, you know, doing a single shot film?"

"It's very difficult because there's literally one side, there is wind, then another side there is fire, and the other side there's rain and there's so much to coordinate, but I love challenges and I wanted to do something different, so I did it," she added. Meanwhile, on the work front she was last seen in Telugu thriller film 'My Name Is Shruthi'.

She also has 'Rowdy Baby', 'Guardian', 'Man', and web series 'Nasha' in the pipeline.

I aim to give my old clothes a fresh, creative update

Actress Geetanjali Mishra shared her views on upcycling outfits and accessories, and said she prefers shopping only when necessary, adding she aims to give her old clothes a fresh, and creative update.

Emphasising on the transformative power of upcycling and the inherent beauty of reimagining everyday items, Geetanjali, who plays Rajesh Singh in the sitcom 'Happu Ki Ultan Paltan', shared: "Actors have traditionally faced the

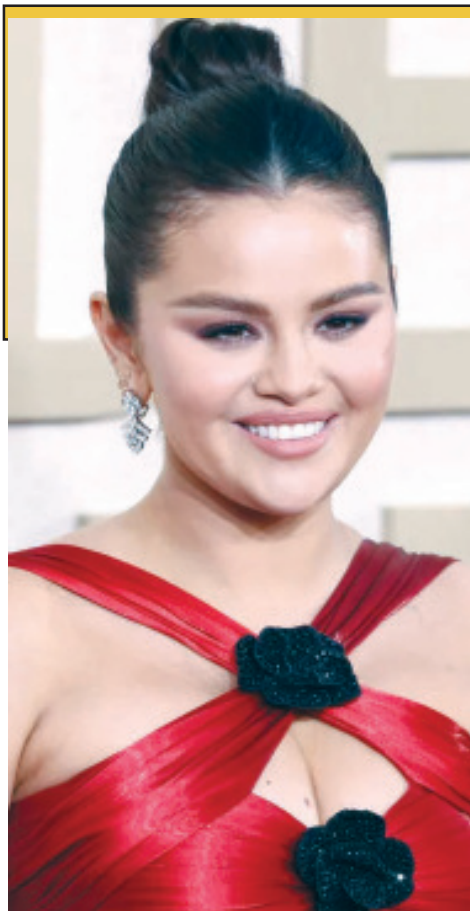
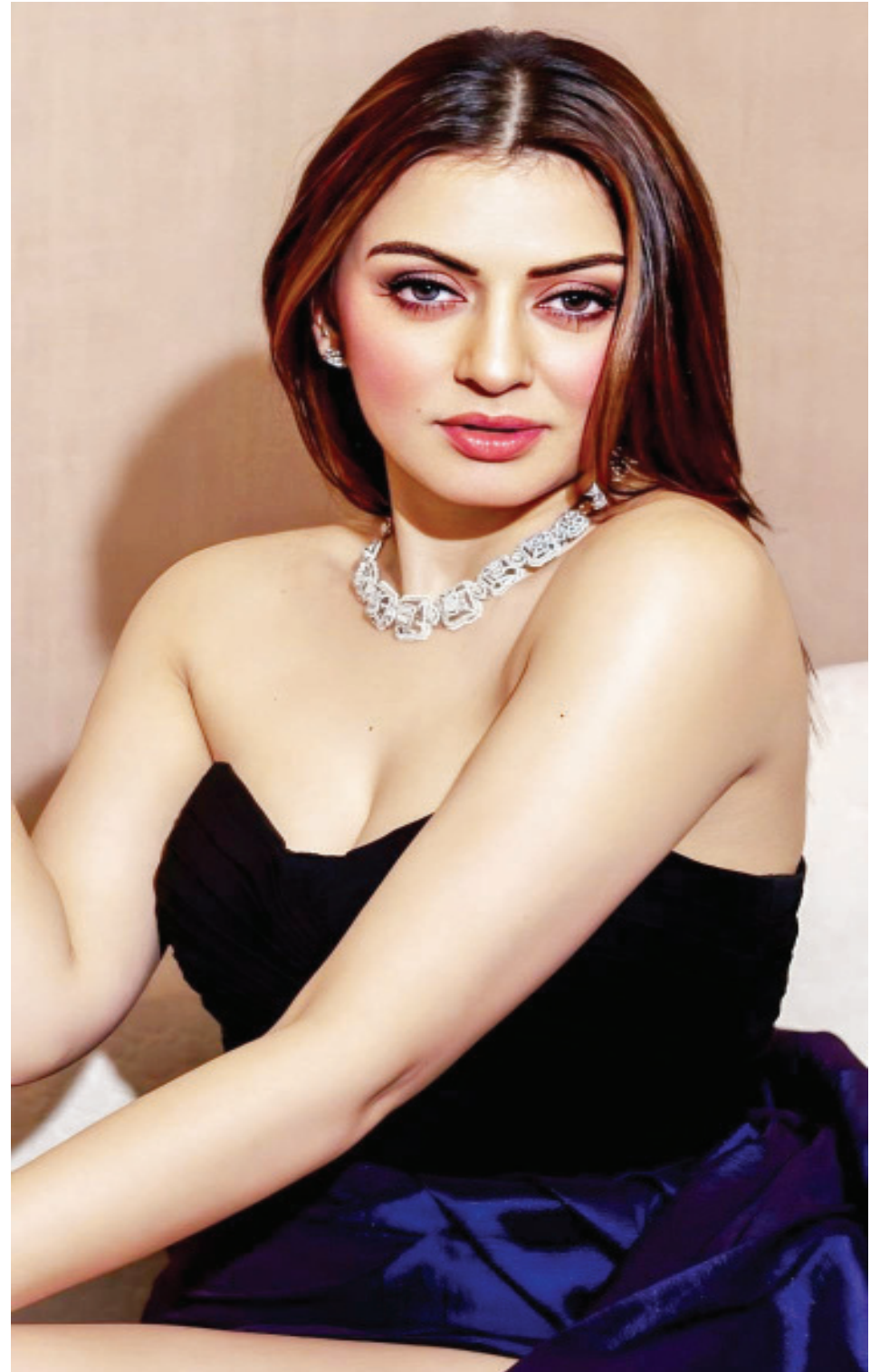
pressure of avoiding outfit or accessory repeats, but things are different now. I prefer shopping only when necessary and have transformed several dresses from my



existing wardrobe."

