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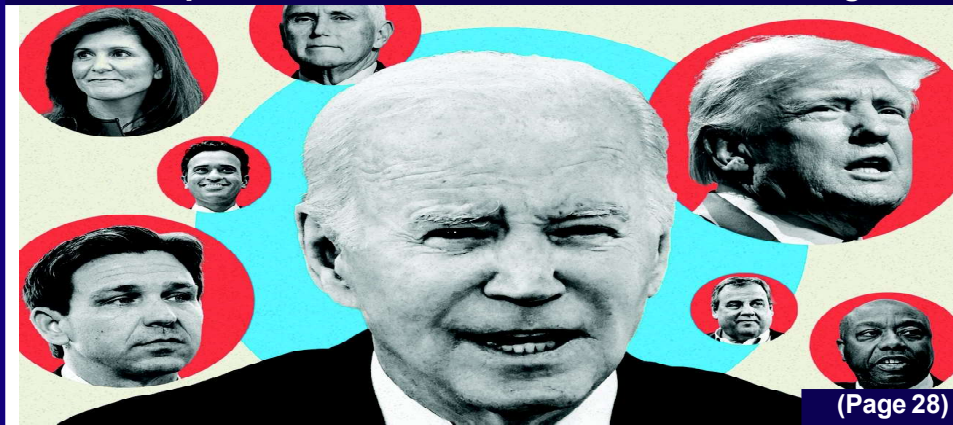


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Biden's Running

Which Republican Has the Best Chance of Beating Him?



(Page 28)

India, The World's 4th Biggest Military Spender

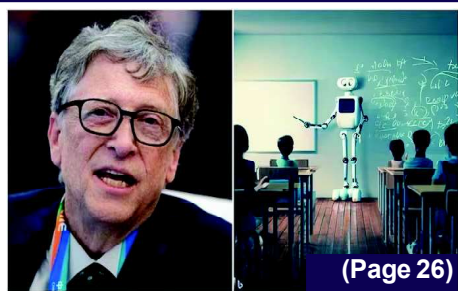
Russia's aggression and tensions in East Asia are prompting larger defence outlays in parts of the world. India has also been raising its defence budget year-on-year. Read on to find out what it is spent on.



(Page 25)

AI chatbots will have human-like teaching capabilities in future

Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates said that AI chatbots can help in teaching students in the future and will be 'as good as human tutors'.



(Page 26)

Filling the loopholes: How drug networks evade port security around world and what can be done to fix

The dark world of drug trafficking in India through the sea routes of the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal after a recent report by the UN calls for enhanced port security measures while also raising alarm about the role of drug dealers in smuggling through ports jointly with local operators and networks.



(SAI Bureau) A recent report by the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), the United Nations watchdog for narcotics, released on March 2023, detailed data related to drug control efforts around the world. It states that there has been a significant increase in drug seizures in India over the last five years i.e. from 2017 to 2022, with darknet and sea routes having emerged as the preferred mode of smuggling.

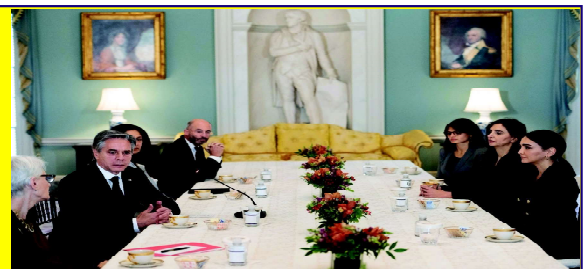
(Contd. on page 27)

'I'll Burn You Alive'

Disputes within the Iranian diaspora are getting uglier- and complicating U.S. foreign policy as the regime gets closer and closer to having a nuclear bomb.

(SAI Bureau) Last October, as women filled the streets of Iranian cities to protest the Islamic Republic's violent repression, Sherry Hakimi accepted an invitation to meet with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken. In an ornate State Department reception room, Hakimi and a handful of other Iranian-American women sat across a table from Blinken and discussed Iran's antigovernment protests.

(Contd. on page 24)



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"They Put Rifles To Our Chest...": Evacuated Indians Narrate Sudan Horror

Amid the 72-hour ceasefire that has been agreed upon by the two warring factions in Sudan, countries have been evacuating their citizens, India being one to recently evacuate its nationals under Operation Kaveri.

The Air Force recently rescued another batch of around 250 trapped Indians from conflict-torn Sudan as part of the rescue effort. More than 250 people were evacuated from Port Sudan by two IAF C-130 J planes. Prior to this, 135 stranded Indians were rescued from Sudan on Wednesday.

The Indians evacuated from violence-hit Sudan narrated their ordeal and said that the fight was so intense that it became an everyday struggle to even arrange for food.

Narrating his experience, one of

the Indians evacuated from Sudan told ANI, "The fight was intense. We were struggling for food. The scenario continued for 2-3 days."

Sudan is facing violence due to fighting between the army and the paramilitary forces. There are reports of violence even amid a 72-hour ceasefire. Fighting has been raging between forces loyal to Sudan's army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

In a separate statement, another evacuated Indian said, "The tent of Rapid Support Forces (RSF) was fixated near our company. Early morning at around 9, the forces entered our company. We were looted." "They kept us hostage for eight hours. They kept rifles at our chest and

looted us. Our mobiles were stolen," he told ANI.

"We kept in touch with the Embassy and told them to arrange for the buses, as we had diesel. The Indian Navy came and treated us well," the Indian national evacuated from Sudan said. The conflict began when a coup in 2021 between Sudan's military leader and his deputy on the ruling council erupted derailing a plan for a transition to a civilian democracy after the fall of longtime dictator Omar al-Bashir in 2019. As the fighting between the Sudanese Army and paramilitary groups intensified in the capital Khartoum, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar informed on Monday that its 'Operation Kaveri' to evacuate its citizens from battle-torn Sudan is underway and about 500 Indians had reached Port Sudan.

Indian-origin man found guilty of drugging, raping 5 Korean women in Australia

Balesh Dhankhar, a prominent member of the Indian diaspora in Australia, was found guilty of drugging and raping five Korean women and filming the acts on a hidden camera.

An Indian-origin man in Australia has been convicted of drugging and raping five Korean women and filming the acts on a hidden camera, the Sydney Morning Herald reported.

Balesh Dhankhar, a prominent member of the Indian diaspora in Australia with political ties, faced trial over 39 charges including 13 counts of rape committed between January and October 2018. He has been found guilty of all charges by a jury at the District Court in Sydney on Monday. The 43-year-old data expert broke

down in court when the jury foreman replied "guilty" to each of the 39 charges against him, the Herald report said. He will face court again in May and will be sentenced later in the year. A predator's modus operandi

The jury heard Dhankhar had a 'very specific modus operandi' to ensnare the women - with a fake job posting for Korean translators. He used the same hotel, café, and Korean restaurant to meet the women before taking them to his studio apartment in the Sydney CBD under false pretences.



Ask NAPCA Column

National Asian Pacific Center On Aging (NAPCA) is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of life of AANHPI older adults and their families. We operate a NAPCA Senior Assistance Center for Older Adults and Caregivers which is available in five (5) different languages. In this column, we want to share some of the important questions we received from readers. Hope you will find them useful.

Q1. My husband is turning 65 soon and he is still working. He and I are covered by his employer's medical insurance. He does not have 40 working quarter credits yet. Do we still need to join Medicare?

Most people sign up for both Medicare Part A and Part B when they turn 65. However, if they do not have more than 40 working credits that allow them to get premium-free Part A, they must pay \$278 (30-39 credits) or \$506 (less than 30 credits) per month.

If your husband's employer has more than 20 employees and employer-sponsored insurance is "creditable", he may delay signing up for Medicare until he stops working or loses the current employer coverage whichever comes first. He will not pay a penalty for delaying enrollment.

Whether delaying Medicare or enrolling in Medicare, he should check his coverage policy with his employer before making his decision.

Q2. What happens if I work and get Social Security retirement benefits?

You can get Social Security

retirement benefits and work at the same time. However, if you are younger than FRA (Full Retirement Age which is between 65 and 67 depending on the year you were born) and make more than the yearly earnings limit, your benefit will be reduced. If you are younger than FRA during all of 2023, Social Security Administration deducts \$1 from your benefits for each \$2 you earn above \$21,240. If you turn FRA during 2023, your benefit is deducted \$1 for each \$3 you earn above \$56,520 before your birth month. Starting with the month you reach FRA, your benefits will not be reduced no matter how much you earn.

Q3. Should I pay taxes on Social Security benefits when I work while receiving retirement benefits?

Some people must pay federal income taxes on their Social Security benefits. This usually happens only if you have other substantial income in addition to your benefits. The portion of benefits that are taxable depends on your COMBINED INCOME* and filing status.

If you file as an individual;

1) you pay no tax on your benefits when your combined



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income is below \$25,000,
2) you pay taxes on 50% of your benefits when your combined income is between \$25,000 and \$34,000,

3) you pay taxes on 85% of your benefits when your combined income is more than \$34,000.

If you file as a joint return;

1) you pay no tax on your

SPECIAL FEATURE

benefits when you and your spouse have combined income below \$32,000,

2) you pay taxes on 50% of your benefits when you and your spouse have combined income between \$32,000 and \$44,000,

3) you pay taxes on 85% of your benefits when you and your spouse have combined income more than \$44,000.

*COMBINED INCOME = Your adjusted gross income + Nontaxable interest + ½ of your Social Security benefits

Q4. I have been a legal

permanent resident for over 15 years. My husband worked at a job during all those years. I did not work because he wanted me to stay at home and raise our three children. Last year my husband divorced me. My children are grown so he does not have to pay me anything. Am I eligible for Social Security or Medicare?

Yes, as a divorced spouse you are entitled to premium-free Medicare Part A and collect Social Security Benefits based on your husband's work credits. If you have been married for over 10 years and remain unmarried after being divorced, you can apply for Social Security Benefits when you turn 62 and premium-free Medicare Part A when you turn 65.

Q5. I am over 70 and it has been just over 5 years since I received permanent resident status. Now I am qualified to sign up for Medicare and I found that

I must pay high monthly premiums because of the lack of Social Security working credits, but I cannot afford it. Should I still sign up for Medicare or can I keep my current individual plan that I got through the Health Insurance Marketplace?

If you are not eligible for premium-free Part A and are not enrolled in Medicare yet, you can keep your current individual Marketplace plan and premium tax credit benefits. However, if you choose to enroll in Medicare Part A and/or Part B later, you will have to wait to sign up and you may have to pay late enrollment penalties.

Depending on your state's income and asset limit, you may be eligible for Medicare Savings Program (MSP), which can help you pay Medicare part A/part B premiums. To be eligible for MSP, you must enroll in Medicare. Please check your eligibility with the Medicaid office in your state.



Former Punjab CM Parkash Singh Badal dies at 95

Born: 8 December 1927, Sri Muktsar Sahib
Died: 25 April 2023, Fortis Hospital Mohali, Lamba
Party: Shiromani Akali Dal
Spouse: Surinder Kaur Badal (m. 1959–2011)

Previous offices: Chief minister of Punjab (2007–2017),
Children: Sukhbir Singh Badal, Parneet Kaur
Grandchildren: Gurleen Kaur, Harleen Kaur, Anantbir Singh Badal

(By Staff Reporter) Muktsar : Former Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal passed away on Tuesday at a private hospital in Mohali. He was 95. Badal was hospitalised for the past few days and was suffering from breathing problem. Badal is survived by son and SAD chief Sukhbir Singh Badal and daughter Parneet Kaur, who is married to former cabinet minister Adeish Partap Singh Kairon. His wife Surinder Kaur Badal died due to cancer in May 2011. Home Minister Amit Shah and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had recently inquired about the well being of Badal. In a media bulletin Fortis Hospital said: "S Parkash Singh Badal, Former Chief Minister of Punjab, was admitted at Fortis Hospital Mohali on 16th April 2023 with acute exacerbation of bronchial asthma. He was shifted to the medical ICU on 18th April as his respiratory condition worsened. He had been on NIV and HFNC support along with medical

management. He was being managed under Prof (Dr) Digambar Behera along with the Pulmonology and critical care team supported by Cardiology. Despite appropriate medical management S Parkash Singh Badal succumbed to his illness. Fortis Hospital Mohali deeply condole the death of S Parkash Singh Badal." Badal's mortal remains will be placed at SAD head office in Chandigarh from 10 am to 12 noon on Wednesday. Thereafter, the mortal remains will be taken to Badal village in Muktsar district. The cremation will take place at Badal village on Thursday. Badal was the oldest candidate in the electoral fray in the country in the state elections in 2022, but lost to AAP's first timer Gurmeet Singh Khudian, son of late MP Jagdev Singh Khudian. This was Badal's 13th Assembly election. After election results, Badal was hardly politically active in the area. Though he had started his thanksgiving tour in Lambi, it too was cancelled midway.

Thereafter, he either spent time at his residences at Badal village and Chandigarh farmhouse at Balasar village in Haryana.

Notably, Badal has created many records in the past. He was the youngest sarpanch when got elected from Badal village in 1952. Besides, he became the youngest CM of the state in 1970. Further, he became the oldest CM in 2012. He has also the record of becoming the CM for five times from 1970-71, 1977-80, 1997-2002, 2007-12 and 2012-17. Besides, he has remained member of Lok Sabha once, served as Union Agriculture Minister for a short stint as well. In his over 75-year political journey, Badal has lost just two Assembly elections. First, to Harcharan Singh Brar from Gidderbaha in 1967 by 11,396 votes and thereafter in 2022 to Gurmeet Singh Khudian from Lambi in 2022. He won the first Assembly election before the reorganisation of the

state from Malout in 1957 on the ticket of Indian National Congress (INC). He won Assembly election five times in a row from Gidderbaha in 1969, 1972, 1977, 1980 and 1985. Thereafter, he switched to Lambi and has won five times in a row in 1997, 2002, 2007, 2012 and 2017. Badal did not contest just two Assembly elections in his political career, once in 1962 and thereafter in 1992 when the SAD had boycotted it.

He even served as Union Agriculture Minister for a short stint. He was conferred with Padma Vibhushan in 2015, which he returned in 2020 in protest against the three contentious farm laws. Besides, he was conferred with Path Rattan Faqr-e-Qaum (Jewel of the Panth Pride of the Community) in 2011, but various Sikh organisations kept demanding that Badal be stripped of this title. Notably, a Faridkot court in March this year had allowed anticipatory bail to Badal in the Kotkapura police firing case of 2015.

Parkash Singh Badal's granddaughters light the pyre along with Sukhbir

Besides Sukhbir Badal, his daughters Harkirat and Gurleen and Manpreet Badal's daughter Ria light the pyre



(By Staff Reporter) Badal : Akali stalwart Parkash Singh Badal was cremated with full state honours on Thursday. His granddaughters lit the pyre along with Sukhbir Badal. Lighting of pyre is traditionally considered a male preserve. SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal lit the pyre along with the grand-daughters of the former chief minister and

grandsons - to send a strong message of women empowerment in keeping with the teachings of the Gurus. Besides SAD president Sukhbir Badal, his daughters Harkirat and Gurleen and Manpreet Badal's daughter Ria lit the pyre. Manpreet Badal and Adeish Partap Kairon's sons - Anantvir, Arjun and Jai also lit the pyre of their grandfather.

PM Modi pays respect to former Punjab CM and Akali Dal patriarch Parkash Singh Badal



(By Staff Reporter) Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday paid his last respect to former Punjab Chief Minister and veteran Akali Dal leader Parkash Singh Badal, who passed away on April 25, after a brief illness at a private hospital in Punjab's Mohali. Mr. Modi reached Chandigarh and paid tribute to late Mr. Badal at the office of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), where mortal remains of Mr. Badal were kept for people to pay homage. The cremation will take place at 1 p.m. on Thursday at Mr. Badal's native Badal village in Muktsar district. Mr. Badal, the 95-year-old SAD patriarch was undergoing treatment at the

hospital following uneasiness while breathing. Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday paid his last respect to former Punjab Chief Minister and veteran Akali Dal leader Parkash Singh Badal, who passed away on April 25, after a brief illness at a private hospital in Punjab's Mohali. Mr. Modi reached Chandigarh and paid tribute to late Mr. Badal at the office of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), where mortal remains of Mr. Badal were kept for people to pay homage.



Manish Sisodia named as accused for first time in Delhi liquor scam

The CBI has filed a supplementary chargesheet against former Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia and three others in the excise policy case.

(News Agency)- Former Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia has been named as an accused in the CBI chargesheet in the excise policy case for the first time. The Aam Aadmi Party leader's name was included in the supplementary chargesheet filed by the central agency on Tuesday.

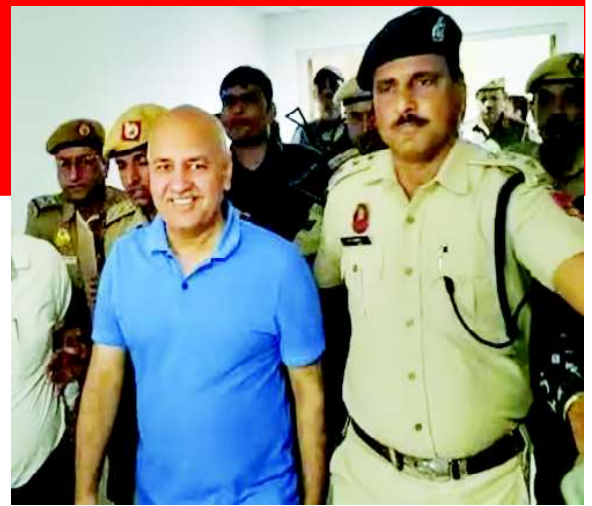
The CBI has also named Hyderabad-based CA Buchi Babu Gorantla, liquor trader Amandeep Singh Dhall and Arjun Pandey in

the supplementary chargesheet under IPC sections 120-B (criminal conspiracy), 201 and 420 besides provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act. In its chargesheet filed before a special CBI court in New Delhi, the agency said the probe is kept open to look into larger conspiracy and role of other accused in the case.

It is alleged that the Delhi government's excise policy for 2021-22 to grant licences to liquor

traders favoured certain dealers who had allegedly paid bribes for it, a charge strongly refuted by the AAP. The policy was later scrapped.