"I aim to give my old clothes a fresh, creative update. For example, when my kurtas show signs of wear, I shorten them and create crop tops that I can pair with any of my jeans or denim. Versatile clothing pieces like shrugs, jackets, and scarves offer numerous styling possibilities. I enjoy revamping old scarves into stylish ponchos, particularly for winter wear," said the 'Kundali Bhagya' actress. Geetanjali said she tends to collect jewellery from various cities. "When

these pieces become worn or tarnished, I remove the ghungroos and pearls and repurpose them as decorative accents for my garden accessories and display items.



Singer-actress Selena Gomez has spoken candidly about her body image.

The singer recently shared a series of Instagram stories, showing off her body in photos from over the years.

The 'Only Murders in the Building' star, 31, first shared a photo from an earlier

Selena Gomez reflects on body changes in then & now Instagram posts

date, where she's photographed wearing a zebra bikini, reports People magazine.

In the Instagram story, Selena wrote: "Today I realised I will never look like this again".

She followed up the first photo with a more recent bathing suit image. This photo showed Selena in a black, high-waisted bikini bottom with a white tube-top bikini top.

As per People, the second Story caption read, "I'm not perfect, but I am proud to be who I am... Sometimes I forget it's ok to be me".

Her recent posts follow her previous

body positivity messages, along with the instances when she's called out body-shamers for sharing unpleasant comments about her body.

People further states that in April 2022, the 'Selena + Chef' star called out body shamers who criticised her appearance.

"Honestly, I don't care about my weight because people bitch about it anyway", she said in her TikTok Stories.

"You're too small,' 'you're too big,' 'that doesn't fit.' 'Meh meh meh meh'."

"B****, I am perfect the way I am," she added.

"Moral of the story? Bye."

Dakota Johnson claps back at criticism over her statement of '14 hours of sleep'

Actress Dakota Johnson has told people to "leave her alone" over the idea she sleeps for 14 hours every night.

The 34-year-old actress caused a stir last month when she told the Wall Street Journal she could "easily" sleep for such a long amount of time, but now she's insisted she doesn't "demand" it after her comments were misinterpreted, reports 'Female First UK'.

Appearing on 'The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon', she said: "I didn't even say that like that!" When the late night host asked if she "likes to sleep 14 hours," she responded: "No. I said that I could easily sleep 14 hours. But I don't like to demand it. I'm not a monster." As per 'Female First UK', after Jimmy noted that plenty of outlets picked up the story which sparked a debate on the right amount of sleep, Dakota jokingly argued her case.

She laughed: "Why is sleep bad? Like, why? Leave me alone. I'm just asleep. I don't have to take anything to sleep like that either, I can just sleep like that. I think if I took like an Ambien, I think I'd wake up next year."

Last month, she told the WSJ that sleep is her "number one priority", while meditation helps her cope with anxiety.

She explained: "I don't have a regular [wake-up] time. It depends on what's happening in my life. "If I'm not working, if I have a day off on a Monday, then I will sleep as long as I can. Sleep is my number one priority in life."

Dakota, who is currently promoting upcoming superhero movie 'Madame Web', told the outlet that she needs at least 10 hours of kip a night to function.

She added: "I'm not functional if I get less than 10. I can easily go 14 hours."



Mohsin Khan: Watched Jim Morrison's videos, French movies as reference for 'Jab Mila Tu'



Actor Mohsin Khan, who stars in the slice-of-life drama series 'Jab Mila Tu', shared that he watched a lot of Jim Morrison interviews, French movies, and 'Once Upon a Time in America' for the references in order to portray his character smoothly. Mohsin was last seen as Kartik in the show 'Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai'. He is portraying Maddy in 'Jab Mila Tu', who is a passionate, larger-than-life character dealing with emotional upheavals off-stage.

Opening up about his preparation for the role, Mohsin shared: "I don't relate to my character a lot because Maddy is completely different from Mohsin. I had to go through a lot of references to be able to portray my character smoothly."

Mohsin, who was a part of 'Nisha Aur Uske Cousins', said: "I remember watching a lot of American singer Jim Morrison's interviews and videos, and some French movies. Although the stories and events are different, we can learn a lot."

"I remember watching 'Once Upon a Time in America'

and speaking to our director to take references from that movie, as Sir De Niro's character in the movie was very similar, suffering from childhood trauma and having a childhood sweetheart," he added.

'Once Upon a Time in America' is a 1984 epic crime film, starring Robert De Niro and James Woods.

'Jab Mila Tu' stars Mohsin Khan, Eisha Singh, Pratick Sejpal and Alisha Chopra in the lead.

Set against the scenic and lively backdrop of Goa, 'Jab Mila Tu' is about Maddy, a maverick superstar singer, and Aneri, a passionate chef, who are forced to come under one roof owing to an unforeseen situation. What follows is a series of confusion, peppered by moments of laughter. Aneri cleverly uses social media to spin fake love stories, while Maddy, not one to be outdone, hires an actor to entangle her in a fabricated romance.

Directed by Lalit Mohan, created by Nisheeth Neelkanth and Harjeet Chhabra and produced by Two Nice Men, 'Jab Mila Tu' is streaming on JioCinema.

Craving to do a Bollywood item number: Aradhana Sharma



Actress Aradhana Sharma, who has performed a dance number in the Marathi film 'Khurchi', said it is her dream to do a Bollywood item number and shared how she is really manifesting it.

Aradhana, who was recently seen in the web series 'Video Cam Scam' said: "It's my dream, and I am craving to do a Bollywood item number. I'm hoping that my video somehow reaches a director or someone in the industry, and they quickly like it, taking it as a reference."

"I want them to think, 'We need someone like Aradhana who danced gracefully in that video'. I am really manifesting it, wishing to do a Bollywood item number as soon as possible. I am dying to do it. I am a very desi girl, a girl who loves Bollywood cinema very much, and I would love to be a part of a Bollywood item number, just like Helen," she shared.

Arbaaz Khan joins Nawazuddin Siddiqui in 'Section 108'

Actor Arbaaz Khan, who recently tied the knot with Sshura Khan, has joined Nawazuddin Siddiqui and Regina Cassandra in the upcoming film 'Section 108'. The actor will be seen playing a powerful businessman in the film, and will infuse the character with a blend of sophistication and charisma. The film is currently in its final schedule in Lonavala.

Talking about the project, Arbaaz said, "This is a great script and also the first movie that has been offered to me post marriage. It's a fantastic role. In fact, the team for 'Section 108' is really energetic and amazing! Also, the best part is that we discussed, and we started immediately shooting for the same. Really looking forward to this one."

'Section 108' is produced by CinemaWala Productions and directed by Rasikh Khan. Meanwhile, Arbaaz is in a happy place on the personal front. He tied the knot for the second time with Sshura Khan. As per reports, Arbaaz and Sshura had met on the sets of the upcoming movie 'Patna Shukla'.



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Nicotine-free vapes too can harm your lungs

London- Researchers found that even the nicotine-free vape caused oxidative stress in the lung, increased inflammation and the breakdown of blood vessels. This damage is similar to those found in patients with lung injury, said the team from Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) in the UK.

E-ci garettes have become increasingly popular in recent years and are often seen as harmless alternatives to cigarette smoking. The team identified a protein that causes nicotine-free vape fluid to increase in the lung, causing the damage.

In the paper, published in the journal *Microvascular Research*, they demonstrated a range of damaging pathways when an in vitro model of the human lung was exposed to a common brand of nicotine-free e-cigarette.

Recent studies have focused on harm done by vapes containing nicotine, and 39 countries have banned the sale of nicotine-containing e-cigarettes, resulting in an increase in the use of nicotine-free vapes, particularly in adolescents. "Vaping is a significant health concern considering the rising numbers of smokers, especially young teenagers, and research into its health impact is still at an early stage," said lead author Dr Havovi Chichger, Associate Professor of Biomedical Science at ARU.

"Nicotine-free vape fluid has been demonstrated to have the same chemical composition as nicotine-containing fluid except



for the absence of nicotine. As the most damaging to vascular function," Chichger said. The team at the University's Biomedical Science Research group measured the effect of vape fluid on cells in a model of a human lung. Three vapes, all watermelon

flavour, were purchased from an online retailer and contained different concentrations of nicotine: 0mg, 10mg and 20mg in a 2ml solution to mimic concentrations commonly used by the public.

Analysis of the data revealed that a protein, ARF6, which was not previously thought to be linked to smoking or lung injury but is associated with vascular function, has a key role in regulating pulmonary microvasculature.

"Our findings indicate that nicotine-free vape fluid exposure causes similar pro-oxidant and pro-inflammatory effects on human microvascular endothelial cells, and that ARF6 is a key regulator in vape-induced damage to blood vessels," Chichger said.

"Further investigation is vital to identify the link between the vaping of nicotine-free e-cigarettes and the potential development of lung injury in future years."

Family companies are experiencing heir loss: Report

New Delhi- Family companies are the hidden engines of the global economy. More than 90 per cent of all companies are family companies. These include many of the world's biggest organisations such as LVMH Moet Hennessy Louis Vuitton SE in France and Samsung Electronics Co. in South Korea, Bloomberg reported. A third of companies in Standard & Poor's 500 index and 40 per cent of the largest companies in France and Germany have a strong family element, Bloomberg reported. Yet thanks to a combination of demographics and changing social mores, many family firms now face the ultimate threat to their survival: a shortage of heirs. Good riddance, you might say, after watching the psychopathic antics on succession. That ignores the importance of



the best family firms not just as engines of progress and innovation, but as repositories of public trust, especially at a time when trust in capitalism is at an historically low ebb, Bloomberg reported. Even if family companies grow to be behemoths like Succession's Waystar RoyCo, family companies are inherently fragile organisations. This is partly because they are

so prone to family feuds but also because producing a capable heir is hard. Nonfamily companies have the advantage of choosing successors from the entire universe of management talent. Family-run companies are restricted by DNA, Bloomberg reported. The heirs that remain are much less inclined to follow their fathers into the family business. The brightest ones go off to elite universities and business schools and frequently put down their roots in big cities. The less talented ones who stay at home may be willing to take over the company but are often not up to the job. Two other demographic factors compound the problem of the shortage of heirs. Patriarchs and matriarchs now live much longer and may not be willing to concede control until they are in their seventies or even beyond, Bloomberg reported.

Diabetes drug Ozempic can reduce severe liver disease risk too

London- Novo Nordisk's Ozempic and other GLP1 agonists -- popular diabetes drugs -- are also associated with a reduced risk of developing cirrhosis and liver cancer in people with Type 2 diabetes and chronic liver disease, according to a study. GLP1 agonists like Ozempic reduce blood sugar levels and are mainly used to treat Type 2 diabetes. However, as the drug also reduces appetite, it is now increasingly used to treat obesity and has become a popular weight-loss drug. The study, published in the journal



Gut, showed that those who took the drug for a long period of time had a lower risk of later developing more severe forms of

liver disease such as cirrhosis and liver cancer.

This suggests that GLP1 agonists could be an effective treatment to avoid severe liver disease in people with concurrent Type 2 diabetes, said the researchers from Karolinska Institutet in Sweden.

People with Type-2 diabetes are more likely to develop severe liver disease

"Our findings are interesting because there are currently no approved drugs to reduce this risk," said Axel Wester, Assistant Professor at Karolinska's

Department of Medicine.

Many of the people in the study stopped taking GLP1 agonists, resulting in a lack of protective effect. However, those who continued taking their medication over a 10-year period were half as likely to develop severe liver disease. However, "the results need to be confirmed in clinical trials, but it will take many years for these studies to be completed," Wester said. "Therefore, we use existing registry data to try to say something about the effect of the drugs before that."

OnePlus expands mainline network in India, to operate with 50K retailer stores in 2024

India continues to be an important market for global technology brand OnePlus and the company aims to operate with approximately 50,000 mainline retailer stores in the country in 2024, a top company executive said on Wednesday. OnePlus, which has just launched its flagship 12R series which offers a significant advancement from its predecessor across performance, display innovation, charging capabilities, camera technology, and design aesthetics, will certainly look forward to bringing more positive investments this year, to further benefit its India community, Ranjeet Singh, Director of Sales, OnePlus India, told IANS.