Manish Sisodia was arrested for alleged corruption in the formulation and execution of the excise policy and for laundering the money so generated. The CBI contends that liquor companies were involved in framing of the 2021 excise policy, for which kickbacks were paid by a liquor



lobby it dubbed the "South Group". The CBI had named seven people including AAP's communication in-charge Vijay Nair in its first chargesheet in November. On April 16, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal was

questioned for nearly nine hours by the CBI as a witness in the excise policy case, amid protests by his party as the AAP chief claimed that the allegations of scam were false and the agency was acting at the BJP's behest.

Meeting with PM went very well: Bishops in Kerala

The prime minister landed in Kerala on Monday for a two-day visit ahead of the general elections next year.

(News Agency)-The meeting between the heads of the church and the prime minister went well, Christian bishops and priests said. Seven heads of the church attended the meeting last evening.

"We shared the needs of the Christian community and spoke about what we need in Kerala through the initiatives of the central government in Delhi," the bishops said. "We shared our anxieties about our mission work in northern India which are being hindered by certain activities of religious fundamentalists. The PM



promised that there would be protection for all believers in India. He also casually spoke about the visit of the Holy Father which he desires to happen in the near future," they said.

"The PM listened to us very attentively and he shared what he has already done for the people of Kerala and for the Christians in particular and for the poor people by visualising 10% reservation without considering religion or caste," he said. The prime minister landed in Kerala on Monday for a two-day visit ahead of the general elections next year.

Government official hacked to death in Tamil Nadu

(News Agency)- A man, working as the village administrative officer in Tamil Nadu's Thoothukudi, was hacked to death by two men at his office on Tuesday. The victim, Lurdu Francis, lay unconscious in a pool of blood after the attack. The villagers rescued him and took him to the Thirunelveli government hospital, where he died.

The police reached the spot and, based on investigations,



detained one person. Chief Minister MK Stalin announced Rs 1 crore as compensation to the victim's family and a government job for one family member.

"He has been working in Morappanadu village for a year and a half. Around 12:30pm, two men entered the office and attacked him. He received defensive injuries to both his arms and also deep cuts to his skull. The perpetrators

absconded immediately," the collector of Thoothukudi, Senthilraj, said. "He was immediately brought to the medical college. Within 20 minutes, he was put on ventilator support. Unfortunately, he died. He was an honest and a brave officer. He made sure that no damage happened to the government property. I've instructed the police to immediately file an FIR and arrest those involved," he said.

Kotkapura firing: SIT files supplementary chargesheet against Badals, former DGP

The Special Investigation Team probing the Kotkapura firing has submitted a supplementary chargesheet running into 2,400 pages naming the Badals and a former DGP.

(News Agency)-A Special Investigation Team (SIT) headed by Additional Director General of Police L K Yadav submitted a 2,400 page supplementary chargesheet of the Kotkapura firing case to a court in Faridkot, naming former Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal, Home Minister Sukhbir Singh Badal and then DGP Sumedh Singh Saini.

The chargesheet was filed under Section 173(8) of the Code of Criminal Procedure. On the orders of the Punjab and Haryana High Court in Chandigarh, the state government formed an SIT comprising ADGP LK Yadav, Inspector General Rakesh Agarwal and senior superintendent of police, Moga,



Gulneet Singh Khurana to probe the Kotkapura firing case.

The SIT filed the main chargesheet, running into 7,000 pages, to the court on February 24. The main chargesheet mentioned Sukhbir Singh Badal and Saini as masterminds of the conspiracy for illegal and excessive use of force to conceal the inaction of the state

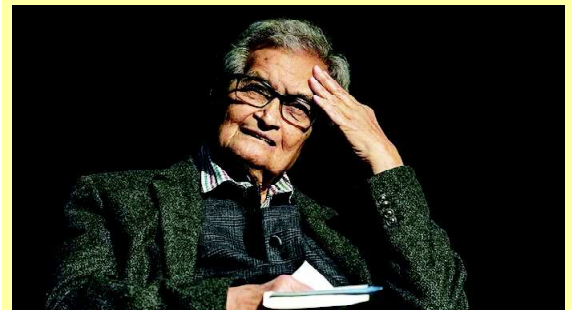
on a series of sacrilege incidents in the Burj Jawahar Singh Wala and Bargari villages. The chargesheet mentioned Parkash Singh Badal as a facilitator in the execution of the conspiracy. A few senior police officers were also named as executors of the conspiracy. Both Badals got anticipatory bail in the case. In the first incident

reported on June 1, a copy of the Guru Granth Sahib was stolen from Burj Jawahar Singh Wala village in Faridkot district. The second incident took place on September 24-25 when some abusive posters were put up by a group of people in Burj Jawahar Singh Wala and Bargari, threatening that the Guru Granth Sahib would be

thrown on to the streets.

On October 14, 2015, the Punjab Police opened fire at people protesting at Kotkapura and Behbal Kalan against the sacrilege of Guru Granth Sahib in Faridkot's Bargari village. While two people were killed in Behbal Kalan, a few others were injured in Faridkot's Kotkapura in police firing.

'Humiliation': Open letter to Visva Bharati on eviction notice to Amartya Sen



(News Agency)-Over 120 personalities have written an open letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is also the chancellor of Visva Bharati, condemning the eviction notice issued to Nobel laureate Amartya Sen.

The letter accuses Visva Bharati of harassment and humiliation of Amartya Sen over a land issue.

"The kind of behaviour by an esteemed university like Visva Bharati is unexpected and appalling. We condemn this harassment, humiliation, and misdemeanor against a respected economist. Sen inherited the leased land and now the varsity is set to evict the economist from his ancestral home, which is an insult at its lowest for all Bengalis, Indians in front of the entire world," the letter read. In a recent eviction order, the Visva Bharati university had asked the renowned economist to vacate the 13 decimals of land on campus in Santiniketan which he had allegedly occupied in an unauthorised manner by May 6. The signatories include former chief economist of World Bank Kaushik Basu, actor Sabyasachi Chakraborty, writer Bhagirath Misra, educationist Pabitra

Sarkar, theatre critic Samik Bandhopadhyay, director Anik Dutta, and actor Kamaleshwar Mukhopadhyay, among others.

They questioned the prime minister's silence on the issue and accused Visva Bharati administration of defying a court order by accusing Sen of illegal occupation of a leased land. The issue began with a row over land which was rented to the economist's family for 99 years in 1943. The university has claimed that Sen's father rented only 1.25 acres of land on a 99-year lease in 1943, while the remaining three decimal is being occupied illegally by Sen.

Visva Bharati has asked Amartya Sen to vacate 13 decimals of its land by May 6 or within 15 days of the publication of the last order, failing which he would be removed "by use of force if necessary." "Any contrary claim to this leased land before the expiry of the lease cannot stand. The magistrate of the area has noted that the existing arrangement should be recognised and that no interference or breach of peace should be allowed," he wrote in a letter to Visva Bharati.



Police station set afire in Bengal's North Dinajpur over minor girl's death

The police quarters adjacent to the station were also set afire, along with several police vehicles. Many police officers were injured in the attack.

(News Agency)-The Kaliyaganj police station was set on fire amid the uproar in Bengal's North Dinajpur over the death of a minor in Kaliyaganj. The tribal and Kamtapuri organisations gheraoed the Kaliyaganj police station on Tuesday.

The police quarters adjacent to the station were also set afire, along with several police vehicles. Many police officers were injured in the attack. During the commotion, the protesters

pelted stones at the police, who then lathicharged.

Tension has been prevailing in Kaliyaganj since the dead body of a minor girl was found. The locals have alleged that the girl was raped and murdered, before her body was dumped. The police said that rape was not confirmed in the autopsy report. There were no injury marks on her body, they said, adding that the girl died by suicide by consuming poison. The BJP has

been trying to corner the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) on the issue.

Today, a protest was held under the leadership of BJP MP Deboshree Chowdhary in front of the police headquarters in Raiganj, North Dinajpur. The protesters clashed with those who attended the call by the Kamtapuri organisations. The police fired tear gas shells and lathicharged at the crowd to quell the violence.

Gujarat High Court Judge Opts Out Of Hearing Rahul Gandhi's Appeal

Rahul Gandhi appealed to the Gujarat High Court on Tuesday after a lower court turned down his request to pause conviction in the case involving his remarks on the surname of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

(News Agency)-The Gujarat High Court judge assigned to hear the appeal of Congress's Rahul Gandhi in the Modi surname case, has recused herself. Sources said Justice Geeta Gopi has directed the court registry to hand over the case to the Chief Justice for assignment to a different bench. Assigning a new judge might take two days, Mr Gandhi's lawyer PS Chapaneri has told NDTV.

Mr Gandhi went to the Gujarat High Court on Tuesday after a lower court turned down his request to freeze conviction in the case involving his remarks on the surname of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Mr Gandhi -- disqualified from parliament last month after receiving a two-year jail term -- cannot be reinstated if his sentence is not overturned or suspended. Also, he would be unable to contest elections for the next eight years.

Mr Gandhi's lawyer PS



Court yesterday after a lower court turned down his appeal. New Delhi: The Gujarat High Court judge assigned to hear the appeal of Congress's Rahul Gandhi in the Modi surname case, has recused herself.

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Mr Gandhi -- disqualified from parliament last month after receiving a two-year jail term -- cannot be reinstated if his sentence is not overturned or suspended. Also, he would be

unable to contest elections for the next eight years.

In his appeal, he has argued that the Surat sessions court has erred in dismissing his plea seeking stay of conviction, which, he added, has caused him "irreparable and irreversible damage".

In his appeal to the Surat court earlier this month, Mr Gandhi had contended that the trial court had treated him harshly, overwhelmingly influenced by his status as an MP. Its decision, he again said, has caused him irreversible damage.

The judge, however, declared that Mr Gandhi had "failed to demonstrate" that he is facing "irreversible and irrevocable damage" if his conviction is not stayed and he is not allowed to contest elections.

Agreeing with the trial court, the judge also said a high standard of morality was expected from a person of Mr Gandhi's stature. Decisions to

pause conviction should be exercised with caution and "not in a casual and mechanical manner... (as) that will shake public confidence in the judiciary," he had added, citing a judgment from the Supreme Court.

The two-year jail term awarded to Mr Gandhi is the maximum possible in a criminal defamation case. It is also the minimum requirement to disqualify an MP -- a situation that has had the opposition up in arms.

Condemning his disqualification, the opposition accused the BJP of delivering a body blow to democracy.

In the campaign ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha election, Mr Gandhi had said, "How come all thieves have the common surname Modi" -- targeting the Prime Minister over his last name, which he shares with fugitive businessmen Nirav Modi and Lalit Modi.

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How Worrying Over Blue Ticks Has Exposed the Shallowness of Our Social Elites



There is a certain image that has been doing the rounds on Indian Twitter for a while now. It purports to show a license of some kind, apparently called a "Kursi Nashin" issued in Delhi in 1887. It is made out to one "Ram Narain, son of Sheo Parshad" and entitles him to sit down when in front of government officials. While I cannot verify this document independently, it sounds exactly like something the British would do. Secure the loyalty of people, especially the elites, by allowing them to feel important in petty, meaningless ways. It may seem funny today. How could social elites of that time, all grown-ups, have cared so much for something so small? But is it

really such a mystery? As a symbol of social status, how different is the "Kursi Nashin" of 1887 from the blue tick on Twitter, today?

Until last year, only certain special people, chosen by an inner circle of Twitter executives, could have one. Then Elon Musk took over and said everyone who wanted a blue tick would have to pay for one. When many people were too proud to pay, he took their blue checkmarks away. A couple of days later, he restored some of them. Perhaps for the accounts with millions of followers. Perhaps just to troll them. I don't know. Elon deserves to have his \$44 billion worth of fun. And now

Busy in unifying Opposition ahead of LS polls 2024, is CM Nitish losing grip over Bihar?

In an apparent case of misplaced priorities, Bihar CM Nitish Kumar is engrossed in bolstering the bulwark of Opposition at a time when the state of law and order of Bihar demands his interference.

Even as ruling Mahagathbandhan and Opposition trade charges over the claimed Jungle Raj and Janta Raj, back-to-back attacks on government officials in the state capital by sand and liquor mafia poses serious questions about Nitish Kumar's idea of Sushasan. In the latest development, a raiding team of a state excise department was attacked by an angry mob of supporters of a liquor mafia in the Museypur village under the Bihta police station of Patna district. The team was on their way back after arresting two suspected liquor sellers. The arrested duo was released by the mob in the sequence.

Half a dozen government employees, including two sub-inspectors, two home guards and a government driver, sustained injuries, after which they were dashed to ESIC Hospital in Bihta for medical attention. Two vehicles plying the raiding

team were ransacked by the mob as well. Close to half a dozen persons have been apprehended by the local police for their suspected involvement in the case.

ATTACK BY SAND MAFIA In a similar case barely a week ago, another district administration team was attacked by a local sand mafia in village Parev under the same Bihta police station, where a district mining officer was reported injured besides two female mining inspectors. Launching a series of vicious attacks on the state government, former minister and BJP MLA Neeraj Kumar Bablu said on

Monday that the Mahagathbandhan government has lost its grip over the state and Bihar has been pushed back to dreaded era of the 1990s.

He said no one is safe in Bihar, as even government officials feel threatened. Responding to Bablu's jibes, RJD spokesperson Mrityunjay Tiwari dismissed the charges hurled by the opposition, saying, "Investigation was on, and no one involved in the attack on government officials will be spared."



everyone is worrying over whether they can get a free check mark, whether to pay for one, whether people will come to know if they did, and whether a paid blue tick would have the same prestige as the legacy one. Not just in India, but all over the world. Over 100 years after 1887, intellectual shallowness is exactly the same.

Whether they admit it or not, we have just seen a fascinating social experiment. And there are many lessons here. The first is that people are willing to support any system as long as they are made to believe that they can feel just a little more special than others. The British used to do this with titles such as "Rai Bahadur" and "Khan Bahadur." Or allowing them to dress up like an Englishman to attend the grand durbar of King George V in Delhi. You should look up the old albums of some famous families that claim to have fought for India's freedom. Remember that when social media came around, the number one worry among the elites was that it had made the playing field level. Would the opinion of someone with a degree in Journalism, or English, from Oxford for instance, be placed at the same level as someone with just an internet connection? Or in their words, a troll. Or in India, the Internet Hindus. Back in the day, even Al Jazeera did a show about the

dangers posed by them. With time, the words they use to show their contempt for fellow Indians have changed. Now the term "WhatsApp University" has caught on. Even if the elites themselves cannot tell the difference between a spam email and a job offer from Harvard. But then, the social media companies agreed to play ball with the social elites. They could have a little blue tick next to their names. Of course, as with any major change, a handful of new elites were created as well. But for the most part, they could transfer the social hierarchy as it was, from the old public square to the new one on the internet. Even more importantly, the social media companies agreed to police speech on terms set by the old elite. They were back as gatekeepers. If they wanted to get rid of someone for "hate speech", they could. If they wanted to elevate someone as an "activist", they could do that too. The second lesson from this massive social experiment is just how far people will go to justify their little status markers to the world. With the blue ticks gone, they worry. How can the masses now be sure that they are getting their information from the high and mighty? Now anyone can spread 'misinformation.'

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Why Mayawati forgave Atiq in January despite guest house horror, Raju Pal's murder

Atiq Ahmed was accused in the outrageous attack on Mayawati in Lucknow's state guest house. Later, Atiq was seen behind BSP MLA Raju Pal's murder. Why did she then welcome Don's wife, Shaista, to her party in January?



In 1995, Samajwadi Party leader Mulayam Singh Yadav was running his government with support from the BSP of Kanshiram and his successor, Mayawati. There were rumours that the BSP could pull the plug. Tempers were running high. Some Samajwadi Party men learnt that Mayawati was meeting her MLAs at a state guest house in Lucknow to finalise the decision to part ways. The mob stormed her room. She was abused and assaulted. The outrageous incident ruined the SP-BSP relations for years. One of the accused in "the guest house kaand" was SP bahubali Atiq Ahmed of Allahabad (now Prayagraj). He became Mayawati's sworn enemy. In 2002, Atiq accused her of plotting to kill him when he was attacked while being taken to court from jail. In 2005, her MLA from Allahabad West, Raju Pal, was shot dead. Atiq hatched the conspiracy and his brother, Ashraf, killed Raju Pal, the police said.

It took Mayawati several years to forgive the Samajwadi Party—though both have gone back to being rivals—but she couldn't forgive Atiq. Till January 2023, that is. Mayawati welcomed Atiq's wife, Shaista Parveen, into the BSP and said she would be the party's candidate for the post of Prayagraj's Mayor. To be fair, Shaista's options were limited. Atiq and Ashraf, besides hundreds of supporters, were in jail. Atiq's sons, except Asad, were also in prison/correctional homes. Properties had been demolished, bank accounts frozen and gun licences cancelled. All this as part of a crackdown which also targeted the likes of Azam Khan and Mukhtar Ansari while ignoring some others, making the chief minister popular and leaving bahubalis increasingly defanged. For Shaista, going to the Samajwadi Party was not an option, partly because of Akhilesh's dislike, though inconsistent, for criminal politicians but mainly due to

UP's changed political realities after Yogi Adityanath's arrival. So much so that some defensive netas have been staying away from iftar parties as they feel overt minoritarianism could be counter-productive. And why would the Samajwadi Party embrace a liability when Akhilesh, even if as a fringe player, is hobnobbing with anti-BJP forces ahead of the 2024 national polls when PM Modi seeks a third straight term. "My husband's proximity with the Samajwadi Party never let us learn discipline. We will follow BSP's guidelines and take advice from senior leaders. My husband always respected Dalits and wanted to join the BSP but some leaders kept him at bay," Shaista Parveen had said after joining the BSP in January. Fair enough. But why did Mayawati welcome her into the BSP? On the face of it, she buried the hatchet as the enemy's enemy is often a friend. But the reality is more complex. The alliance was Mayawati's desperate attempt at survival.