"This year, we are excited to bring in renewed focus towards our retail strategy. OnePlus is looking to increase investments across mainline channel by two folds in 2024. And we look forward to expanding our mainline presence by opening 200+ new OnePlus Experience stores across India in 2024," Singh informed.

The OnePlus 12 will arrive in two colour variants -- Flowy Emerald and Silky Black. The



12GB+256GB option is priced at Rs 64,999 and the 16GB+512GB option is priced at Rs 69,999 and will be available for purchase starting January 30. Moreover, the company launched the OnePlus 12R in two colours -- Cool Blue or Iron Gray. The 8GB+128 GB option is priced at Rs 39,999 and the 16GB+256 GB option is priced at Rs 45,999. The OnePlus 12R will be available for purchase starting February 6.

At the core of OnePlus 12 5G is the powerful Snapdragon 8 Gen 3 Mobile Platform, supported by the proprietary Trinity Engine, and

up to 16GB of LPDDR5X RAM with 512GB UFS 4.0 ROM. "The design, inspired by luxurious timepieces and the beauty of nature that surrounds us, reflects a harmonious blend of technology and aesthetic appeal. The 4th Gen Hasselblad camera system has something for just about everyone; we've also enhanced our Pro Mode to create Master Mode for the experimental or for professionals," Singh told IANS.

The company ventured into the foldable segment last year and introduced the OnePlus Open. "We went on to witness an incredible response from our

India community. And the OnePlus Open device emerged as the highest selling foldable smartphone device on the first day of sale at Reliance Digital," according to Singh. Similarly, it also emerged as the highest sold foldable smartphone on Amazon.in on its open sale day in Rs 1 lakh price segment (January 2023-October 27 2023). "We also ventured into a brand-new segment of tablets with our OnePlus Pad and Pad Go, both of which also saw remarkable response from our consumers across India," Singh told IANS.

OnePlus emerged as the top brand in India within the price segment of \$400-\$600 (mid to high end range), according to the IDC. Additionally, OnePlus 11/11R led the mid to high end price segment (\$400-\$600) in January-November 2023 period in terms of shipments. "We also emerged as the fastest growing brand among top 10 smartphone brands in Jan-Nov 2023 with YoY growth of over 50 per cent (as per IDC)," Singh noted.

With the launch of the OnePlus 12 Series, the company is thrilled to embrace its "Never Settle" mantra once again, redefining flagship technology.

"And we are confident that our community is going to love what's in store for them," Singh added.

In line with its earlier commitment, OnePlus continues to increase market penetration with expansion into tier 2 and 3 markets in 2024. "With our retail expansion, we want to give our wider community base in India a chance to gain first-hand premium experience of our products as well as the OnePlus connected ecosystem," Singh told IANS.

As a brand, OnePlus has always listened to its community and their feedback on its products. "2024 will be no different, as we will continue to keep our community's interest at the heart of our efforts. We will continue to deliver on our promise to provide high-quality products with superior performance and burdenless technology," he mentioned. As a user-centric brand, "we will continue to invest in bringing in top-notch, meaningful technology to our consumers in India. And we will continue diversifying our product portfolio to meet the diverse needs of our growing user base," Singh further said.

Microsoft working on smaller, cheaper GenAI models



San Francisco- Microsoft is reportedly working on cheaper, smaller artificial intelligence (AI) models to tap more opportunities in the AI market. The Information reported the new generative AI team will focus on developing smaller language models (SLMs) that are similar to LLMs like OpenAI's GPT-4 but use less computing power.

"Microsoft is doubling down on artificial intelligence that's smaller and cheaper to run than OpenAI's," the report mentioned.

The tech giant has formed a new team to develop conversational AI that requires less computing power compared to software it's using from OpenAI, said the report, citing sources.

The new GenAI team will reportedly be led by Microsoft corporate vice president Misha Bilenko, and will be part of the Azure cloud unit.

The company has also moved several senior AI developers from its research group to the new GenAI team. Meanwhile, OpenAI

launched a GPT Store this month where users on its premium plans can sell and share customised AI models based on the company's LLMs. To access the GPT Store, users must be subscribed to one of OpenAI's premium ChatGPT plans - ChatGPT Plus, ChatGPT Enterprise or the newly launched ChatGPT Team. The Sam Altman-run company also announced it will start a revenue sharing programme with GPT creators in the first quarter of the year. ChatGPT Team is priced at \$25 a month per user when billed annually or \$30 a month for monthly billing.

ChatGPT Team is targeted toward teams with no more than 150 people and offers several features found in ChatGPT Enterprise, including access to GPT-4 and DALL-E 3 and the ability to create custom GPTs.

Google updates Chrome's incognito disclaimer after settling \$5 bn lawsuit

San Francisco- Google has updated Chrome's incognito mode disclaimer in the experimental Canary channel after it agreed to pay \$5 billion for settlement over tracking users' activity in incognito mode.

As spotted by MSPowerUser, the



updated Incognito pages are live in the Canary version of Chrome on Android, Windows, and other platforms.

"Others who use this device won't see your activity, so you can browse more privately," the new disclaimer reads.

"This won't change how data is collected by websites you visit and the services they use,

including Google. Downloads, bookmarks and reading list items will be saved," it added.

The lawsuit was filed in 2020, alleging that the tech giant "track, collect, and identify browsing data in real time" even when the users open incognito mode.

The lawsuit was filed by Florida resident William Byatt and California residents Chasom Brown and Maria Nguyen.

It also alleged that websites using Google Analytics or Ad Manager collected information from browsers in Incognito mode, "including web page content, device data, and IP address".

The plaintiffs also accused Google of taking Chrome users' private browsing activity and then associating it with their already-existing user profiles.

Amazon reduces nearly 5% of workforce at its Buy with Prime unit

Amazon has said that it is laying off nearly 5 per cent of its workforce at its Buy with Prime unit, the media reported. The latest job cut will include about 30 employees at the unit, reports CNBC.

However, it's unknown how many employees are in its Buy with Prime division.