Let's go back in time a little. Mayawati has always needed a Dalit-plus strategy to win political battles. In 2007, she became Uttar Pradesh's chief minister for the fourth time. But the 2007 victory was different. In 1993, when she became the first Dalit CM, she had won the polls in alliance with the Samajwadi Party. In 1997 and 2002, her partner was the BJP. However, in 2007, she single-handedly steered her BSP to a stunning win with a majority. And even though she didn't need a political ally, she had a caste one: the Brahmins. It was called Mayawati's social engineering that brought the two unlikely-to-join-hands communities, Dalits and Brahmins, together. When the Samajwadi Party dislodged her in the 2012 UP Assembly polls, Mayawati was

down but not out. The state had, more or less, seen revolving-door governments, with the BSP and the SP often replacing each other after every election. She was hopeful of a comeback. But 2017 brought about a major shift. The BJP swept the polls and Yogi Adityanath became the CM. It was a different BJP. It was a post-2014 BJP, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his trusted aide Amit Shah, which, after coming to power, tended to stay on. Riding on the Hindutva Hurricane, and a publicity blitz around its governance model, it was a BJP whose performances seemed to ridicule the term anti-incumbency. It was a BJP that wore pro-incumbency on its sleeve. In 2022, Mayawati tried to go for her social engineering. The result was: Yogi Adityanath created history by becoming the first UP CM who returned to power after completing the full five-year term. The apprehensions that Brahmins were upset with the Rajput CM—though he calls himself a Yogi, who is above matters like caste—were found unfounded. Samajwadi Party's Akhilesh Yadav, with a legacy of his father's Muslim-Yadav vote bank, though now dented considerably, became the principal political opposition in a saffronised UP. Mayawati, in her mid-60s, stared at complete political irrelevance. It is against this backdrop that she seemed to have thought of a new Dalit-plus strategy, this time involving Muslims, as a last-ditch effort aimed at survival. She swallowed the bitter Atiq pill and welcomed Shaista into the BSP in January. But UP's crime-politics script is often unpredictable. Next month, in February, Umesh Pal, a witness of Raju Pal's murder, and his security guards were shot dead in Prayagraj.

Suicides In IITs: Time To Stem The Tide

The suicides at IIT Madras and IIT Bombay made headlines recently, though proportionately, more students die of self-harm across schools and colleges in India than in these halls of fame. Thirty-three students have died by suicide across the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) since 2018. The corresponding figures for the National Institute of Information Technology (NIIT) and the Indian Institutes of Management (IIM) are much lesser, with the IIMs having the least. The political mayhem and insane chaotic speculations around the causes of suicide have caused agony, fear and a divide among students on the basis of caste. The widely reported investigations and wild allegations flowing to and fro have also vitiated the atmosphere and an uneasy calm prevails in the affected and the non-affected campuses. Intimidating teachers and gherao of the Director inside the campus following a suicide does not help. Following are the measures one can take to further prevent suicides and promote



resilience in the institutes. All IITs do not have full-fledged counselling centres. The institutes need to have at least one psychologist for 350 students. These centres need to be walking talking centres that reach out to students and not wait for them to be referred by the faculty, other students, parents or themselves. The counselling centres need to engage with the parents of the students both online and offline. Meetings along with the wards could prove to be helpful. Psychologists need to actively penetrate the classrooms and hostels and conduct activities on mental health such as resilience building,

interpersonal skills, study skills, confidence building, sleep hygiene, saying no to drugs, tackling failures, mindfulness, emotional hygiene, managing parents and others. When activities leading to good health will be transacted, ill health will lose its shame and present itself to the experts for early treatment. These centres need to be far away from the geographical premises of the Director. Funds for them can be made easily available from the tonnes of money the alumni pour in and the hundreds of crores the government gives for infrastructure and research. Suicide prevention needs to be a narrative that is woven into the ethos of the campus, including families of the teachers, non-teaching staff and others. The action plan needs to have the entire community be the participants and the receivers of the emotional health package. The passion towards ensuring good mental health should be similar to the festivals the institutes host such as 'Mood Indigo', 'Tech Fest' and others.

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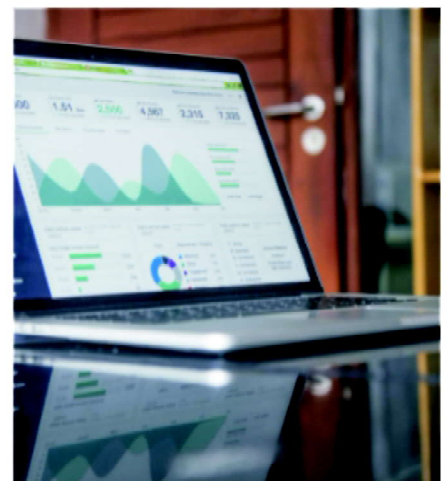
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Ron DeSantis is flaming out – and Trump is on The unnecessary price of Covid-19 course for a Republican coronation

The Ron DeSantis boomlet is done. He consistently trails Donald Trump by double-digits. A Wall Street Journal poll out Friday pegs Florida's governor in severe retrograde, slipping 27 points since December. DeSantis mistakenly conflates his campaign's bulging war chest with adulation. Wrong!

He forgot that working-class Americans dominate the Republican party and that mien matters. Voting to gut social security comes with fatal backlash, and eating pudding with your fingers is gross. Said differently, largesse from the party's donor base coupled with little else is a losing recipe.

Charles Koch has but a single vote and David Koch is gone. Before he goes any further, DeSantis needs to be reminded of past campaign flame-outs – Jeb Bush, John Connally and Mike Bloomberg – if he is to avoid their inglorious endings. In 2016, Trump bludgeoned Bush to an early primary exit. His name recognition bought a ton of campaign donations but little else. A son and brother to presidents and a grandson to a US senator, Bush left the race with a grand total of four convention delegates and zero primary victories.

He sat in the Florida governor's mansion between 1999 and 2007. The gig doesn't scream springboard.

Connally is another cautionary tale. Lee Harvey Oswald seriously wounded him as he was riding with President Kennedy that fateful November day in Dallas. Fast forward, Ronald Reagan left Connally in the dust in 1980.

The jut-jawed former Texas governor garnered just a single convention delegate after parting with \$500,000 from his own pockets and nearly \$12m from everyone else's. And then there's Mayor Bloomberg. He dropped \$900m of his own money, netted 58 delegates and a lone victory – American Samoa. As a coda, he tussled with campaign staff over unpaid wages.

If primaries were held tomorrow, DeSantis would probably suffer beatings in New Hampshire, Georgia and South Carolina, and lags in Florida. And if he can't win in the Sunshine state, he is not likely to win anywhere else.

Home-state losses are fatal. Just ask Elizabeth Warren and Amy Klobuchar. Joe Biden resides at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Warren and Klobuchar continue to toil in the Senate. Don't expect DeSantis to regain traction any time soon. He has not benefited from Trump's legal woes. DeSantis also remains plagued by a likability deficit, and his war on "woke" is beginning to bite him.

When news broke in March of Trump's indictment, DeSantis reflexively rushed to his defense. In the moment, he accused Alvin Bragg, Manhattan's district attorney, of pushing an "un-American" political "agenda". DeSantis also stood ready to fight Trump's extradition to New York, a meaningless gesture. Trump voluntarily surrendered days later.

Subsequently, DeSantis took a swipe at Trump's extracurricular hobbies, but it was too little, too late. Subtlety doesn't work on Trump. To be the man, you need to beat the man.

This coming week, E Jean Carroll's defamation and sexual assault civil case against Trump begins in a Manhattan courtroom. Trump is noncommittal about attending. Expect the infamous Access Hollywood tape to be re-aired. The circus is back.

Regardless, there is no indication that DeSantis will have much to say about any of that. Whether Casey DeSantis, his wife, offers any empathetic words for Ms Carroll or Melania Trump is also unknown. A former television broadcaster, Casey DeSantis knows how to wield a shiv with a smile, not a snarl.

On that score, DeSantis's lack of social skills has cost him plenty. At Politico, the headline blares: "How to lose friends and alienate people, by Ron DeSantis."

This past week, his gambit to woo Florida's House Republicans flopped. He flew up to Washington only to be met by a passel of Trump endorsements.

"A great group of supportive Florida Congressmen and Congresswomen, all who have Endorsed me, will be coming to Mar-a-Lago," the 45th president posted. "Our support is almost universal in Florida and throughout the USA."

Trump takes the time to wine, dine and threaten. DeSantis can't be bothered. Voters in early primary states expect to be stroked or entertained. The governor appears incapable of doing either.

Last, Disney is fighting back, to DeSantis's chagrin and Trump's delectation. To burnish his stock with social conservatives, DeSantis attempted to put the torch to one of his state's biggest business and largest employers. By contrast, when Trump taunted the National Football League, he was playing with other people's money.

Right now, Mickey, Minnie and Trump are winning. The path to the 2024 Republican nomination looks ever more like a coronation.

By Lloyd Green

According to a new report, half a million Americans may have died unnecessarily of Covid-19. At the same time, the US government spent trillions to deal with the pandemic when better preparedness could have saved many lives and much money. American schools were also closed for many months unnecessarily, with students paying the price. The report, "Lessons from the Covid War," by the Covid Crisis Group, is being published as a 347-page book Tuesday. It will likely stand as the most authoritative account of American policy failures and successes during the war against Covid-19.

The report makes for sobering reading, concluding that "no country's performance was more disappointing than the United States." The group came to that conclusion because, despite the great depth of scientific knowledge in the United States, American "excess deaths" during the pandemic were about 40% higher than the European death rate.

If the US had had a similar rate to Europe by the end of 2022, "probably" at least half a million Americans wouldn't have died, according to the report. That's a big number. The federal government also deployed \$5 trillion to deal with the consequences of the pandemic. That is also a big number.

So how did the US get into this mess? Given America's hyper-partisanship, just about everything about the Covid-19 pandemic was deeply politicized – from the precise origins of the coronavirus in China, to lockdowns, mask-wearing, school closures, vaccines, and the best drugs for treatment.

As a result, there has been scant official reckoning over how the government fared during the pandemic and what lessons might be learned for

the inevitable next pandemic.

A 2022 bipartisan bill seeking to establish a National Covid Commission never made it to the floor for a vote in the US Congress. This is astonishing when you consider that more Americans have died of Covid – around 1.1 million so far – than all the Americans who died in every US war going back to the American Revolution. So, without a congressionally mandated inquiry like the 9/11 Commission, 34 American public health experts, physicians, and other policy experts decided to investigate what went right and wrong during the pandemic.

Starting their work in early 2021, the non-partisan Covid Crisis Group conducted "listening sessions" with 274 people who had played some role in responding to the pandemic or had been affected by it. The group was directed by Philip Zelikow, a leading historian and former senior State Department official in the George W. Bush administration who had also served as the Executive Director of the 9/11 Commission, which had set the gold standard for how to conduct a comprehensive examination of a major catastrophe and the lessons that could be learned from it. Other members of the Covid Crisis Group included Michael Osterholm of the University of Minnesota who had been publicly warning of the emergence of a global pandemic for a decade and a half before Covid-19 first emerged; Dr. Margaret "Peggy" Hamburg, the former Commissioner of the US Food and Drug Administration and Dr. Ezekiel J. Emanuel, former chair of the Department of Bioethics at the National Institutes of Health.

The report examines both the "lab leak" theory that the coronavirus accidentally escaped from a research lab in Wuhan, China, and the natural transmission theory that the virus moved from a wild animal into humans.

By Peter Bergen

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With Amritpal in Net, Khalistan Bogey Buried in Punjab

ISI May Continue to Stir Trouble Abroad

Finally, after a 36-day-long run, Amritpal Singh gave himself up to the Punjab Police in the native village of his role model and the original Khalistan mascot, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.

But, significantly, there was no sign of trouble or protests in Punjab on Sunday as Singh was quickly whisked away to Dibrugarh jail in Assam. Singh, perhaps, did anticipate some voices in his favour after putting up a show of sitting before Bhindranwale's picture in a gurdwara at Rode village in Moga district, and trying to play a martyr for the cause of Khalistan. This, however, may not travel far or register widely in Punjab, as it did not even during his 36 days of bumbling escape that has eroded whatever little influence he had built. Booked under the National

Security Act (NSA) along with nine of his key associates and shifted to far-off Dibrugarh, Singh is not expected to be a free man for many years to come with serious charges of Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and sedition to be clamped on him as well. This has also been done to ensure he is not lodged in a Punjab jail where security systems have been found to be porous, lately with gangsters like Lawrence Bishnoi giving video interviews from the jail. Also, this avoids any political mobilisation for Amritpal in Punjab. While the failure of the Punjab Police to nab him before he reached Rode

village or over the last 36 days is a matter of debate, Singh's eight-month long sojourn in Punjab after arriving from Dubai could soon be relegated to a thing of the past. One reason for the same is political alignment of the Bhagwant Mann government and the Centre over diminishing the Amritpal factor in Punjab. Both Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann have been making statements that 'Khalistan' bogey is a thing of the past in Punjab and a wide majority of the people have moved on.

TROUBLE ABROAD

The 'Khalistan' issue would, however, continue to reverberate abroad in countries such as the UK, US and Canada given the active support of Pakistan's ISI to the radical Sikh groups, in a bid to keep the pot stirring. As seen during the protests abroad in the last one month since the police crackdown on Amritpal Singh, which have a clear stamp of ISI support. India will need to do much more through diplomatic means to prevail upon Canada, the US and UK to crack down on such elements and not allow seditious activities against the country in the name

of freedom to speech. India has already taken action against radical Sikh elements abroad by moving to cancel their PIO or OCI cards.

The Amritpal issue also shows that the Aam Aadmi Party government in Punjab needs to remain on its toes to counter any attempts in the future by the ISI to prop up Amritpal-like elements in Punjab. The Mann government has a greater responsibility given Punjab being a border state, and work closely with the Centre on this. For now, Punjab and Centre can heave a sigh of relief with the Amritpal Singh chapter ending in Punjab.

Civil Servants: From Colonial Clones to Compliant Managers?

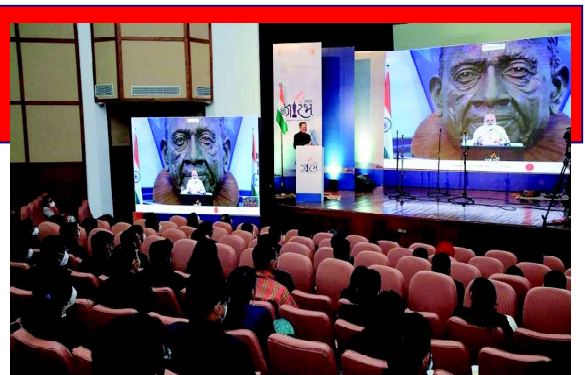
Since Narendra Modi became prime minister in 2014, the ethos of civil services has been shifting from constitutional values to management compliance. This has been attempted through a huge lateral entry of 'compliance managers' to capture the IAS.

By M.G. Devasahayam

Writing on the Civil Service Day, April 21, Srinivas Katikithala, director of the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie (LBSNAA) dished out this pearl of wisdom: "The task of defining an Indian ethos for the civil service began in the 75th year of India's independence, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address where he spelt out the country's vision and the Panch Pran – the five pledges – to drive India's transition from Amrit Mahotsav to Amrit Kaal. The second pledge – the removal of a colonial mindset – demanded a revision of self-imagination and the shedding of colonial baggage among the civil services." He signed off the article with this exhortation: "The shaking off of a former colonial

mindset, sharing a sense of pride in the Indian roots, and a duty-bound set of civil servants with a nation-first approach is the new ethic of civil servants who pass out of their hallowed doors as 'Mussoorie wale karmayogis'." This sycophancy has a similarity with what actress Kangana Ranaut said a couple of years ago: "India's Independence in 1947 was not freedom but 'bheek (alms)'... Of course, what we got [in 1947] was not Independence but alms. Independence is what we got in 2014." Though she came under severe criticism, she reiterated her contention and gave the credit for India's independence to Prime Minister Modi. Katikithala has taken this forward. A person like Kangana had to say what she said to stay relevant. But on what basis

is Katikithala saying that Narendra Modi has taken India's civil services out of colonial clutches in 2019 and more so during Amrit Mahotsav through his 'Mission Karmayogi' announced in September 2020? Does he mean that all IAS/IPS officers prior to the 2019 batch are colonial clones? Is it not criminal defamation a la Rahul Gandhi of the Modi faux pas? Should defamation proceedings be launched in Gujarat, the cadre state of Katikithala? Mission Karmayogi Be that as it may, what is this 'Mission Karmayogi' which is described as a tool to build 'future-ready' civil servants with the right attitude, skills and knowledge, aligned to the vision of a "New India"? The New India Movement 2017-2022



launched by the Prime Minister envisages an India free from poverty, corruption, terrorism, communalism, casteism and uncleanness, and unite the entire country by adopting good governance and using technology. Under this 'movement' the Government of India has launched flagship schemes such as Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), Pradhan Mantri Ujjawala Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, Jan Suraksha Yojana, Pradhan Mantri

Jeevan Jyoti Yojana, Atal Pension Yojana etc. 'New India' dream is also to double farmer's income and to create a \$5 trillion economy by the year 2022 – which is now well past. In short, it is a National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building to make civil servants more creative, constructive, imaginative, innovative, proactive, professional, progressive, energetic, enabling, transparent and technology-enabled.

China Renaming Places in Arunachal Pradesh Undermines International Law

By Abhinav Mehrotra and Dr Biswanath Gupta

In the recent event of the India-China conflict, China has unitarily renamed 11 places of Arunachal Pradesh inside the Indian territory. This is the most recent attempt by China to continue its conflict with India without any provocation from the Indian side. For the last few years, China has continued to threaten or break international law between India-China contested borders. A recent publication from China has renamed 11 places along the map that shows them to be part of Arunachal Pradesh but claimed to be a part of the Southern Tibetan region. Out of these 11 places, one town, which is close to Itanagar, the capital city of Arunachal Pradesh, is also renamed. Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs announced this decision on Sunday, April 2, 2023.

This is China's third attempt to rename the places of Arunachal Pradesh since 2017. In its first attempt, China's Ministry of Civil Affairs put out a list of six places inside Arunachal Pradesh. Lastly, in 2021, it again renamed 15 places of Arunachal Pradesh as a standard geographical name. The notification dated April 2 (No. 548) said, "According to the relevant



provisions of the State Council on the management of geographical names, [China's Ministry of Civil Affairs], together with relevant departments, has standardised some geographical names in southern Tibet. The third batch of supplementary place names for public use in southern Tibet (11 in total) is now officially announced." The 11 places named include five mountain peaks, two more populated areas, two land areas, and two rivers. Such an act goes against the sovereignty over territory which is the founding principle of international legal order and forms the basis for the implementation of the sovereign rights of a State as there seems to be greater recognition of the challenge from China and the need

to recalibrate the Indian response.

In this light, there arise questions regarding the significance of such an arbitrary step under International law, the history of the India-China relationship, the recent standoff in 2020, and the possible way forward.

As China and India are both members of the United Nations. and China being a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, it becomes important for China to not interfere with the political affairs of the other state as laid down under Article 2 (7) of the UN Charter. In this regard, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Nicaragua case has said that the principle of non-

intervention is both an obligation under treaty law and customary international law. If any of the parties violates the UN principle, they can be held responsible under international law. Thus, the unitary action of China to change the name of certain regions of Arunachal Pradesh is a clear example of a violation of the principle of non-intervention. By renaming these regions, China has directly interfered with the political affairs of India. These actions not only violate international law but also destabilise the peace in Asia. As the actual control of the area is with India, therefore, these actions of China are a futile exercise of powers. Historically, many issues have divided the two countries such as India's largely sympathetic attitude towards Tibet and hosting of the Dalai Lama; the Cold War geopolitical realignments; China's efforts to challenge India's primacy in South Asia; and China's patronage of many ethnic-separatist groups operating in Northeast India, etc. What needs to be understood is the background in which China's current attitude of expansionism has developed. It was in the early 1970s when China was in the middle of the Cultural Revolution, which even the Chinese

themselves describe as a massive, destructive era. The root cause is the devastation resulting from the opium wars in the 1840s to World War II in the 1940s when China was under the control of the Western powers. In recent times, the standoff at Doklam was one of the most serious confrontations between India and China since the 1962 War. It was an outcome of India's refusal to be bowed down by China's growing assertiveness. The Doklam plateau is a disputed patch of land near the tri-junction of Bhutan, Tibet, and Sikkim. At the same time, India is treaty-bound to help address Bhutan's security concerns as per the terms of a pact renewed in 2007 between the two countries, consequently, India sent its troops to the disputed area, preventing China's attempts to seize physical control of the same. Going forward, the need of the hour is for China to revisit the five principles of peaceful co-existence under the Panchsheel Agreement that it had signed with India on April 29, 1954, and enunciated the principles of mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; non-aggression; non-interference; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful coexistence.

GPT and its Potential Impact on the Education Sector

By Akshay Srinivasan

As per the National Education Policy (NEP), India plans to revamp its education system with a renewed focus on application, creativity, and innovation. It aims to create an educational framework that nurtures learners' potential to the fullest. Speaking of innovation, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is one of the most promising technologies that has the potential to reshape the way we live, work, and learn. Integrating AI, specifically Generative Pretrained Transformer (GPT), into the education system is a crucial step to keeping pace with the rapidly changing technological landscape. It could transform the traditional education model into a more personalised, adaptive, and effective learning experience.



Furthermore, a change is already on the cards. Therefore, now is the perfect time for integration. In the last six months, GPT has left an impression on everybody across the world. According to SimilarWeb, in February alone, OpenAI's ChatGPT received one billion visitors and had over a

hundred million users. ChatGPT is an artificial intelligence conversation tool that generates responses to prompts. With ChatGPT already available in English, Spanish, French, and German among others, it is only a matter of time before it is available in top Indian languages.

This would help expand access to education and bridge the gap between different mediums of instruction in the Indian educational landscape. ChatGPT, being available offline, is another perk considering that internet access is not available everywhere in India. There are several benefits to incorporating GPT into education in India. How many times have Indian students learned some concepts without knowing how they are going to be used in real-world situations? Even if we forget the practical application, there are so many times people learn to memorise the concepts instead of understanding them. That is where the integration of GPT would help the students. They can have back-and-forth conversations with GPT. Additionally, GPT can summarise concepts at different

levels of complexity using practical examples. Thus, GPT can assist students in grasping concepts, faster and more effectively. In a way, it could act as a learning companion that knows what it is talking about. Teachers can benefit from the same perks as well, along with some teacher-specific perks too. One of the most mundane, time-consuming tasks of a teacher is grading papers. A teacher's life would be so much easier if this part of teaching were automated. No one in the education realm dreamt of grading papers when they decided to pursue teaching. Here is something that is not a secret. We have the technology to automate grading. With the GPT, creating tests and quizzes can be straightforward with trivial time spent on these tasks.

On Hinduism, Hindutva and Hate

Some may say that no conclusion can be drawn about crores of Hindus on the basis of these incidents. But Hindus should honestly ask whether they respect co-existence with others. Is hatred not increasing in Hindu society?

By Apoorvanand

In the evening of the day of Eid a friend shared a video which was in fact done live by the famous singer Shaan. He was in his casuals. As we learn from him he was in Mangalore where he had to perform. But before that he felt compelled to do this video. This was because of the attacks that he faced for his earlier post, released at the beginning of the day of Eid. In the post that he uploaded, he can be seen wearing a skull cap with hands raised in a dua with a caption, "Eid Mubarak to you and your family." This gesture received angry, hateful reaction from his Hindu followers, enough in number to force him to take out time before his performance to give a polite lesson to his followers in the beauty of respecting other religions. He in his own way said that he wouldn't change, it is for his followers to think about what they had become. So, the day of Eid became for me, as for Shaan, a day to think about my fellow Hindus. Or, worry about them. Not




only about a significant section of the Hindus of India. I feel concerned for even those Hindus who have gone to other countries and settled there. We were not taught enough about what's going on in the community or what is being done to them hasn't been explored enough. What they're doing to themselves, what they're turning into has never been critically examined. No one cares for their collective socio-psychological health. On the other hand, much has been written about the Muslims of India over the years. About the

violent attacks on them, about their killings and destruction of their homes and livelihoods, about their daily humiliation, about the injustices meted out to them by the state and society. About the growing depression in Muslim society as a whole in India. There is no aspect of the lives of Muslims which has been allowed to remain private. They are a matter of public discussion and everyone feels free to comment on them. Muslims are bearing all this and are alive. The proof of their survival is that despite all the might of the


state, Bilkis Bano is still fighting. She doesn't sound helpless and bitter, and is also not ready to give up her constitutional rights. Khalid Saifi comes home only on an interim bail of six hours after being kept in jail for three years, and I see his photographs in which he smiles and laughs. In those six hours, he finds time to clip his mother's nails and feed her. Despite the horrendous rebuff from the Supreme Court, Zakia Jafri does not stop fighting for justice. Even after facing violence and obscenity on the occasion of Ram Navami, Muslims celebrate Eid with grace. All these are proof of the survival of dignity and humanity of Muslims. It is now becoming difficult to say the same thing with confidence about so many Hindus. I am not talking about Ram Navami which is now sadly becoming more about Muslims than about Ram. Has Ram become a tool or cover to provoke Hindu hatred against the Muslims. It becomes clear just by comparing the violent collectivisation of Ram Navami

with the decent collectivisation of Muslims on Eid, which came a few days after Ram Navami. Hindus have many organisations which look community based but the welfare of Hindus cannot be achieved unless other communities are restrained. It cannot be done unless hatred is spread among them against Muslims and Christians. A large section of Hindus choose political leaders as their representatives who spread hatred against other communities. We haven't talked about this problem. Why can the votes of Hindus be guaranteed by spreading hatred towards other religions?

The school near Hathras
The immediate provocation for this rumination along with the Shaan video was the news from a school near Hathras. A video landed in my timeline in which dozens of people at the gate of this school, perhaps even the parents of the children studying in it, are clapping and singing Hanuman Chalisa or Manas.



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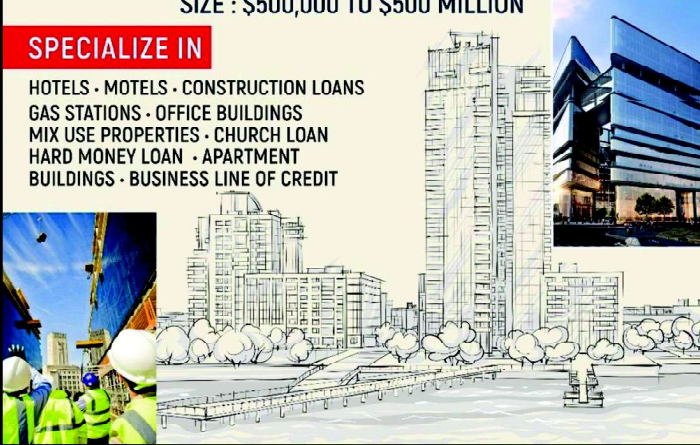
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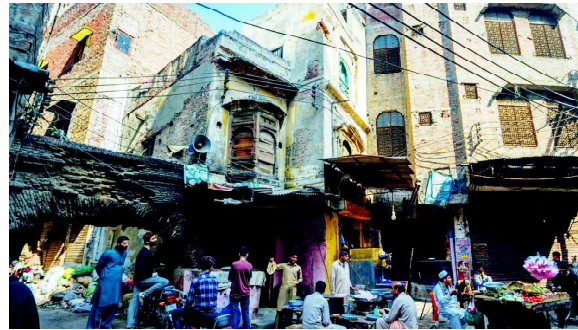
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Attempting a 'Grand Synthesis' of Pakistan's History and Present

Pervez Hoodbhoy makes entertaining observations on the many faces of Pakistan's Muslim identity in the course of its elusive and futile quest for an Islamic state.

By Farzana Shaikh

In a poignant and deeply prescient essay titled 'The Messiah and The Promised Land', the American photojournalist, Margaret Bourke-White, who had been assigned by Life magazine to tour India on the eve of independence in 1947, wondered what led Pakistan's founding father, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, in his final months to a 'dismaying withdrawal into himself'. Bourke-White, the first foreign journalist to be granted an interview with Jinnah after the creation of Pakistan in August 1947, noted that his once famed 'Olympian assurance' appeared to have 'strangely withered' and been replaced by a 'spiritual numbness concealing something close to panic underneath'. While she acknowledged that the acute difficulties facing Jinnah as he steered his economically vulnerable state and prepared it for war with India over Kashmir may have been to blame, neither could explain his 'tortured appearance'. She



suspected that the sources of his anxiety lay deeper. "Jinnah," she wrote, "knew what he had done. Like Doctor Faustus, he had made a bargain from which he could never be free. During the heat of the struggle, he had been willing to call on all the devilish forces of superstition, and now that his new nation had been achieved the bigots were in the position of authority. The leaders of orthodoxy... had the final word and... were seeing to it that the people were held in the deadening grip of religious superstition."

Bourke-White's suggestion that

Jinnah had instrumentalised the language of religion to service his political cause continues to resonate to this day, fuelling controversy among his followers. Those who regard Pakistan as the modern expression of the prototypical Islamic state remain convinced that Jinnah's appeal to religion reflected his desire for a homeland where Muslims would be governed by the laws of Islam. Others, wary of this theocratic reading of Pakistan, insist that Jinnah's invocation of Islam was intended primarily to promote a secular enterprise that would free

Muslims from the domination of a Hindu majority poised to capture political power with the exit of Britain from India. These diverging positions have been impossible to reconcile and still tax the minds of many a historian and social scientist wrestling with the roots of the world's first self-consciously created Muslim state and its uncertain trajectory. Their difficulties have been compounded by Jinnah's own carefully cultivated ambivalence about the role of Islam in the political space he envisioned as Pakistan and its relationship to the definition of Pakistan's national identity. The latest to step in with his bold intervention to settle these questions is the Pakistani nuclear physicist, political activist and well known commentator on current affairs, Pervez Hoodbhoy. He aims at nothing less than a "grand synthesis", which he declares "should rightly have been written by a full blooded historian of South Asia". But the paucity of "scrupulously honest" historians

capable of "sticking to facts" or resisting "the needs of power", he tells us, left him impatient. He had no choice because "no one has really tried to understand just why the theory of two distinct nations [Hindus and Muslims] emerged" to result in two separate, warring states – India and Pakistan. Hoodbhoy's claims are sure to raise a few eyebrows if not the hackles of some Pakistani scholars at home and abroad who will resent his cavalier treatment of their contributions; some may even choose to repay him in kind by dismissing his efforts as no better than an exercise in polemics. This would be a mistake. For Hoodbhoy deserves to be heard and his arguments carefully appraised.

Much of Hoodbhoy's five-part narrative of Pakistan's historical roots, its intellectual antecedents, contested sovereignty, dysfunctional politics and less-than-promising outlook covers ground that will already be familiar to most academic specialists of Pakistan.



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We Are Neglecting These Two Large Countries

By **Rajmohan Gandhi**

We see our country as a world power and would like our elephant to overtake the dragon beyond the mountains. Today the G20 logo is displayed on a million hoardings in India. BRICS, too, has been a familiar acronym. But Brazil's Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva is currently making a conspicuous trip to China that seems little noticed in India even as China's party-owned media trumpets the Xi-Lula bonhomie.

Brazil's trade with China amounts to twice its trade with the US, which shows up next as the country's second most important economic partner. India, at number 10 on Brazil's international trade list, places ahead of the UK and France.

However, if Brazil, which is Latin America's largest and most populous country, were to rank its economic partners by a democracy-cum-population metric, India would be near the top.

Let's bring up a third continent and country here. In terms of population and a democratic framework, three countries seem to lead their continent: India in Asia, Brazil in Latin America, and Nigeria in Africa. While India and Brazil are members of BRICS as well as of G20, Nigeria, curiously

enough, belongs to neither, even though in GDP terms oil-rich Nigeria seems recently to have replaced South Africa as the number one country in all of Africa. We should also mark that Nigeria is the number one destination in Africa for China's investments, apart from being a significant supplier of oil to China. Yet nothing can remove the similarities between India, Brazil and Nigeria. Extending beyond size and a democratic constitution, these similarities include population diversity. In fact, diversity may be their primary common feature.

Of the more than 200 million people that Nigeria now has, about 45 percent are Muslim and 45 percent or so are Christian. However, religion is not the most important distinction between one Nigerian and another. Whether by birth you are a Yoruba or an Igbo or belong to another regional ethnicity seems to matter more in the country's more prosperous, and predominantly Christian, southern half. Nigeria's overwhelmingly Muslim northern half too is influenced by its own ethnic divides.

It was in the 1950s that people like me first learnt of Yorubas, Igbos (then spelt Ebos), and the Muslims of Nigeria's north. Nnamdi Azikiwe was a famous

Igbo leader in Nigeria's struggle for freedom from Britain, and Chief Awolowo was an equally famous Yoruba leader, but Nigeria's first prime minister, who remained in that post for nine years, was Abubakar Balewa (1912-66), a Fulani Muslim from the north.

Although Nigeria has had to cope with secession and military takeovers, its democratic journey has been impressive, and it has displayed pragmatic statesmanship in trying to ensure that Christian and Muslim leaders alternate at the nation's top. That convention will not, however, be observed this year. On May 23, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the winner of Nigeria's recent elections, is scheduled to succeed another Muslim, Muhammadu Buhari, as president.

Tinubu's victory brings the number one position back to someone from Nigeria's south. Unlike Buhari, who was born in the northern state of Katsina into a family of Fulani and Hausa Muslims, Tinubu by ethnicity is a Yoruba from the south. He is wholly identified with Lagos, the megacity situated on Nigeria's southwestern coast and easily the African continent's most populous city. Until 1991, Lagos was Nigeria's capital. By making Abuja in the country's middle the new capital, Nigerians firmed up

their national unity.

If perhaps 10,000 Nigerians live today in a range of Indian cities, most of them as students, the estimated figure for Indians living in Nigeria is eight lakhs, if we go by Wikipedia, which cites the BBC as its source. Given such numbers, the potential for partnership between Indians and Nigerians is clearly something that the Chinese dragon must envy.

Brazilians may not be as noticeable in India as Nigerians are. Their country is a good deal more distant than Nigeria, and the number of Indians who have made Brazil their home is much smaller when compared with Nigeria. However, Indians are probably more familiar with the name of the current Brazilian president, 77-year-old Luiz Lula da Silva, better known simply as Lula, than with the names Tinubu and Buhari.

In his previous spell as Brazil's president, from 2003 to 2010, Lula's pro-poor policies often made news in India. More recently, he made bigger news when, going from state prisoner to president-elect, Lula defeated the right-wing incumbent, Jair Bolsonaro, in an election the world closely watched. Lula's victory over Bolsonaro delighted many in India and elsewhere, who were alienated by Bolsonaro's seeming unconcern

over Covid and over the shrinking of the Amazon Forest, and by Bolsonaro's apparent willingness to cripple democratic institutions. Although Portuguese is the language that Brazilians speak, Portugal, the European power that once controlled Brazil, ceased long ago to be a major factor in Brazil's life. Nonetheless, a common Portuguese connection in the past links Goa, Mumbai and some other parts of India to Brazil. Then there is football and the love that Indians harbour for Brazilian and other South American stars.

Brazil too, with more than 200 million people, has a variety of ethnicities like in Nigeria and India. The ethnicities include Indigenous American, European, African and Asian blood. It was slavery which centuries ago bequeathed African blood to Brazil. Unlike North America, Brazil was comfortable with inter-racial marriages and alliances. Much of its current population is thus a fusion. Yet racism is far from absent, observers say, in Brazil.

India, Brazil, and Nigeria clearly have much in common. Their modern stories suggest that the state of human rights in a diverse country may be strongly connected to the respect and friendship that different communities give to one another.

Biden's 2024 presidential run will put America at greater risk in the world

By **Rebekah Koffler**

President Biden announced on Tuesday that he will run for re-election in 2024, a decision that a huge majority of Americans, 70% according to a new survey, oppose. Americans are right to be concerned. Team Biden's unhinged foreign policy has already eroded America's security, and it will destabilize the world even further. Here's how.

Threat of terror attacks on America and Americans

Biden's chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 had catastrophic consequences, sowing the seeds of instability for years to come. It is bad enough that billions of dollars worth of abandoned high-tech U.S. military hardware fell into the hands of Taliban, one of the most brutal regimes in human history. What is even worse is that Afghanistan has become a staging ground for international terror attacks planned by ISIS, according to a Pentagon intelligence report recently disclosed by the Massachusetts Air National Guardsman Jack Teixeira. Additionally, the U.S.



homeland is on the target list, as Islamic State leaders pursue "aspirational plotting" against American and European targets and interests, reveals the document marked "top secret."