"We regularly review the structure of our teams and make adjustments based on the needs of the business and, following a recent review, we've made the difficult decision to eliminate a small number of roles on our Buy with Prime team," an Amazon



spokesperson was quoted as saying. The spokesperson added that Buy with Prime remains "a top

priority for Amazon" and the company plans to continue investing "significant resources" in the programme. The Buy with Prime service lets online stores offer two-day shipping to Prime subscribers. According to the report, citing sources, some of the employees affected by the latest job cut worked in Amazon's multichannel fulfilment unit, which sits alongside Buy with Prime under the "Project Santos" organisation.

Amazon said it's helping laid-off workers in finding new positions elsewhere within the

company.

Workers will continue to receive their pay and benefits for at least 60 days, and they will be eligible for a severance package, the report mentioned.

Last week, Amazon-owned audiobook and podcast division Audible announced to lay off 5 per cent of its staff, more than 100 employees, as part of overall job cuts at the e-commerce giant.

In the same week, Amazon announced to lay off hundreds of employees at Twitch, Prime Video and MGM Studios.

Vroom to shut its e-commerce operations, cut nearly 90% of jobs

US-based leading e-commerce platform for buying and selling used vehicles Vroom has announced that it is discontinuing its e-commerce operations and winding down its used vehicle dealership business in order to preserve liquidity and enable the company to maximise stakeholder value through its remaining businesses. As part of a plan, the company expects that approximately 800 employees will be laid off, which is about 90 per cent of the total workforce.

"The company anticipates that approximately 800 employees will be impacted upon substantial implementation of the Value Maximisation Plan, resulting in a reduction of approximately 90 per cent of the employees not engaged in UACC's or CarStory's operations," Vroom said in the filing with the US Securities and



Exchange Commission (SEC). Under the Value Maximisation Plan approved by Vroom's Board of Directors, the company is suspending transactions through vroom.com, planning to sell its current used vehicle inventory through wholesale channels, and

substantially implemented by March 31, 2024.

"As we previously disclosed, we intended to raise additional capital to fund our operations and support the extension of our vehicle floorplan facility beyond its current expiration date of March 31, 2024," Thomas Shortt, the Company's Chief Executive Officer, said in a statement.

"Despite significant efforts to do so, we ultimately were unable to raise the necessary capital in the current market," he added.

The United Auto Credit Corporation (UACC), an automotive finance company, and CarStory, an artificial intelligence (AI)-powered analytics and digital services platform for automotive retail businesses will continue to serve their third-party customers, with their operations unaffected by Vroom's e-commerce wind-down.

Fintech firm Brex cuts 20% of jobs in restructuring exercise



US-based fintech company Brex has laid off about 20 per cent of its workforce, or 282 employees, in a restructuring exercise.

"Today we're restructuring Brex to become a high-velocity company. Sadly as part of those changes, 282 people (roughly 20 per cent of the company) will be leaving Brex today," Brex Founder and co-CEO Pedro Franceschi said in a message to employees on Tuesday.

Explaining the reason behind the decision to reduce the workforce, Franceschi said while the company's spend management solutions have a "massive opportunity ahead," the Brex organisation had grown too quickly and

was not operating as quickly as it had in the past.

"Looking inward, I realised we grew our org too quickly, making it harder to move at the speed we once did. This year, we decided to take a hard look at our current structure, and reduce the number of layers between leaders and the actual work that affects customers," he wrote. The impacted employees will receive eight weeks of severance, with two additional weeks of pay for each additional year of service, waiver of the one-year equity cliff for those who haven't reached theirs yet, and outplacement support for job search assistance.

David Ellison's Skydance Media explores acquiring all of Paramount Global, sources say

David Ellison's Skydance Media and its financial backers are exploring a deal to take private all of Paramount Global

, people familiar with the matter told CNBC.

Skydance, the film and TV studio run by Ellison, has exchanged preliminary information with Paramount, said the people, who asked not to be named because the deal talks are private. Full due diligence hasn't started, the people said.

Skydance has been working with private equity firms RedBird Capital Partners and KKR & Co.

on a deal to buy National Amusements, the holding company owned by Shari Redstone. It controls 77% of Paramount's voting stock.

But that deal is contingent on merging Skydance with Paramount, and the likely structure for a merger would be a complete take private of the larger media company, said the people.

Redstone is considering selling as the media landscape shifts away from traditional TV toward streaming. While Paramount Global has run a profitable business for decades, it is smaller than

Netflix, Google's YouTube, Apple, Amazon, and other larger streamers that have bigger balance sheets to afford sports and entertainment content.

No acquisition is assured, and talks could fall apart.



It is unclear if Redstone would demand a different premium for selling National Amusements than the remaining shareholders of Paramount Global would obtain.

Skydance would need additional capital to acquire Paramount, which has a market capitalization of \$8.2 billion and

about \$15 billion of debt. Some of that funding could come from Skydance's private equity partners and Larry Ellison, the billionaire co-founder of Oracle

and David Ellison's father. Skydance hasn't reached out for outside financing



yet, as it hasn't decided if it wants to move forward with a deal, said the people.

Skydance isn't interested in a deal where it would only acquire National Amusements but not all of Paramount, said the people. While such a deal would give Skydance control of

Paramount, it wouldn't solve Paramount's problems as a publicly traded company, which include running the growing but money-losing Paramount+ streaming service, and operating declining linear cable assets such as MTV, VH1, Comedy Central and Nickelodeon.

Spokespeople for RedBird, Skydance, Paramount Global and National Amusements declined to comment.

Warner Bros. Discovery has also had preliminary discussions about acquiring Paramount Global, according to people familiar with the matter. If Redstone sells to Skydance, one motivating factor would be her fear that Warner Bros. Discovery would prefer to merge with Comcast's NBCUniversal, one of the people said.

Puck first reported Skydance's interest in acquiring National Amusements. The Wall Street Journal reported last week that Skydance was interested in a two-part deal that would include merging Skydance and National Amusements. Bloomberg first reported on the initial exchange of company information.

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The primaries have just begun. But Trump and Biden are already shifting to a November mindset

Barely 400,000 votes have been cast in two rural Republican primaries over the span of eight days. But both Donald Trump and Joe Biden are behaving like their parties' nominees already.

Trump's double-digit victory Tuesday in independent-minded New Hampshire, where he was considered more vulnerable than perhaps anywhere else, was a rhetorical tipping point for both Democrats and Republicans.

"It is now clear that Donald Trump will be the Republican nominee. And my message to the country is the stakes could not be higher," President Joe Biden said hours after Trump's victory Tuesday night.

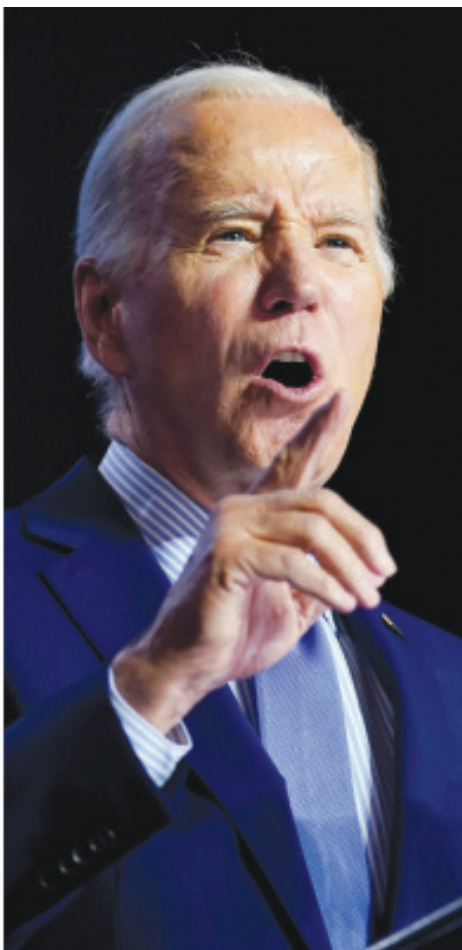
Trump's team largely agreed, even as he raged about former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley's unwillingness to leave the race altogether. "I say the general election begins tonight," said Trump-adversary-turned-advocate Vivek Ramaswamy, who was standing at the former president's side during his New Hampshire victory speech. "And this man will win it in a landslide."

What comes next for a potential matchup many voters don't want

The bluster is just a sliver of what's to come over the next 10 months. Both parties are building out sprawling political operations backed by billions of dollars in advertising to shape the all-but-certain general election rematch between the current president and his predecessor. It is a matchup that many voters and some elected officials did not want. Both Biden and Trump have loud detractors within their parties and glaring political liabilities. Yet no other Republican presidential candidate in history has won the first two contests on the primary calendar, as Trump polished off Tuesday night, and failed to clinch his party's nomination. And Biden, who won New Hampshire's Democratic primary without even appearing on the ballot, is facing only token opposition in his bid for the Democratic nomination.

Hours before Biden's New Hampshire win was official, the president shifted two key aides from the White House to his Delaware-based campaign. On Wednesday, Biden served as the keynote speaker at a United Auto Workers political convention in Washington, where he accepted the group's endorsement. The auto workers' decision marks a significant step in the president's push to win over blue-collar workers in critical Midwestern swing states.

Trump heads to Phoenix on Friday to address Republicans in a swing state that Biden won by 10,000 votes in 2020. Nikki Haley vows to continue As much as Trump's team would like to



shift its full focus toward Biden, one Republican rival is still standing. And at least for now, Haley is still consuming a significant amount of Trump's attention. The former president's campaign unveiled a new anti-Haley website on Wednesday as Trump railed against her repeatedly on social media. "Could somebody please explain to Nikki that she lost — and lost really badly," Trump wrote on his social media network. "She also lost Iowa, BIG, last week. They were, as certain non-fake media say, 'CRUSHING DEFEATS.'"

Haley's team vowed on Wednesday to continue fighting Trump for the GOP nomination, even with the prospect looming of an embarrassing home-state primary defeat in South Carolina on Feb. 24. "New Hampshire is first in the nation. It is not last in the nation," Haley declared before leaving Tuesday night. "This race is far from over. There are dozens of states left to go." Indeed, primary contests are scheduled in every U.S. state and territory over the next five months ahead of each party's summertime national conventions. The earliest either Trump or Biden could clinch enough delegates to become his party's presumptive nominee in March. Eyes on South Carolina and the race ahead Haley's campaign launched a new \$4 million advertising campaign in South Carolina on Wednesday, describing the prospect of a Biden-Trump general election as "a rematch no one wants."

"Biden — too old. Trump — too much chaos," the narrator says. "There's a better choice for a better America."

Haley was to campaign in Charleston on

Wednesday evening in what her campaign said was the beginning of her "first-in-the-South swing." She began Wednesday by addressing Republicans via Zoom in the U.S. Virgin Islands, where caucuses on Feb. 8 will decide nine Republican delegates. "Nikki Haley is the happy warrior," Mark Harris, who leads the major pro-Haley super PAC, said Wednesday.

Harris said his organization would join the campaign in running millions of dollars in TV ads in South Carolina over the next month in addition to sending out mailers, knocking on doors and doing other outreach. As Trump seeks to expand his coalition among elected officials, Harris said Haley's team is more focused on the voters.

"It will not be politicians, it won't be party insiders," Harris said. "Voters get to make this decision. That's the beauty of American democracy."

Early next week, Haley is scheduled to do a fundraising tour that includes stops in New York, Florida, California, Texas and South Carolina. She's expected to continue to draw continued donor support, despite Trump's grip on the nomination, because significant forces within the GOP do not want him to represent their party on the general election ballot. Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, said she was glad Haley is staying in the race, but she's not willing to endorse her.

"I think the more people see her particularly since she appears to be the only alternative to Donald Trump right now, the more impressed that they will be,"

Collins said.

General election concerns

Trump's critics openly fear that he would struggle to win in November and would drag down Republican candidates in other elections. Republicans have struggled in every national election since Trump first captured the White House in 2016.

Indeed, there were new warning signs about Trump's broader political standing tucked within New Hampshire's results that raised questions about his strength in the general election.

Haley beat Trump on Tuesday among Republican primary voters who identified as either moderates or independents, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of the electorate. She also beat Trump among voters with college degrees.