Another terror threat comes from Iran, which aims to target U.S. citizens directly and via proxy attacks, having been developing "surrogate networks inside the United States," for "more than a decade," according to the 2023 Annual Threat Assessment issued on March 8 by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI).

The report also called out top U.S.

opponents that threaten America and technologies they are developing that "disrupt" traditional business and society. North Korea, for example, targets assets and persons with espionage, cyber-crime, and other sophisticated attacks inside the United States, the report

reveals. "Pyongyang probably possesses the expertise to cause temporary, limited disruptions of some critical infrastructure networks and disrupt business networks in the United States," according to the DNI. Terror attacks have occurred just this year. In March, Iranian proxy forces launched multiple rocket strikes on a U.S. base in Northeast Syria, following an attack that killed a U.S. contractor and wounded six other Americans. On Sunday, U.S. special forces evacuated U.S. Embassy employees out of Sudan, following an armed attack on the U.S. diplomatic convoy in Khartoum by forces

belonging to two rival generals. Like in Afghanistan, although the embassy was evacuated and shut down, thousands of private American citizens were left behind in the East African country. Threat of a direct, potentially two-front war with US top adversaries

Biden's policies have created a grave risk of the United States facing a two-front war, one with Russia over Ukraine and the other with China over Taiwan – a scenario for which America is woefully unprepared. The "risk for escalation" into a direct U.S.-Russia war has reached the levels "the world has not faced in decades" due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, states the DNI report. Despite years worth of signposts indicating that Russian President Vladimir Putin will attack Ukraine, team Biden failed to craft a counter-strategy to deter him. Instead, they are throwing billions of dollars at the problem in assistance to Ukraine, having drained the U.S. weapons arsenal precisely at the time when Chinese President Xi Jinping is readying his military for an invasion of Taiwan.

Nitish Kumar's Mission Against Modi Appears Ready To Take Off

By Ashutosh

It may be too early to bet big on it, but after years of false starts and photo ops that fizzle out, the elusive opposition unity, the biggest X Factor in the great fight of 2024, finally appears to be taking shape. And it's Nitish Kumar who appears to have decided to play the role of a shepherd to corral almost everyone against the man called Narendra Modi. The jury is still out on whether he will succeed in his new role, but one can say that he has had a good start. The contours of the unity look very encouraging, and a shape, more than a few wisps of smoke, appears to be emerging. A productive meeting with Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi notwithstanding, if opposition unity was to take a concrete shape, Nitish Kumar will have to make several more trips to Delhi and other state capitals. His visits to Kolkata and Lucknow are works-in-progress. The Bihar Chief Minister first met Mamata Banerjee, which managed to bust the notion that she is intent on undercutting the Congress, and she hinted that she is not driven by ego. If opposition unity is to happen, and she has to share the burden with the Congress, then she is okay with that. This is the real breaking news and should really worry the BJP.

Though the meeting with Akhilesh Yadav was not as categorical in terms of taking the narrative forward, at least, it has given a hint that if marshalled well, then Akhilesh Yadav can be an active player in this game, and he won't be a stumbling block. His only worry is that the Congress should not act like a big brother, and UP should be left to the Samajwadi Party. Currently, he can take solace in the fact that under his leadership, the party might not have formed the government in UP, but its social base has widened by 10 per cent in the assembly elections, which is the highest vote percentage in the history of the Samajwadi Party. One can argue that in 2019, when Akhilesh Yadav aligned with Mayawati and still belying all expectations, could not stop the Modi juggernaut, one should have high expectations of Akhilesh Yadav sans Mayawati. But let's not forget that the Samajwadi Party and the BSP have been traditional rivals and were fighting with each other to capture the seat of power in UP for more than two decades. The BJP and the Congress played second fiddle in this battle. If Mayawati was sworn in as chief minister four times, then Mulayam Singh and Akhilesh Yadav, together, were also sworn in as chief ministers four times. Their party

cadres have been fighting with each other over the years. So, to assume that both parties can come together and that their partymen and sympathisers will transfer their votes to each other is expecting too much. It's common knowledge in UP that Dalit and OBC, especially the Yadav community, are anything but friends. Therefore, the mere meeting of leaders will not lead to the meeting of souls. Therefore, it is no surprise that in UP, it is argued that if Mayawati contests alone, then it might indirectly help the Samajwadi Party as Dalit voters will not vote for the BJP, a vote that can possibly go to the BJP if Mayawati and Akhilesh Yadav are together. In this exercise, one person has been completely forgotten, and that person is Tejashwi Yadav, whose family is facing the wrath of the Modi government. His whole family has been inundated with notices from the CBI and the ED and subjected to raids and interrogations. Tejashwi accompanied Nitish Kumar on his earlier visit to Delhi and to Kolkata and Lucknow this time. Nitish Kumar wants to kill the rumour that there is acrimony between the JDU and RJD; both parties seem to be firmly together, despite all the rumour-mongering and conspiracy theories. This can also be seen as Nitish Kumar

having taken Tejashwi under his wings to train him for the future. But the underlined message is more potent, and that should really make the BJP uneasy. The togetherness of Nitish Kumar and Tejashwi is building a new edifice for Mandal politics vis-a-vis BJP's 'Kamandal'. Under Modi's leadership, Hindutva has scaled unprecedented heights. Welfare schemes of the central government have further consolidated the BJP's social base. A section of the OBC voters has gravitated towards the BJP in UP and Bihar. These two states comprise 120 Lok Sabha Seats. If the consciousness of social justice could be robustly revived again, then it has the potential to dampen the spirit of Hindutva in the bastion of Mandal politics. The collective presence of Nitish Kumar, Tejashwi and Akhilesh Yadav in one frame in Lucknow is strong symbolism. It also sends a signal to the OBC voters that real representatives of OBC politics have united once again, and there is no need to look at the pseudo-practitioner, i.e., BJP. It is no coincidence that all three have demanded that the Modi government should carry out a caste-based census.

In Picking New Deputy, Rishi Sunak Puts A Stamp On Government

By Harsh V. Pant

As Britain gets ready for the coronation of King Charles III next week as the 40th reigning monarch since 1066 with all the pomp and pageantry that the nation is often known for, the political wheels of the country continue their slow churn. Last week, where Prime Minister Rishi Sunak finally lost his long-standing ally and deputy, Dominic Raab, he also managed to consolidate his hold over power with the appointment of his close allies to senior positions in the government. Sunak is increasingly making it clear that he is playing a long game and, despite challenges, is unlikely to give up easily. Raab has been in the eye of the storm for quite some time now about his bullying behavior, and at least 24 people had complained about him during his terms as justice secretary and foreign secretary under Boris Johnson and as Brexit secretary under Theresa May. Sunak, who got significant support from Raab



during his Conservative leadership campaign, had been under pressure to reveal if he knew about these allegations when he appointed Raab as his deputy in October last year. A month later, the Prime Minister appointed a senior lawyer to investigate the allegations against Raab; he concluded last week that Raab had engaged in an "abuse or misuse of power" during his stint as foreign secretary, and "acted in a manner which was intimidating" towards officials at the Ministry of Justice. Though Raab strongly defended himself, he had to resign last week, a move that Sunak praised, saying

that his former deputy had kept his word after "rightly" undertaking to resign if any evidence of bullying might come to light in the report. Raab is a talented and formidable political operative. He will soon bounce back on the political scene. But for Sunak losing his number two is a big setback in the short term. However, he quickly used the opportunity coming his way by appointing two of his closest allies to key positions in the government - Oliver Dowden as Deputy Prime Minister and Alex Chalk as Justice Secretary. What is also interesting is that both of them

had voted to remain in the EU in the Brexit referendum despite being close friends of Sunak. In some ways, Sunak is signaling that he is not averse to working with those holding different views, thereby expanding his base within the party. He also recognises that this is a time to put his stamp on the government even more strongly as the Conservative Party is in no real mood for internal upheaval after its close encounter with catastrophe last autumn. Sunak has brought much needed calm to the Conservatives and there is genuine appreciation for it among the Tories. Meanwhile, the Labour Party that continues to lead in opinion polls is facing its own challenges as one of its senior MPs, Diane Abbott, had to be suspended for what Labour leader Keir Starmer described as "anti-Semitic" remarks. Labour has struggled to get rid of anti-Semitism within its ranks and its former leader Jeremy Corbyn remains suspended from the party for suggesting that the

problem is more hyped than real. Yet, Sunak's challenges are manifold and they are unlikely to disappear anytime soon. His Illegal Migration Bill, aimed at stopping people from crossing the English Channel in small boats, has been deemed to be in contravention of the UK's human rights obligation by the nation's Equality and Human Rights Commission. But more significantly, an inquiry has been launched earlier this month into whether Sunak breached the MPs' code of conduct, which stipulates that MPs "must always be open and frank in declaring any relevant interest in any proceeding of the House or its committees, and in any communications with ministers, members, public officials or public office holders." This is concerning his wife's shares in a childcare agency, though Sunak has maintained that "the prime minister has taken his obligation to declare everything very seriously, he has done that for a number of years."

Joe Biden, his deputy Kamala Harris launch re-election bid for 2024 US polls

The announcement comes on the four-year anniversary of when Joe Biden declared for the White House in 2019, promising to heal the "soul of the nation" amid the turbulent presidency of Donald Trump.



(News Agency)-United States President Joe Biden and his deputy Kamala Harris on Tuesday formally announced their 2024 re-election bid in a new video which the duo posted on their social media account. The 80-year-old president has asked voters to give him one more chance to "finish the job", saying that his age won't impede his ability to govern. In a video released today, Joe Biden framed next year's contest as a "fight against Republican extremism",

stating that he would need more time to fully realise his vow to restore the nation's character. "When I ran for president four years ago, I said we are in a battle for the soul of America. And we still are," the president said in the video. The announcement comes on the four-year anniversary of when Joe Biden declared for the White House in 2019, promising to heal the "soul of the nation" amid the turbulent presidency of Donald Trump. "The question we are

facing is whether in the years ahead we have more freedom or less freedom. More rights or fewer," Biden says in the video. "I know what I want the answer to be and I think you do too. This is not a time to be complacent. That is why I am running for reelection," he adds. Even US Vice-President Kamala Harris shared the same video with a caption that read: "As Americans, we believe in freedom and liberty—and we believe that our democracy will only be as

strong as our willingness to fight for it. That's why @JoeBiden and I are running for reelection. Join us." Biden, who would be 86 at the end of a second term, if elected, is betting his first-term legislative achievements and over 50 years of experience in

Washington to retain the presidency in a bitterly divided nation. According to experts, Biden is likely to enjoy an easy path to his party's nomination as no major Democratic challengers are expected to challenge him.

Australia to focus on strong ties with India, Japan in biggest defence reform



At the Defence Strategic Review, Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles said for the first time in 35 years, the country was recasting the mission of the Australian Defence Force.

(News Agency)- Australia on Monday unveiled its biggest military shakeup, which refocused the armed forces on deterring would-be foes far from its shores. At the event, the country's Defence Minister Richard Marles said the decades-old territory-focused strategy was "no longer fit for purpose".

The long-awaited Defence Strategic Review (DSR) by the defence ministry stated Beijing's military build-up is now the largest and most ambitious of any country since World War II. According to the details, the military shakeup is being viewed as the public version of the strategic review that has proposed a strategy of greater self-sufficiency combined with stronger relationships with its allies and key powers in the region, including Japan and India.

Marles said Australia will shift its focus to deterring enemies before they reach its shores -- at sea, in the air and online.

"Today, for the first time, in 35

years, we are recasting the mission of the Australian Defence Force," Marles said. "This build-up is occurring without transparency or reassurance to the Indo-Pacific region of China's strategic intent," the review said, using another term for the Asia-Pacific. "China's assertion of sovereignty over the South China Sea threatens the global rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific in a way that adversely impacts Australia's national interests." "We commissioned the Defence Strategic Review to make sure Australia is more secure. Today, we've released our response to the review. It shows how determined we are to keep Australians safe. Because national security is every government's most solemn responsibility," Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said in a tweet. Australia has already announced a key tool in its new strategy -- the development of stealthy long-range nuclear-powered submarines.

Building on that, the Australian

Defence Force will acquire long-range missile strike capabilities, both air and land-launched. There will be a short independent review this year of the navy's surface combatant fleet to ensure its size, structure and composition complement the capabilities provided by the new nuclear-powered submarines.

The Australian army will focus more sharply on coastal defence, particularly along the country's vast north.

As a result, a plan to purchase 450 infantry fighting vehicles will be scaled back to just 129.

Australian military planners have viewed China's military rise

warily, fearing that Beijing's now-vast capabilities could effectively cut Australia off trading partners and global supply chains.

The return of major power strategic competition between China and the United States "should be seen as the defining feature of our region and time", the review said.

New Zealand competition wanted kids to kill feral cats.

(News Agency)-Organisers of an annual cat hunting competition in New Zealand faced backlash after it was revealed the competition required children to kill feral cats.

According to the details, organisers announced that those under 14 years of age would have to hunt feral cats. Youngsters were told not to kill pets, but they were otherwise encouraged to kill as many feral cats as possible for a prize. In New Zealand, feral cats are considered a pest and thus pose a risk to the country's biosecurity.

The child who killed the most between mid-April and the end of June would have won NZ\$250 (â124; \$155). The event drew immediate condemnation from animal welfare groups.

Commenting over the cancellation of the program, a representative from New Zealand's Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals on Tuesday told AFP children, along with adults, would not be able to differentiate between "a feral, stray or frightened domesticated cat". There were fears that this would mean house cats would be unintentionally killed.

"We should be teaching our tamariki [children] empathy towards animals, not handing them the tools to kill them," a spokesman for the animal welfare charity Safe told local media outlet 1News.

The event had been announced as part of a June fundraiser hunt for a local school in North

Canterbury in the South Island, a largely rural area of New Zealand where hunting is popular. The competition each year typically sees hundreds, including children, compete to kill wild pigs, deer and hares. Organisers of the North Canterbury Hunting Competition announced the cancellation of the cat event on Tuesday, saying they had received "vile and inappropriate emails".

"We are disappointed and apologise for those who were excited to be involved in something that is about protecting our native birds, and other vulnerable species," the group wrote on Facebook.

They also pointed out that anyone who participated in their hunts are required to abide by firearms and animal welfare laws.

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Taking Chinese threat very seriously: Taiwan warns of conflict with China in 2027

Relations between China and Taiwan soured after Nancy Pelosi's visit to the island in August last year. Recently, China's foreign minister Qin Gang said that both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to China and that "those who play with fire on Taiwan will eventually get themselves burned".

(News Agency)-Amid strained ties with China, Taiwan's foreign minister has expressed his concerns regarding the possibility of conflict with the Xi Jinping-led country in 2027.

According to US intelligence, China's leader, Xi Jinping, has ordered the country's military to be prepared to annex Taiwan by 2027 and Taiwan's Foreign Minister, Joseph Wu, has taken the Chinese military threat seriously. "We are taking the Chinese military threat very seriously. I think 2027 is the year that we need to be serious about," Joseph Wu said in an interview with LBC, reported by The Guardian.

Xi has previously emphasised that the Taiwan issue "cannot be passed on from generation to generation".

Wu also emphasised Taiwan's importance for the UK, as well as for the rest of the world, saying that "even though the UK is looking at China as an economic opportunity in the long run", an attack on Taiwan would affect the UK "in a very serious manner".

"Therefore, we need to look at a



comprehensive way for the UK, Taiwan and other countries to come together," he said. He also noted that the world is dependent on the semiconductors produced in Taiwan, which account for more than 90 per cent of the world's most advanced computer chips. "If there's any disruption to the supply chain or to the shipping lanes, I think it's going to have a serious impact on the rest of the world," Wu said.

Taiwan's foreign minister also compared China to Russia, saying that the world had failed to take Russia's aggressive posturing seriously in the past,

leading to the annexation of Crimea and the initiation of a war against Ukraine.

"We did not stop Russia from taking over Crimea. And the Russians were emboldened to go ahead and initiate a war against Ukraine. We did not stop China from imposing national security laws in Hong Kong. And people were asking: is Taiwan going to be next? Now Taiwan is feeling all this pressure," he said.

CHINA-TAIWAN TENSIONS

In recent months, tensions between China and its neighbour, Taiwan – a territory China considers its own – have escalated, especially

after Nancy Pelosi's visit to the island in August last year.

Recently, China's foreign minister Qin Gang said that both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to China, and that "those who play with fire on Taiwan will eventually get themselves burned". Meanwhile, China is continuing to respond aggressively to any comments made by foreign countries on the issue of Taiwan. On Sunday, China's vice minister of foreign affairs, Sun Weidong, lodged a formal complaint with South Korea's ambassador over what he called "erroneous" remarks by South Korean President Yoon

Suk Yeol about Taiwan.

In an interview, Yoon said he opposed changing the status quo of Taiwan by force, saying that the matter does not just affect China and Taiwan.

"The Taiwan issue is not simply an issue between China and Taiwan but, like the issue of North Korea, it is a global issue," he said.

Yoon's remarks were "totally unacceptable", Sun Weidong said, according to a statement issued by the Chinese foreign ministry.

"The South Korean leader made no mention of the one-China principle, but equated the Taiwan issue with the Korean peninsula issue," he continued.

China is also facing criticism in Europe after a Chinese envoy raised questions about the sovereignty of Baltic countries.

In an interview with French network TF1, China's ambassador to France, Lu Shaye, said former Soviet republics have no "effective status" in international law.

The remarks angered countries including Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, who have summoned their Chinese ambassadors.

Sudan crisis: Amid uneasy truce, foreign states race to evacuate their own

Foreign nations are racing to extract their citizens from violence-hit Sudan, where the battle between two rival generals has been paused for 72 hours thanks to a US-brokered ceasefire deal.

(News Agency)-Fighting in Sudan abated overnight after the army and a rival paramilitary force agreed to a 72-hour truce but a witness said gunfire could be heard on Tuesday while Arab, Asian and Western nations were racing to extract their citizens from the country.

The Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) said the US and Saudi Arabia mediated the ceasefire. US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken announced the agreement first and said it followed two days of intense negotiations. The two sides have not abided by several previous temporary truce deals. A power struggle erupted between the SAF and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) paramilitary group on April 15 and has killed at least



427 people, knocked out hospitals and other services, and turned residential areas into war zones.

"During this period, the United States urges the SAF and RSF to immediately and fully uphold the ceasefire," Blinken said in a statement. A Reuters witness said he heard gunfire from time to time in the city of Omdurman

adjacent to the capital after a period of relative calm overnight. The British government launched a large-scale evacuation of its nationals on military flights from an airfield north of Khartoum, open to those with British passports. We have started contacting nationals directly and providing routes for departure out of the country," Foreign Secretary James Cleverly

said on Twitter.

All Japanese people who wished to leave Sudan have been evacuated, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said on Tuesday.

The Swiss foreign minister said on Tuesday that Bern was monitoring opportunities to extract its remaining citizens but said it was having difficulty getting out people with dual nationality – the majority of the remaining Swiss in the country. Switzerland has already shut its embassy and evacuated the staff and their families, and they arrived in Bern early on Tuesday morning. Ahead of the evening truce announcement, air strikes and ground fighting shook Omdurman, one of three adjacent cities in the capital region, and there were also clashes in capital Khartoum, a

Reuters reporter said.

Dark smoke enveloped the sky near the international airport in central Khartoum, near the army headquarters, and booms of artillery fire rattled the surroundings.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that the violence in a country that flanks the Red Sea, Horn of Africa and Sahel regions "risks a catastrophic conflagration ... that could engulf the whole region and beyond".

Tens of thousands of people, including Sudanese and citizens from neighbouring countries, have fled in the past few days to Egypt, Chad and South Sudan, despite instability and difficult living conditions there. Foreign governments have been working to bring their nationals to safety.

Brexit red tape to send UK food prices soaring even higher

(News Agency)—A new system of border checks on goods arriving from Europe is expected to force rocketing U.K. food prices even higher as businesses grapple with hundreds of millions of pounds in extra fees.

British business groups last week got sight of the U.K. government's long-awaited post-Brexit border plans, via a series of consultations. One person in attendance said the proposals will "substantially increase food costs" for consumers from January.

That could spell trouble in a country which imports nearly 30 percent of all its food from the EU, according to 2020 figures from the British Retail Consortium, and where the annual rate of food and drink inflation just hit 19.2 percent — its highest level in 45 years.

Ministers have argued that the full implementation of the new post-Brexit procedures — which will eventually include full digitization of paperwork and a "trusted trader scheme" for major importers in order to reduce border checks — will more than offset these costs in the long-run as they will also be rolled out for imports coming from non-EU countries as well.



Supply-chain disruption caused by the Ukraine war, poor weather and new trade barriers due to Brexit have all been blamed for the U.K.'s surge in food prices. A member of a major British business group, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said that incoming post-Brexit red tape will mean "some producers on the EU side will find it is no longer possible to trade with the U.K." and that "some small businesses will find themselves shut out."

"It will add to the costs, and probably inflation, but I think we need to go through this so we can work with the EU to find advantageous improvements," they said.

"We can't keep running away from the fact we need to implement our own border

checks." "Not business as usual" Britain has delayed the implementation of full post-Brexit border checks multiple times, while the EU began its own more than two years ago.

The government's new "target operating model," published last month, will see the phased implementation of new border and customs checks for EU imports from October.

This will include a new fee that must be paid from January for all goods that are eligible for border checks, including items like chilled meat, dairy products and vegetables. Each batch of goods that could be subject to checks, even if they are ultimately not chosen by border staff for inspection, will be hit with a fee of between £23 to £43 at inland

ports.

The first business figure quoted above said the scale of the new fees came as a surprise, after firms had been previously assured by the government that these costs would be dependent on whether goods had actually been checked.

"[Former minister] Jacob Rees-Mogg said there would be minimal costs. Initially we thought it was business as usual, but it's not," they said. "There were people at this [consultation] saying that this is not a massive increase, but it will substantially increase food costs."

William Bain, trade expert at the British Chambers of Commerce, said there is a "strong prospect" of higher inflation due to the new Brexit checks.

"EU suppliers may be less willing to trade with British based companies, because of increased costs and paperwork. The costs of imported goods would almost certainly increase," he said.

But he added: "We knew this day was coming and that inbound controls on goods would be applied. It's a part of having a functional border and complying with the U.K.'s international commitments."

Reality check

The U.K. has seen trade flows with the EU disrupted since leaving the bloc's single market and customs union.

Recent analysis by the Financial Times found that Britain's goods exports are dropping at a faster rate than in any other G7 country.

Recent figures from the Office for National Statistics meanwhile show that U.K. trade in goods with EU countries fell at a much faster rate than from non-EU countries in January.

Conservative MP Tobias Ellwood told POLITICO that he fears his party will pay a price at the next general election, due to be held by January 2025, if the government does not seek better trading arrangements with the EU.

"There's certainly a revision across the nation when it comes to Brexit — people are realising that what we have today isn't what they imagined, whether you voted for Remain or for Brexit," he said.

"The reality check is that it has become tougher economically to do business with the Continent and quite rightly there's an expectation that we fix this."

'Good riddance': Pentagon officials cheer Tucker Carlson's ouster

The former Fox host ridiculed top DoD leaders over Biden-era policies.

(News Agency)—From maternity flight suits to diversity policies to Ukraine aid, the military was a favorite punching bag for Tucker Carlson. Now that he's off the air, some Pentagon officials are quietly cheering his departure.

Carlson's criticism of Biden-era personnel policies appealed to many of the rank-and-file, which has a large bloc of conservative members. But at the upper levels of the Defense Department, news of Carlson's firing from Fox News on Monday was met with delight and outright glee in some corners. "We're a better country without him bagging on our military every night in front of hundreds of thousands of people," said one senior DoD official, who like others interviewed for this story was granted anonymity to discuss a politically sensitive topic.

"Good riddance," said a second DoD official.

Asked to respond to the news that DoD officials are pleased by his departure from Fox, Carlson responded by text message: "Ha! I'm sure." He declined to comment further.

The tension between the former cable host and Pentagon leadership isn't new. Carlson drew the ire of top DoD officials early in the Biden administration for personal attacks on a number of military leaders, as well as ridiculing the armed forces' efforts to increase diversity. A slew of conservative leaders quickly followed Carlson's lead, giving rise to a small but vocal minority that to this day continues to hammer DoD officials, saying they're focusing personnel policies at the expense of preparing for war. The Pentagon says only a small percentage of troops' time is spent on diversity training.

Most memorably, Carlson's

remarks disparaging female service members in March 2021 prompted a rare rebuke from then-Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby.

After President Joe Biden announced new efforts to recruit and keep women in the service — including designing new body armor, updating requirements for hairstyles and the nominations of two female generals to become combatant commanders — at a White House ceremony, Carlson accused the commander in chief of making a "mockery" of the troops. "So, we've got new hairstyles and maternity flight suits. Pregnant women are going to fight our wars. It's a mockery of the U.S. military," he said. In response, Kirby took a rare swipe at the Fox News host.

"What we absolutely won't do is take personnel advice from a talk show host or the Chinese



military," Kirby said during a briefing with reporters, adding that Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin "shares the revulsion" of others who criticized Carlson's remarks. The comments yielded another rarity: The Pentagon's in-house news service published an article focused entirely on the dust-up: "Press Secretary Smites Host That Dissed Diversity in U.S. Military." Kirby, who is now the top spokesperson for the National Security Council at the White

House, declined to comment for this story. The Fox News host targeted the Air Force in particular, calling Lt. Gen. Brad Webb, then-commander of Air Education and Training Command, a "doughy moron" for updating pilot tests to address systemic racism. He also mocked Maj. Gen. Ed Thomas, head of the Air Force's recruiting office, for arguing that the service's pilot force needs to become more diverse.

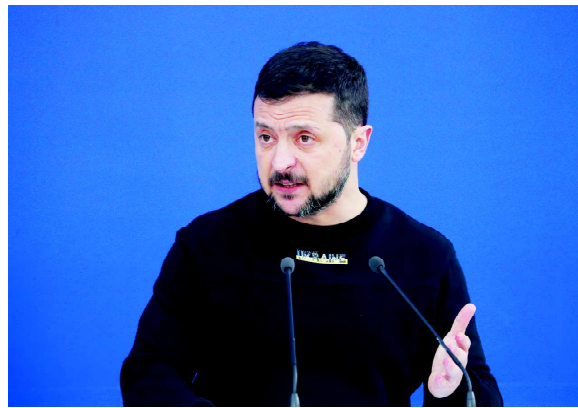
Xi tells Zelenskyy: China won't add 'fuel to the fire' in Ukraine

In first phone call between the leaders since Vladimir Putin launched his full-scale invasion, China's president says 'now' is the time to resolve the crisis.

(News Agency)-Chinese leader Xi Jinping on Wednesday reassured President Volodymyr Zelenskyy that Beijing would not add "fuel to the fire" of the war in Ukraine and insisted the time was ripe to "resolve the crisis politically."

While Xi's remarks — as reported by the state's Xinhua news agency — made no specific reference to international fears that China could send arms to Russia's invading forces in Ukraine, his words will be read as a signal that Beijing won't give direct military assistance to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Xi was making his first call to Zelenskyy more than 400 days into the Russian war against Ukraine, and he suggested that Kyiv should pursue "political resolution" through dialogue — presumably with Russia — to bring peace to Europe. Wednesday's call, which according to Ukrainian officials lasted an hour, could ease tension between China and the West over



Beijing's precarious position which has been largely in favor of Putin, analysts and diplomats say. But they also caution that this would not change Xi's fundamental vision of a stronger relationship with Russia to fend off U.S. pressure, calling into question Beijing's ability to broker peace satisfactory to both sides.

In Zelenskyy's own words, the call with Xi served as a "powerful impetus" for their bilateral relationship.

"I had a long and meaningful

phone call with [Chinese] President Xi Jinping," Zelenskyy tweeted. "I believe that this call, as well as the appointment of Ukraine's ambassador to China, will give a powerful impetus to the development of our bilateral relations."

In a fuller statement, Zelenskyy said that during the call "particular attention was paid to the ways of possible cooperation to establish a just and sustainable peace for Ukraine."

"There can be no peace at the expense of territorial

compromises," Zelenskyy added. "The territorial integrity of Ukraine must be restored within the 1991 borders." "No one wants peace more than the Ukrainian people. We are on our land and fighting for our future, exercising our inalienable right to self-defense. Peace must be just and sustainable, based on the principles of international law and respect for the U.N. Charter," he said.

Xi, for his part, used the call to reject the West's criticisms of China amid worries that Beijing was preparing to provide Moscow with weapons.

"China is neither the creator nor a party to the Ukraine crisis," he said, as reported by state media Xinhua. "As a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council and a responsible great power, we would not watch idly by, we would not add fuel to the fire, and above all we would not profiteer from this."

The call came just days after China's Ambassador to France Lu Shaye made an

explosive remark during a TV interview saying former Soviet countries have no "effective status" in international law and disputed Ukraine's sovereignty over Crimea, causing an international uproar and forcing Beijing to disavow him in an effort to mend ties with Europe. Old splits, new bridges. One major difference, though, existed between the two.

Zelenskyy has been clear about the need for resistance to continue as Putin has shown no signs of easing the Kremlin's military aggression, insisting that negotiations would not be possible while parts of Ukraine remain under Russian occupation. Xi, however, said now would be the time for all sides to talk.

"Now [is the moment] to grasp the opportunity to resolve the crisis politically," he said. "It's hoped that all sides could make profound reflection from the Ukraine crisis, and jointly seek a way toward long-lasting peace in Europe through dialogue."

Prince Harry and Meghan Markle 'forgiven' by King Charles?



(News Agency)-A royal insider claimed that King Charles continues to keep photos of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle in his house, suggesting that the monarch has "forgiven" his youngest son and is happy to let him and Meghan continue their life in California. Gyles Brandreth said that despite Prince Harry's distance from the rest of the royal family and his bombshell memoir, King Charles is still

"delighted" that Prince Harry will attend the coronation ceremony. In his memoir, Spare, Prince Harry criticised his father, older brother Prince William and Queen Consort Camilla.

Speaking to Page Six, Gyles Brandreth said, "I'm lucky enough to go to Clarence House for events to do with charities and things. I'm a trustee of something called The Queen's Reading Room, which is a real

passion project of the new Queen.

"There are pictures of Harry and Meghan on the piano [and] on the mantelpiece, Gyles Brandreth added saying that the monarch and Queen Consort are too busy with their lives to dwell on "rumours" of a "feud". "I don't think they [Charles and Queen Camilla] are obsessing about it they are just getting on with it," Gyles Brandreth said, adding,

"He announced that William was going to be the Prince of Wales. He sort of made the situation clear and wished Harry and Meghan love and well as they build their life overseas." Prince Harry will be reunited with the royal family at the coronation on May 6, although his visit is expected to be a fleeting one. Meanwhile, Meghan Markle and their children Prince Archie and Princess Lilibet will not be attending the ceremony.

Iran 'secret way' to target celebrities amid anti-hijab protests revealed

(News Agency)- Iranian authorities formed a 'secret' committee last year in order to keep a tab on celebrities who supported the massive anti-hijab protests which erupted following

Iran after the death of 22-year-old Kurdish-Iranian Mahsa Amini who was detained by the controversial morality police over her 'inappropriate' attire- not wearing her hijab properly.



Mahsa Amini's custodial death then led to huge protests that lasted for months in which hundreds of protesters lost their lives. BBC said that the people on the Iranian regime's radar included sporting legend Ali Daei and top actress

Mahsa Amini's death, BBC reported citing leaked documents. In a letter dated September 22 last year, the committee sent a list of 141 well-known figures to the economy ministry. The letter asked them to investigate their tax returns, marking a well coordinated action against the celebrities who participated in the nationwide protests.

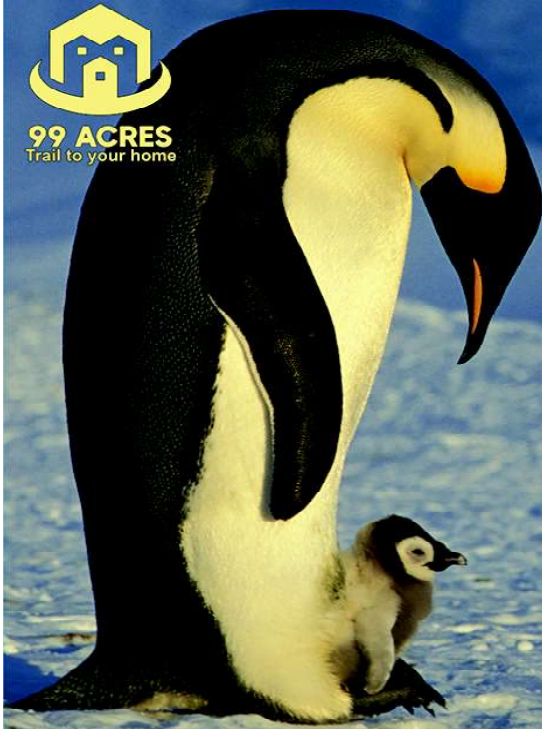
Demonstrations began across

Taraneh Alidoosti. Earlier this month, Iranian police said that they would begin using "smart" technology in public places to crackdown on women defying county's strict dress code. Iran also charged two prominent actresses- Katayoun Riahi and Pantea Bahram- for publishing pictures of themselves without a hijab, weeks after announcing a crackdown on breaches, local media reported.

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'I'll Burn You Alive'

Disputes within the Iranian diaspora are getting uglier- and complicating U.S. foreign policy as the regime gets closer and closer to having a nuclear bomb.

the regime's brutal response and how the United States should handle the events.

Three of the participants — Hakimi included — appeared in a photo with the secretary, which he posted on Twitter. "We continue to find ways to respond to the Iranian government's state-sponsored violence against women," Blinken wrote. "Today, I met with civil society partners to discuss what more the U.S. can do."

Hakimi didn't think too much about the photo. She is founder and executive director of a non-profit that promotes gender equality around the world. She supported the Iranian nuclear deal in 2015 and led roundtables with Mohammad Zarif, Iran's then-foreign minister, during and after the negotiations. But Hakimi generally eschews the spotlight. She has a modest social media presence and does not receive much publicity.

Yet in the hours after the Blinken photo appeared, that changed. "Why the FUCK," one tweet asked, was Hakimi at the meeting? The account went on to call her an agent "of the Mullahs and Butcher regime." Other posts referred to her as an apologist for the Iranian government. She found the comments upsetting — and baffling. She was born in the United States and hadn't been in Iran since 2006, when government officials threatened to arrest her for delivering a talk on sexually transmitted diseases. There is no love lost between her and

the regime. Hakimi went to bed that night hoping the attacks would subside. Instead, they got worse. The next day, Kaveh Shahrooz, a Canadian lawyer and think tank fellow with more than 30,000 followers, posted a 2015 video of Hakimi speaking excitedly about taking a photo with Zarif. Shahrooz tweeted the photo and said that she lobbied for the regime. His accusations gained traction: Over the course of just two days, she was mentioned on Twitter nearly 35,000 times. Many of those posts called Hakimi an Islamic Republic supporter. Others said she was a regime puppet. One suggested that Hakimi had her hands "up Zarif's ass."

Twitter was tame compared to Instagram, where she was inundated with violent messages, almost all in Persian. Some threatened to rape her. Others threatened to kill her. "I'll find you and I'll burn you alive," one declared. Some of the people who messaged her said they knew where she lived.

Hakimi didn't sleep at home for the next week. She had security systems installed in her apartment. She downloaded the "DeleteMe" app to help get her personal information offline. She laid low. But the threats kept coming. People began trolling her nonprofit.

"It was a wild time," Hakimi told me. "People have tried to take me out, essentially, as an organizer." For Iranians, the last seven months have been extraordinary

ily turbulent. Since last September, when Mahsa Amini — a 22-year-old Iranian-Kurdish woman — died in police custody after being arrested for "improperly" wearing her hijab, people across Iran have taken to the streets to protest the regime. They have been staunchly supported by the diaspora, which has held demonstrations around the world in solidarity.

But the government's horrifying suppression of the protests has stirred up the diaspora's emotions, and many Iranian expats have been smeared, harassed and threatened by their angry peers. The attacks overwhelmingly target women, most notably in North America and Europe. The victims include gender equality activists, journalists, foreign policy analysts and a historian, each of whom has been accused of colluding with the authoritarian Islamist regime in Tehran.