About half of the state's Republican primary voters also said they are very or somewhat concerned that Trump is too extreme to win the general election. And about one-third believe that Trump broke the law — in his alleged attempt to interfere in the vote count in the 2020 presidential election, his role in what happened at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, or with the classified documents found at his Florida home after he left the White House.

In a conference call Wednesday, the Biden campaign signaled it was eager to take on Trump, while highlighting the Republican former president's apparent weakness with general election swing voters.

"We have been prepared for this since the launch of this reelection last year," Biden spokesman Michael Tyler said of Trump's grip on the GOP nomination. "We are full steam ahead heading into the general election."

Trump flew back to his Florida estate late Tuesday as he prepared for another series of court appearances.

Still, for all of Trump's baggage, there were new signs following his New Hampshire victory that his party was accepting the reality of his dominance. A new series of elected officials endorsed him, including Texas Sen. John Cornyn, who has publicly disagreed with Trump before and told reporters in May, "We need to come up with an alternative."

Cornyn tried to project confidence in Trump as he spoke to reporters on Capitol Hill on Wednesday even as he acknowledged the former president's need to expand his appeal heading into the next phase of the campaign.

"You can't win with just your own base," Cornyn said. "But President Biden's got serious problems. I mean, all the polling shows that even Democrats aren't excited about his candidacy. So, I like President Trump's chances."



Zee's Legal Play, Reaches NCLT To Enforce Merger, Sony Confident On India Growth Without Deal

By: Namit Singh Sengar

Media baron Subhash Chandra's Zee Entertainment on Wednesday approached a corporate disputes tribunal to get Sony to honour a USD 10 billion merger deal even as the Japanese media giant vowed it will thrive in India despite the aborted merger.

Days before the Sony Group pulled the plugs on the merger following a stalemate over who will lead the merged entity, Zee group founder Chandra had written to the Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, blaming market regulator Sebi for trying to "scuttle" the deal by slapping notices right in the middle of negotiations in a case of relating to alleged fund diversion by Zee promoters.

Sony had resisted the demand by Zee Chief Executive and Chandra's son Punit Goenka, who was investigated by Sebi over fraud allegations, to stay on after the merger.

In a stock exchange filing, Zee denied Sony's claims that it breached its obligations under the deal, and said it has started legal action to contest the claims in arbitration proceedings before the Singapore International Arbitration Centre. It also approached the Mumbai-bench of the National Company Law Tribunal to get Sony to honour the deal that was preliminary agreed two years ago.

Separately, Sony's India unit

head shot off a letter to its employees, assuring them the firm will thrive despite its aborted merger with Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd.

USD 90 Million Claim By Sony Zee has also initiated appropriate legal actions to contest the



claims of USD 90 million (Rs 748.5 crore) filed by Sony Group before the Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC), according to a regulatory update by Zee Entertainment Enterprise Ltd (ZEEL).

It asserted that Sony Group firm Culver Max and BEPL (Bangla Entertainment Pvt Ltd), which were to be merged with ZEEL, "are in default of their obligations to give effect to" and implement the scheme of merger that was sanctioned by the NCLT. "The company approached the NCLT, Mumbai-bench, inter alia seeking directions to implement the merger scheme," ZEEL said.

The NCLT on August 10, 2023, approved the scheme of merger of ZEEL with Sony group entities

Culver Max Entertainment (earlier known as Sony Pictures Networks India) and BEPL.

"The company has called upon Culver Max and BEPL to immediately withdraw the termination and confirm that they will perform their obligations to

give effect to and implement the merger scheme, sanctioned by the NCLT," it noted.

Moreover, the Chandra family-promoted media entity has refuted all allegations of Sony Group of breach of the merger agreement and said the termination fee claimed by the Japanese firm is "legally untenable" and has no basis whatsoever.

It is "evaluating all available options" and basis the guidance received from its board, said a regulatory filing from Zee Entertainment Enterprise.

"The company initiated appropriate legal action to contest Culver Max and BEPL's claims in the arbitration proceedings before the SIAC," it

added.

Termination Decision

On Monday, Sony Group Corp (SGC), the Japanese parent company of Sony Picture Network India (SPNI) and BEPL, announced the termination of the USD 10 billion merger agreement with ZEEL, while seeking USD 90 million for breach of conditions besides initiating arbitration. SGC had said ZEEL did not satisfy the merger conditions despite engaging in discussions to extend the end date for consummation of the transaction.

Replying to it, ZEEL said, "The company categorically refutes all claims and assertions made by Culver Max and BEPL regarding alleged breaches of the MCA by the company, including their claims for the termination fee, and reserves its rights in this matter".

ZEEL further said it is evaluating all available options.

This also includes "taking appropriate legal action and contesting Culver Max and BEPL's claims in the arbitration proceedings".

In the January 16 letter to the Finance Minister, Chandra alleged that Sebi was "acting with a predetermined mind", and sought steps "to safeguard the interest of the minority shareholders of ZEEL".

ZEEL and all other people, he said, have been cooperating in the investigation related to the

alleged fund diversion by promoters and expressed concern over a new notice issued by the market regulator to former directors of ZEEL. Chandra, while referring to the order passed by the appellate tribunal SAT, where the order passed by Sebi banning him and his son Puneet Goenka from holding key positions in any listed entity was challenged and was stayed, alleged that the regulator was working with a prejudiced mind.

As per the agreement, Sony had plans to invest USD 1.575 billion in the merged entity and have a majority stake of 52.93 per cent. 'Largest Entertainment Network In The Country'

If the Sony-Zee merger was completed, the combined entity would have owned over 70 TV channels, two video streaming services — ZEE5 and Sony LIV — and two film studios — Zee Studios and Sony Pictures Films India— making it the largest entertainment network in the country.

In the letter to employees, SPNI Managing Director and CEO N P Singh asked them to focus on current projects, with an immediate goal to unleash the company's full potential, continuing to craft content that not only engages audiences but also boosts subscriber growth and revenues.

"As we close the chapter on our proposed merger with ZEEL, I want to take a moment to talk to you — not just as your CEO but as someone who has been on this journey with you. This change in our plans allows us to step into a new phase of our story, which I believe is full of promise," Singh wrote in the letter.