It is unclear who many of the assailants are, because many of the attacks are anonymous, often using social media accounts without clear provenance. Some of the harassment may be orchestrated by institutions, rather than actual people. But there are plenty of humans launching the attacks, too. Some are well-known figures in the Iranian expat community, others are less-known, but all of them are hardliners with a commitment to aggressively isolating Iran. As for their targets, what they share is a history of either supporting Western-Iranian diplomacy or re-



porting information that adds subtly to the debate over how the United States and its allies should handle the Islamic Republic.

"They are trying to claim that anyone who brings nuance or a degree of complexity into the conversation is a regime apologist," said Sanam Naraghi-Anderlini, the founder of a feminist organization that works with women-led peace initiatives in conflict-ridden countries.

The debate around Iran has assumed newfound urgency. Since former President Donald Trump walked away from the Iran nuclear deal in 2018, Tehran has worked hard to bring itself within striking distance of obtaining a nuclear weapon, and today, it is closer than it has ever been. A senior U.S. official estimated that Iran can now produce a bomb's worth of fissile material in roughly 12 days. Gen. Mark Milley, the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has told Congress that Iran would need only a few months to build a working weapon.

President Joe Biden, like his predecessors, has pledged to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. It is an issue that he must contend with alongside Tehran's arms sales to Russia,

its support for regional militias, its attacks on U.S. troops in Iraq, and, of course, its domestic repression. Individually, each of these problems is hard to address. Collectively, they pose an extraordinary challenge, and one that Biden is struggling to solve. It is no surprise, then, that plenty of diplomacy proponents and opponents alike agree that addressing Iran will require great creativity, especially from the diaspora. The United States and Europe's leading Iran hands are often of Iranian origin, making them more vulnerable to harassment. And the threats and harassment appear to be hitting their mark: At arguably the most critical juncture in relations with Iran since the two countries agreed to the nuclear deal in 2015, many pro-diplomacy analysts have shut up.

"The goal of this campaign is to intimidate and silence people," said Ali Vaez, the Iran project director for the pro-diplomacy International Crisis Group. He expressed deep concern that Iran will become much more dangerous if experts and observers cannot openly discuss and figure out a new policy for the country. "There is literally a ticking bomb," Vaez said.



Indian Navy to acquire more American, Russian missile systems

A proposal worth over Rs 1,400 crore is under consideration by the government and is expected to be cleared soon for acquisition.



Seeking to strengthen its fire power in the maritime zone, the Indian Navy is all set to acquire American harpoon missiles along with the Klub missiles from Russia. A proposal worth over Rs 1,400 crore is under consideration by the government and is expected to be cleared soon for acquisition, government sources told India Today.

The proposal includes acquisition of around 20 Klub missiles and harpoon missile systems from the American government, they said. It's an all-weather, over-the-horizon, anti-ship missile system. It has a low-level, sea-skimming

cruise trajectory with active radar guidance, according to Boeing, its manufacturer. As part of Harpoon missile system acquisition, India will receive one Harpoon Joint Common Test Set, a maintenance station, spare and repair parts, support, and test equipment, publications and technical documentation and personnel training. Also included are support services from the US government and the contractor. The Klub missiles from Russia are equipped on both the surface warships and submarines of the Indian Navy and have been in use for many decades now.

India fourth biggest military spender, but China way ahead at No. 2

A belligerent China and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict have pushed total global defence expenditure to record levels in 2022, jumping by 3.7 per cent to reach an unprecedented high of \$ 2,240 billion, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute said in a new report.

With an arms budget of \$81.4 billion, India retains its place as one of the world's top five military spenders. The United States leads the pack with an expenditure of \$877 billion, and China a distant second place with \$292 billion. Russia is in third place with a defence budget of \$86.4 billion — less than a tenth of arch rival the United States. Riyadh rounds out the top five with \$75 billion in spending.

Incidentally, the three largest spenders in 2022 — the US, China and Russia — accounted for 56 per cent of the world's military spending. Moreover, at a time of heightened tensions at the Himalayan border, Beijing's expenditure was three and half times higher than that of New Delhi's.

"India raised its defence spending by 6 per cent from 2021 and 47 per cent from 2013 consequent to the border tensions with China and Pakistan. Its expenditure on capital outlays that funds equipment upgrades for



the armed forces and to the military infrastructure along its disputed border with China, amounted to 23 per cent of total military spending in 2022," the report stated.

On the other hand, China has boosted its military expenditure for 28 consecutive years. The one-party nation's defence budget has surged 63 per cent since 2013 and the outlay in 2022 being 4.2 per cent more than in 2021.

WHY IS INDIA'S DEFENCE SPENDING ON THE RISE?

India has been raising its military spending year-on-year as it focuses on three objectives —

modernising the tri-services, bolstering troops deployed along the borders with Pakistan and China, and shoring up domestic defence manufacturing.

This year, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman allocated Rs 1.63 trillion for defence capital outlays — an expenditure that would include new weapons, aircraft, warships and other military hardware, as she unveiled nearly \$550 billion of total federal spending in the annual budget for 2023-24 starting in April.

With the government's 'atmanirbhar' push, defence production has also started picking up in the country. India now has

an impressive stockpile of indigenously made, lethal ballistic missiles that act as deterrence.

PRALAY MISSILE

A core component of India's "rocket force", Pralay is the country's first tactical quasi-ballistic missile with a range of 150-500 kilometres. It can carry conventional warheads weighing 500-1,000 kg.

AGNI-V MISSILE

Agni-V is an ingeniously built advanced surface-to-surface ICBM that can strike targets half a world away with a very high degree of accuracy. It is capable of delivering a 1.5 tonne nuclear warhead.

BARAK-8

Used in naval point and area defence, Barak-8 is all weather missile system which can engage sea skimming to high altitude targets up to a distance of 150 km. It can intercept aircraft, low-flying anti-ship and cruise missiles, and stealthy targets.

BRAHMOS CRUISE MISSILE

An Indo-Russian venture, the Brahmos cruise missile packs a supersonic punch. With a proven range of up to 280 km, which was further enhanced to 450 km during recent tests, BrahMos missiles can reach speeds of up to Mach 3 and take out deep underground bunkers of the enemy.

VL-SRSAM

Developed by the DRDO, the VL-SRSAM is a surface to air missile that can be used to target an enemy ship or missile flying at low altitude in a range of 25-30 km. It flies at Mach 4 speeds, twice that of the Barak-8 missile.

PINAKA ROCKET LAUNCHER

Named after the bow of Lord Shiva, the Pinaka rocket system fires 12 projectiles in 44 seconds. Its range is 7 to 90 kilometres. High Explosive Fragmentation (HMX), cluster bombs, anti-personnel, anti-tank and landmine weapons can be installed on top of the Pinaka rocket.

Bill Gates says AI chatbots will have human-like teaching capabilities in future

OpenAI's ChatGPT proved to be a ground-breaking tool that is being used widely across the world today. The AI chatbot was first introduced to us in November 2022 and has come a long way since then. After OpenAI launched ChatGPT, Google also came up with its own AI chatbot, Bard, in February this year. On the other hand, Microsoft, that had entered into a partnership with OpenAI long back, also launched the new Bing with an inbuilt AI chatbot.

While ChatGPT and Bing are available for all to use, Bard can be accessed by a few users in the US and UK as of now since it is in its initial stages. However, Google is working towards improving Bard and CEO Sundar Pichai had promised a better performance from the chatbot in future.

As the popularity of AI chatbots like Bing, Bard, and ChatGPT is growing each day, many tech experts have continuously warned against the dangers of AI. However, Microsoft co-

founder Bill Gates is pretty confident that there is nothing to worry about.

Gates, in a detailed blog post in March, had explained how AI does carry its risks, but will ultimately be beneficial for human beings and its limitations 'will be gone before we know it'. And now, while speaking at the ASU+GSV Summit on Tuesday, Bill Gates said that AI chatbots will have the capability of helping in teaching students in the future. Not only this, the billionaire also feels that the AI chatbots will prove to be 'as good as human tutors'.

"The AI's will get to that ability, to be as good a tutor as any human ever could," he said.

The Microsoft co-founder said that AI can help teach kids to read in less than 18 months. He also added that AI chatbots are incredibly 'fluent at being able to read and write' and will help in teaching students to improve their reading and writing in novel ways.

"At first, we'll be most stunned by how it helps with reading — being a reading research assistant — and giving you feedback on writing," Gates said and added, "If you just took the next 18 months, the AIs will come in as a teacher's aide and give feedback on writing. And then they will amp up what we're able to do in math."

Gates' blog on AI

As mentioned earlier, Gates had written a detailed blog post last month about how ChatGPT is the most 'revolutionary tech' in decades even though it carries certain risks.


Gates listed some uses of AI which will be of huge help to the human race. Some of these uses were AI reducing 'world's worst inequities', bringing change in the education sector and transforming the way children learn, helping improve the health sector, enhancing employees' productivity at workplaces, and so on. Gates also wrote about the possible risks of AI and added that there exists a possi-

bility of AI going rogue and deciding that human beings are the threat. However, such concerns are 'no more urgent today than they were before the AI developments of the past few months'.

He added, "These 'strong' AIs, as they're known, will probably be able to establish their own goals. What will those goals be? What happens if they conflict with humanity's interests? Should we try to prevent strong AI from ever being developed? These questions will get more pressing with time. But none of the breakthroughs of the past few months have moved us substantially closer to strong AI. Artificial intelligence still doesn't control the physical world and can't establish its own goals."

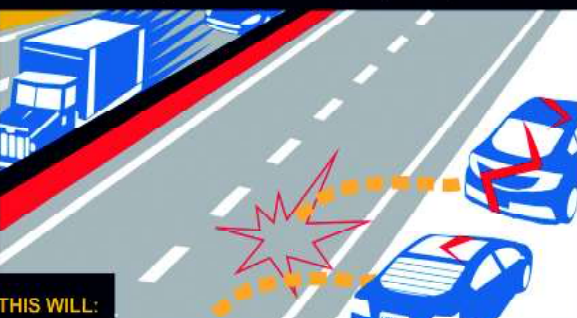
Concluding the blog, Gates wrote that despite the risks, AI will be dominating the public discussion for a 'foreseeable future' and that we need to balance our fears about downside of AI since it has just begun to emerge.

IF YOU'VE BEEN IN A COLLISION
OR YOUR VEHICLE BECOMES DISABLED ON THE HIGHWAY:




- Activate your vehicle's four-way yellow flashers
- Pull over to the side of the road
- Consider moving your vehicle off the highway entirely

THIS WILL:




- Protect you from oncoming traffic
- Allow safer passage for other motorists
- Provide easier access to emergency responders

BE SAFE.
NEVER
CROSS OR WALK
ON HIGH SPEED ROADWAYS.



WALKING ON NYC HIGHWAYS, EXPRESSWAYS OR PARKWAYS IS DEADLY AND AGAINST THE LAW.



Filling the loopholes: How drug networks evade port security around world and what can be done to fix

One of the key findings of the report is that only 74% of governments provided their statistical forms on time, while 22% of countries and territories failed to submit their reports for 2021 by the June 30, 2022 deadline. Accurate and complete data is critical for monitoring drug control efforts and identifying weaknesses in control systems.

Therefore, the INCB is concerned about the lack of timely reporting. Law enforcement agencies have investigated and found that large criminal networks in India are actively involved in facilitating the transportation of drugs through various means, including ports and other transport channels. These criminal organizations allegedly use their extensive networks to smuggle drugs into the country from other countries and then distribute them through a complex network of dealers and distributors.

The INCB report highlights the significant role played by these criminal entities in the global drug trade, particularly in the trafficking of heroin and other opioids.

The amount of illegal drugs seized in 2021 has significantly increased compared to 2017. Specifically, 2,146 kg of narcotics were seized in 2017, whereas 7,282 kg were seized in 2021 as per the report. In addition, there has been a surge of more than 70 per cent in the seizure of opium. The amount of opium seized was 2,551 kg in 2017, which has increased to 4,386 kg in 2021. There has also been an increase of over 90 per cent in the seizure of cannabis. In 2017, 3,52,539 kg of cannabis was seized, whereas, in 2021, the amount increased to 6,75,631 kg.

As for cocaine, the amount seized in 2021 was 364 kg. This is a significant increase compared to the average of around 40 kg seized in the past three years. Moreover, in 2021, a staggering 300 kg of cocaine was found in one container.

The Indian Context

Recently multiple allegations have been imposed on India alleging that it is a major producer and consumer of drugs and making it a target for drug trafficking organizations. The country has several ports that are vulnerable to drug infiltration, such as Kochi, Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata. Criminal networks use various methods to smuggle drugs through these ports, including concealment in containers, using fishing boats, and even air transport. Be-

tween July and October 2021, Indian authorities seized heroin weighing 294 kg and 25 kg respectively from Mumbai/Nhava Sheva Port. The heroin was concealed in goods declared as talcum powder and vegetable oils. On 06 July 2021, the Coast Guard also seized 19 packets of drugs, suspected to be Cannabis, that had been dumped at sea off Kutch, Gujarat.

The largest reported drug haul in India in September 2021, authorities detained two containers arriving from Kandahar, Afghanistan, via Bandar Abbas, Iran, at Mundra Port, Gujarat. After examination, 3,004 kg of heroin was seized from the lower layers of jumbo-sized bags containing unprocessed talc powder. On October 2, 2021, the NCB seized drugs from a cruise ship in an undercover operation off the west coast between Mumbai and Goa.

The above drug cases highlighted the scale of drug trafficking operations in Indian ports and the challenges faced by law enforcement agencies to detect and intercept illicit drugs highlighted by the press information bureau (PIB).

India Today's OSINT team spoke with IPS officer Harinarayan Chari Mishra, who has extensive experience in disrupting drug networks within the state and across the country. Mishra expressed his deep concern regarding the infiltration of illegal drugs in the country, he emphasized that "illegal drugs hamper the lives of young people, and drug trafficking is regarded as one of the most profitable illegal businesses in the world".

Mishra highlighted that "there's a need to target both the 'supply chain' and 'demand chains' to effectively combat illegal drug trade. Although police action often disrupts the supply chain, new criminals join the illegal business due to unchanging demand".

"Criminals and local handlers are facilitating drugs network that pushes new youth into the mire of drugs, and places like bars, and pubs are chosen by criminals. In these places, such gangs continuously 'target' the rich youths by assessing their purchasing power and taking them into this trap due to various temptations and pressures. Therefore, it is crucial to raise awareness among young people, conduct awareness campaigns in schools and colleges, and educate parents," Mishra adds. A few months ago, Mishra's team caught a large inter-state

gang in Indore that was involved in the illegal MDMA trade worth 70 crores. The operation exposed the names of 35 criminals from eight different states, he mentioned.

The Indian government has taken several steps to combat this growing threat, including increasing security measures at ports and other entry points, as well as increasing cooperation with international law enforcement agencies. However, given the complexity and scale of these criminal networks, the fight against drug trafficking in India remains a challenging and ongoing battle.

Mishra emphasizes that there should be better coordination among law enforcement agencies across different regions or countries. This can facilitate the sharing of intelligence and enable more effective targeting of criminal networks. He highlighted that recently an initiative has been taken in coordination with his team to "start a Narco

Helpline in Indore city, dedicated to cracking down on the illegal drug trade. To ensure the effectiveness of such helplines, informer identity is kept confidential. As a result, the police receive a large amount of information and consequently, the effectiveness of the action increases."

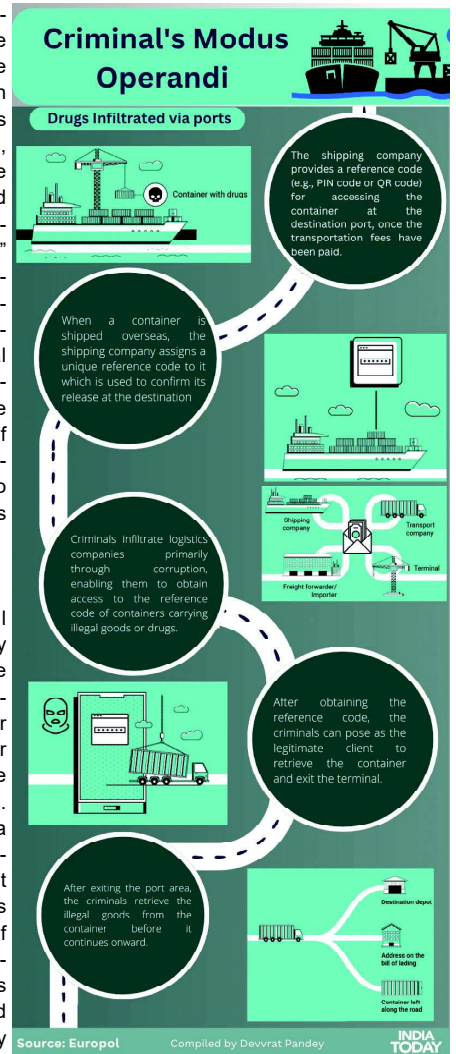
"There's a need for increased investment in technology to enhance the detection and interception of illegal activities in ports or local handlers networks. This can be achieved through the use of advanced scanning technologies and data analytics to identify and track suspicious activities", Mishra said.

Modus Operandi in Drug smuggling

Drug smugglers and criminal organizations traditionally rely on infiltrating a large number of accomplices to invade ports. However, newer methods that require fewer individuals to be grafted are becoming more popular. Smugglers have adopted a new modus operandi to infiltrate ports and extract illicit goods. One of the methods often practised is the use of misappropriated container reference codes, also known as PIN code fraud. This method involves the corruption of only

one individual, who then provides the code to the smugglers, allowing them to extract illegal goods from the port. In addition to PIN code fraud, drug smugglers also use other methods such as concealing drugs in legitimate shipments, creating deceitful compartments in containers, and using false documents to clear shipments. Criminal organizations have also relied on the corruption of a large number of abettors to infiltrate ports. However, new methods that require the infiltration of fewer individuals are becoming more popular.

According to Europol's investigative report, the EU's maritime ports handle approximately 90 million containers annually, but only 2 to 10 per cent of them can be inspected by authorities. Additionally, in the last few years, at least 200 tonnes of cocaine have been trafficked through the ports of Antwerp and Rotterdam alone, claims the report.



Biden's Running. Which Republican Has the Best Chance of Beating Him?

Dissecting the strengths and weaknesses of the GOP contenders.