'Sign From The Lord'

Punit Goenka, who was among the distinguished guests invited to the Ram Mandir Pran Prathista ceremony on January 22, hinted at the company's latest development in a post on X, referring to them as "a divine sign." Goenka posted, "As I arrived at Ayodhya early this morning for the auspicious occasion of Pran Prathista, I received a message that the deal that I have spent 2 years envisioning and working towards had fallen through, despite my best and most honest efforts." "I believe this to be a sign from the Lord. I resolve to move ahead positively and work towards strengthening Bharat's pioneering M&E Company, for all its stakeholders."

‘Deadliest outbreak ever seen’:

climate crisis fuels Bangladesh’s worst dengue epidemic

In a small, dimly lit control room at the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) in Dhaka, data on Bangladesh’s dengue outbreak flashes across multiple computer screens. Government analysts here have been busy collecting and monitoring the impact of the disease across the country since cases were first reported last April.

In 2023, the total reported cases of dengue numbered 321,179, with 1,705 deaths recorded, a massive jump from the year before, when 62,000 people were known to have had the virus, and



longer has the strength to get up and play,” says Begum. “It’s been over four weeks and she still hasn’t got any better.”

Outside their house, an open drain and yard overgrown with weeds create a perfect breeding ground for mosquitoes.

“We can’t afford to admit her to hospital so I’ve been doing whatever I can to protect her at home,” says an exhausted Begum, who has not left her daughter’s side since she fell ill. “I’ve been using repellent and mosquito spray to keep the bloodsuckers at bay – but they still manage to get inside.”

Bangladesh has seen regular outbreaks of dengue over the past two decades. Yet the recent outbreak has been surprising – not only did a surge in cases start earlier than usual (typically cases start during the June–October monsoon), but the disease has also spread beyond its previous concentration in Dhaka and Chattogram (or Chittagong, as it is better known). “In 2022, Dhaka city accounted for 63% of cases, while in 2023, 66% were reported outside Dhaka,” says Alam. “Now dengue is being reported from all 64 districts of the country.” In response, the DGHS has repurposed six hospitals in Dhaka assigned for Covid-19 patients to manage the dengue epidemic, and increased the supply of intravenous saline and other medication across the country. For many of Bangladesh’s urban poor, the cost of contracting dengue has added to the burdens on their households.



globally, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 3.9 billion people – or half of the world’s population – are at risk of infection. Half a million cases were reported in 2000, compared with 4.2 million in 2022: nearly an eight-fold increase. The increasing frequency of extreme weather events is fuelling the spread of the disease into new locations and extending dengue seasons in countries where the disease is already present. In Bangladesh, unusually high rainfall, combined with hotter temperatures and high humidity, has resulted in an increased mosquito population throughout the country. “Climate change is the critical link to the increase in numbers that we’re seeing,” says Alam. In Mirpur, a district of north-east Dhaka, Masuma Begum watches over her nine-month-old daughter Sohana, who has contracted dengue and lies asleep beneath a fan. “She no

281 died. It was the highest number of annual deaths caused by the mosquito-transmitted disease ever recorded in Bangladesh. The deaths last year included at least 113 children. According to Save the Children, the majority of these deaths were of children under the age of 10, with 38 deaths among those under five.

“Children make up around 30% of all dengue cases in Bangladesh and are particularly vulnerable to the virus because of underdeveloped immune systems,” says Dr Shamim Jahan, Bangladesh director of Save the Children. “Those under five are particularly at risk from developing severe symptoms, such as dehydration and shock.”

Over the past few months, the surge in cases has pushed Bangladesh’s health system to the limit, with hospital corridors overflowing with patients as wards run out of beds.

“It’s been the deadliest outbreak of dengue the country has ever seen,” says Dr Mohammad Shafiul Alam, a scientist at the ICDDR,B health research centre in Dhaka.

The high death toll has continued into the new year. As of Wednesday, the outbreak had affected 756 people so far this month, resulting in 10 deaths, compared with 424 cases and three deaths this time last year. However, the official figures may not give a true indication of the scale of the outbreak. “These reported figures are likely

an underestimation of the actual burden,” says Alam. “Numerous healthcare facilities in Bangladesh operate beyond the reporting framework. This underscores the likelihood that the actual figures could be several times higher.” Dengue cases have risen dramatically around the world, with 70% of them occurring in Asia. Glo-

Ron DeSantis failed because Trump’s base wants the man himself, not an imitation

By Andrew Gawthorpe

So long, Ron. After a poor showing in the Iowa caucuses, Ron DeSantis has dropped out of the Republican presidential primary and endorsed Donald Trump. This outcome has looked inevitable ever since the campaign’s botched launch announcement on Twitter, but it was surprising how quickly and totally DeSantis surrendered after losing just a single contest. Many people had heralded DeSantis as the man who could take down Trump, but it was not to be. His campaign began with a whimper – then ended with one too.

The political flaws of DeSantis and his campaign have been so numerous that it’s amazing the Florida governor ever generated so much buzz. He looked politically impressive operating in the safely conservative

state of Florida, but he was completely unprepared for the intensity of competitive national politics. He lacked the empathy and personal warmth necessary to connect with voters and donors alike. He proved a poor administrator. He tried to run on his management of the Covid-19 pandemic when voters had moved on. Worst of all, he could offer no plausible reason why Trump voters should opt for him rather than for the real thing. Despite all of this, DeSantis found huge success among a certain class of Republican pundits and donors. At one point he was hailed by the Murdoch press as “DeFuture”, and conservative writers fell over one another to praise him as the Trump who “gets things done”. When someone so flawed has so many boosters, it’s worth asking about the

motivation of the boosters.

In this case, the DeSantis campaign was promoted by a set of conservative elites who saw the opportunity for a kind of “Trumpism without Trump”. DeSantis drew support from people who were happy with the broad direction of the Republican party under Trump, but had doubts about the former president’s competence. Since his victory in 2016, Trump has been a serial loser of elections who invests little time in trying to implement policies, preferring to focus instead on the melodrama of his own political and legal struggles. DeSantis, by contrast, exudes the kind of grim, thuggish determination of Viktor Orbán, the Hungarian prime minister whose policies have made him a hero of the American nationalist right.