As President Joe Biden kicks off his reelection bid, he begins from a position of weakness: The president has been underwater in the polls for close to two years. His approval ratings dropped under 50 percent around the time of the chaotic Afghanistan pullout in August 2021, and never truly recovered. Only three post-war presidents — Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump — were in a worse polling spot at this point in their reelection campaigns. And two of those three lost. Yet Biden won't be easy pickings for the GOP. Over the past 75 years, only two Democrats won a higher percentage of the popular vote than Biden — Barack Obama in 2008 and Lyndon Johnson in 1964. And Biden carries the formidable advantages of incumbency, along with a largely united party behind him. As the 2024 campaign begins in earnest, the pandemic is effectively over, the economy is showing resilience and the GOP faces the prospect of a demolition-derby primary.

Perhaps most importantly, Biden proved in 2020 that not only could he rebuild the so-called Blue Wall (Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin), he could snag increasingly purple Arizona and Georgia. So which Republican contender is best positioned to take on Biden and win back those swing states? Here's a clear-eyed look at their strengths and weaknesses.

Former President Donald Trump

Twice impeached, once indicted, the only president since the advent of polling whose approval ratings never cracked 50 percent, Trump doesn't exactly cut the profile of a model challenger. Even in his two presidential runs, his high-water mark in the popular vote was just under 47 percent. But in 2016, he showed there was a path to an Electoral College win nonetheless.

In a rematch with Biden, Trump would likely be better politically positioned than many of his GOP rivals on issues like entitlement reform and abortion, where he's tacked a bit more to the center. Still, there is the matter of the five states that Biden flipped in 2020. Trump wouldn't need to win all of them back to recapture the White House but he would likely need at least three of those states — and none of them is a slam dunk.

That's not because of Biden's strengths, but Trump's flaws. There are clear signs of a more professionalized Trump campaign operation than in the past. But Trump is still Trump (see, for example, his Easter message on the holiest day on the Christian calendar). The swing states that will decide the 2024 election are among those that have been the most destabilized by Trump's polarizing politics, either because of his conflicts with the state parties or the forces unleashed by his baseless claims of election fraud. Take Georgia: The 2022 Republican primary there represented a massive repu-

diation of the former president; the cherry on top came in the December Senate runoff, when Trump's handpicked nominee Herschel Walker was defeated. In Arizona, ground zero for election denialism, the Trump-endorsed statewide candidates crashed and burned in November. Biden was no asset to Democrats in 2022, but Trump was equally damaging. While 38 percent of Arizona voters said they cast their votes to oppose Biden, according to exit polls, 35 percent said their votes were to oppose Trump.

The Blue Wall that Trump cracked in 2016 is equally daunting. Democrats are now in ascendance in Michigan and Pennsylvania — which have moved in tandem in presidential elections for close to 40 years — in no small part due to a backlash against Trump in their most populous suburbs. Short of a massive rural turnout in those states, or a black swan event, Biden has a decided edge against Trump in both places.

In Wisconsin, the closest of the three states in 2020, a mere 20,000 votes separated Biden and Trump. But the trendlines for the GOP aren't promising there either. In both 2016 and 2020, Trump ran behind traditional Republican margins in the conservative suburbs of Milwaukee that are essential to GOP chances. Worse, the Trump era has seen the rise of liberal Dane County as an electoral powerhouse — witness the recent state Supreme Court election — and a Trump-led GOP ticket is guaranteed to generate another monster turnout there.

Ron DeSantis

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis

In the view of many Republican officials, DeSantis is Trump without the baggage and drama. If he runs, they envision a conservative big-state governor, fresh off a landslide reelection, prosecuting a vigorous case against an enfeebled Biden — an incumbent who's nearly twice his age. It's true that DeSantis might staunch the bleeding in traditionally Republican suburbs, particularly across the Sun Belt, while maintaining the other elements of the MAGA coalition. Just as important, his robust performance among all Latino groups in Florida in his 2022 reelection caught both parties' attention — he outpaced even Trump's 2020 Latino gains. But the governor's recent stumbles have raised real questions about how he'd fare on the national stage under the relentless pressures of a presidential election — where there is no place for the press-averse DeSantis to hide from the media. And the disciplined approach and sharp political instincts that enabled his rapid rise on the national scene haven't been sufficient to shield him from Trump's assault. If he does emerge from a smashmouth primary against Trump — and with Trump, there is no other kind — DeSantis will enter the general election against Biden with deep scars to show

for it. In presidential elections, governors typically face questions about their lack of foreign policy experience, and DeSantis' description of Russia's war in Ukraine as a "territorial dispute" — which he later walked back amid bipartisan criticism — will only bolster the case for Biden as an experienced hand.

Mike Pence

Former Vice President Mike Pence

Biden proved that former vice presidents can sit on the sidelines for four years and still return to win the presidency. But Pence is no ordinary vice president. For one thing, his boss expressed support for hanging him amid the Jan. 6 riot. That strained relationship with Trump has made Pence, who said Sunday he'll announce his 2024 presidential decision "well before" late June, a longshot to win the nomination. The best case for Pence in a general election is that he is a Reagan conservative whose loyal service to Trump could bridge the gap between traditional Republicans and the MAGA wing of the party. As a former Midwestern governor, he's positioned to compete in the industrial swing states that flipped to Biden in 2020. Georgia's 16 electoral votes would also seem to be in reach for Pence, given the architecture of Republican Gov. Brian Kemp's successful 2022 reelection campaign.

The flip side is that some corners of the MAGA movement might never forgive Pence's refusal to bend to Trump's pressure to block certification of the 2020 Electoral College votes. And Pence's vote-winning appeal on his own remains uncertain. Despite his estrangement from Trump — and a suburban dad image — he can't easily sidestep his affiliation with Trump's slash-and-burn politics. Pence ran statewide just once — in 2012 in Indiana, a red state where he ran well behind Mitt Romney's pace that year. He was no shoo-in for reelection in 2016 before Trump plucked him to join his presidential ticket.

Nikki Haley

Former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley

The daughter of Indian immigrants, Haley would be a historic nominee — the first woman and the first person of color to lead the GOP ticket. That status, along with her age — she's roughly 30 years younger than Biden — would make for a stark contrast on the campaign trail. Haley, who announced her bid in February, also offers the prospect of shrinking the gender gap in the general election — which was a yawning 57-42 in 2020. Exit polls from her 2014 reelection also showed Haley ran strong in the suburbs and with independents, two additional groups Trump lost in 2020. But establishing her independence from Trump won't be easy. She's frequently been critical of the former president, including in 2016 when she decried "the siren call of the

angriest voices." But she also went to work for Trump as his ambassador to the U.N. and has spent the last few years praising his agenda — positions that could limit her appeal with voters looking for a clean break from Trump.

Tim Scott

South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott

Scott's formidable political skills have been on display since then-Gov. Nikki Haley appointed him to the Senate in 2013. Within a year, he had outperformed both Haley and senior Sen. Lindsey Graham on the ballot. In 2016, he ran ahead of Donald Trump in South Carolina by more than 86,000 votes. In his three Senate campaigns, however, Scott has never faced serious Democratic opposition or intense media scrutiny. It showed on his second day of campaigning after announcing a presidential exploratory committee, when he stumbled badly on the question of whether he'd back federal abortion restrictions.

And any expectation that Scott, who would be the GOP's first Black presidential nominee, could carve out some of Biden's considerable support among Black voters must be tempered by Scott's actual performance. While the senator has improved his percentages over the past decade, he regularly loses the majority of the state's nine majority Black counties.

Other Candidates

Several candidates making the early state rounds — among them, Vivek Ramaswamy and Perry Johnson — don't have an electoral record to assess. But former two-term Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson and current New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu have met with success at the ballot box, not to mention some of the highest approval ratings in the nation. As popular, traditional conservatives who have been lonely Trump critics within the party, they'd likely be well positioned to compete across the map in a general election — but the GOP base doesn't show much appetite for nominating a Trump critic.

Former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, a one-time Trump ally who has become a sharp critic, faces the same predicament. He's the rare conservative who's won statewide in a blue state and his successful stint as chairperson of the Republican Governors Association gives him familiarity with the demands of running competitively across the national map. But an experience during his failed 2016 presidential campaign captured both the promise and the flaws of a potential candidacy. In winning the coveted endorsement from the New Hampshire Union-Leader, a prominent voice in the early state's primary, publisher Joseph McQuaid described Christie as "a solid, pro-life conservative" who managed to win and govern in a liberal state.

Tracking Operation Kaveri

India's massive rescue op for stranded citizens in Sudan



As Operation Kaveri led by INS Sumedha gets underway from Port Sudan to Jeddah in Saudi Arabia, India Today uses satellite imagery and open-source tools to map its journey that is bringing back citizens stranded in the violence-hit region.

After the unfolding of the Sudan crisis, India has begun 'Operation Kaveri' – a rescue operation by the Indian Navy and Indian Air Force (IAF) to rescue hundreds of citizens stranded in the region. India Today's Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) team maps the massive rescue operation as our indigenous-built navy ship INS Sumedha evacuates Indian citizens from crisis-hit Sudan. Monitoring of the vessel's voyage confirms that INS Sumedha departed from Port Sudan at 14:30 India time on Tuesday as it headed towards Jeddah port in Saudi Arabia. The government confirmed that the first batch of 278 people was successfully rescued during this voyage. The mission is aimed at rescuing Indian nationals who are currently stranded in Sudan amidst a clash between two regional entities, the para-military force Rapid Support Force and the Sudanese military. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in a statement, "The government is closely monitoring the complex and evolving security situation in Sudan and is coordinating with various partners for the safe movement of Indians who wish to be evacuated." The Indian Embassy in Sudan

said they are not only in touch with the Sudanese authorities but also with the UN, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt, and the US, among others. "The Indian officials in Sudan are in regular touch with the stranded Indians and advise them on the viability of safe movement and the need to avoid unnecessary risks," the MEA stated, confirming that the two Indian Air Force C-130J aircraft are currently positioned on standby in Jeddah airport while INS Sumedha has reached Port Sudan. However, any movement on the ground would depend on the security situation, which continues to be volatile, with reports of fierce fighting at various locations in Khartoum.

TRACKING OPERATION KAVERI

India Today's OSINT team has conducted a detailed investigation into maritime intelligence gathering and discovered that INS Sumedha had been anchored at 'Port Said', Egypt between April 13 and 17. When clashes broke out between the Rapid Support Force (RSF) and the Sudanese military on April 15, 2023, the Indian authorities sent INS Sumedha to Port Sudan. Due to its proximity, INS Sumedha appeared to be in a position to provide immediate assistance to the stranded Indians in Sudan. While monitoring the

trajectory and recent port calls, it was found that INS Sumedha arrived at Port Sudan on April 23. Preliminary satellite imagery from the European Space Agency over the port shows the possible location of the Indian rescue ship.

In a tweet on Monday evening, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar announced the launch of Operation Kaveri to rescue Indian citizens stranded in Sudan. He stated that around 500 Indians had already reached Port Sudan, and more were on their way. He also mentioned that Indian ships and aircraft were ready to bring them back home.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) stated that due to the closure of Sudanese airspace for all foreign aircraft, and logistical challenges and risks associated with overland movement, it is likely that the two Indian Air Force (IAF) C-130J aircraft, which were on standby in Jeddah, would fly back to India along with the stranded Indians from Jeddah Airport.

ALL ABOUT INS SUMEDHA
The Indigenously built, INS Sumedha (P58) is the third Saryu-class patrol vessel of the Indian Navy. It is a stealth offshore patrol vessel constructed at Goa Shipyard Ltd and is fitted with a state-of-the-art weapon and sensor

package. According to the Indian Navy press release, INS Sumedha is routinely deployed for fleet support operations such as anti-piracy patrol, search and rescue (SAR), humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), surveillance, and escort missions. It can carry an Advanced Light Combat Helicopter onboard and is also involved in monitoring sea lines of communications and offshore assets, as well as escort duties. As per a recent press release by the Indian Navy, "INS Sumedha, presently deployed in the Mediterranean Sea, entered Algiers, Algeria on 26 March 2023 for an operational turnaround. The ship was received at Port Algiers by officers of the Algerian Navy and officials from the Embassy of India, Algiers." Examining the travel log and port calls, it was found that INS Sumedha had left Vishakhapatnam on September 22, 2022.

ALL ABOUT SUDAN CRISIS
Sudan, a country in North-East Africa, has been mired in political instability for years. However, the recent clash between the Rapid Support Force (RSF) and the Sudanese military has added complexity to the situation.

The clash between the Rapid Support Force (RSF) and the Sudanese military erupted on

April 15, 2023, in the capital city of Khartoum. While the immediate trigger behind the recent clashes is still unclear, a power struggle between the two factions has been broadly suspected to have played its role. The RSF, a paramilitary force, was formed in 2013 to counter insurgency and has since become a powerful entity in Sudanese politics. It is headed by General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, also known as Hemedti, who is a key figure in the Transitional Military Council (TMC) that took over after the ousting of President Omar al-Bashir in 2019. The Sudanese military, on the other hand, is the official armed forces of the country, responsible for the country's defence and security. Eyewitnesses reported gunfire and explosions in the city, and social media was flooded with videos of the clashes. The situation quickly escalated, with reports of tanks and armoured vehicles on the streets. The Indian authority and Indian Embassy in Sudan are assisting the stranded Indians, including facilitating their possible exit from Khartoum city to reach Port Sudan when the security situation allows for safe movement.

Bollywood actress jailed in Sharjah, Mumbai Police arrests man for planting drugs on her

Bollywood actress Chrisann Pereira was arrested in Sharjah with drugs earlier this month. Now, Mumbai Police has arrested a man for planting drugs on the actress to frame her. The man, it is said, wanted to take revenge on Chrisann Pereira's mother.



The Mumbai Crime Branch arrested two people on charges of framing Bollywood actress Chrisann Pereira in connection with a drug-smuggling case. The actress is in jail in Sharjah in the UAE. And the arrested duo are said to have planted the drugs on her to get Chrisann Pereira imprisoned. The 27-year-old has acted in movies like Sadak 2 and Batla House. One of the accused was identified as Anthony Paul, a resident of Borivali in Mumbai. The Crime Branch also picked up his accomplice, Rajesh Babhote alias Ravi, a resident of Maharashtra's Sindhudurg district, for allegedly sending the actor with drugs hidden in a trophy to Sharjah.

Pereira was arrested earlier this month in Sharjah by authorities after drugs were found hidden in a trophy she was carrying. She is presently lodged in a Sharjah prison on drug-smuggling charges.

REASON BEHIND FRAMING

CHRISANN PEREIRA

Her family alleged she had been framed and Mumbai Police started investigations into the matter. It was learnt by police officials that Paul masterminded the plan to frame Chrisann in the case as an act of revenge against the actress's mother, Premila Pereira. Paul, along with his accomplice Ravi, hatched a plot to send Chrisann to the UAE for a purported audition for an international web series. While going to the airport, she was handed the trophy in which they had hidden the drugs, police officials said.

Officials also discovered that Paul had framed four other people in a similar manner.

Paul runs a bakery in Malad and Borivali areas of Mumbai. One of Paul's sisters stays in the same building where Chrisann's mother also resides. During the Covid-19 induced lockdown in 2020, Paul had gone to see his sister when Premila's pet dog barked at him and tried to

pounce on him. To save himself, Paul picked up a chair in a bid to hit the canine. Seeing this, Premila got angry and had insulted him in front of several other residents of the building. To take revenge for the incident, Paul hatched the plan to frame Chrisann in the case.

EXECUTION OF THE PLAN

It all started when Premila received an SMS on her mobile number about real estate-related work. Premila contacted the number and Ravi answered her call. He asked Premila to meet him at his office. During the meeting, Ravi asked Premila about her family and she revealed about her daughter working in films. Ravi then told her he owned a talent management company named 'Talent Pool' and claimed that it was looking for an actress for an international show. A meeting was arranged at the Hotel Grand Hyatt and Chrisann was told she had been selected. She was informed that she

would have to go to Dubai for an audition.

On April 1, Chrisann's tickets were booked for Sharjah and she was told by Ravi that her travel to Dubai from Sharjah had been arranged. Her stay at Hilton hotel was also booked. Before her departure to Sharjah, Ravi gave her the trophy containing the drugs and told Chrisann that it was needed for the audition. The actress carried the trophy with her.

When Chrisann reached Sharjah, she checked with the hotel there to confirm her booking but found out that her name was not mentioned in the hotel's record of bookings. She then approached police authorities with the trophy. The drugs were found inside the

trophy and she was detained, and later arrested. On learning about her daughter's arrest, Premila approached the police and informed them about the incident. Joint Commissioner of Police, Crime, Lakshmi Gautam, started the probe into the case and an FIR was lodged at Vakola police station. During the investigation, the police learnt that the plan was hatched by Paul and Ravi helped execute it. Paul has been arrested, while Ravi is being questioned. Police will contact authorities in the Ministry of External Affairs and through appropriate channels, the inputs regarding the actress being framed by the accused will be shared with UAE authorities.

Who is don Anand Mohan and why Nitish Kumar govt got him freed from jail

In January this year, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's party JD(U) held a Rajput conference in Patna where he was greeted with 'free Anand Mohan Mohan' chants from the supporters of the jailed gangster-politician. Nitish's reply was: "You don't worry about him, I'm trying my best."

In three months, Anand Mohan is out of jail, permanently. 'Bahubali' Anand Mohan has been released from jail in Bihar. He got the news as he was attending his son's engagement ceremony in Patna on Monday.

Anand Mohan's release comes after the Nitish Kumar government had on April 10 tweaked the Prison Manual, 2012, making changes to rule 481 to facilitate his release.

But why did Nitish, who has always tom-tommed his 'susashan' (good, crime-free governance) claim has to align with a



jailed gangster? It all boils down to political survival.

WHO IS ANAND MOHAN?

In 1994, a mob led by Bihar People's Party (now-defunct) founder and don Anand Mohan, dragged Dalit IAS officer and Gopalganj District Magistrate G Krishnaiah out of his car and lynched him. The 35-year-old innocent civil servant, born to a landless Dalit family in Andhra Pradesh, was thrashed, stoned and shot

dead.

Facing many other cases of serious crime over the years, Anand Mohan, a Tomar Rajput, was elected MP from the Seohar Lok Sabha seat in Bihar in 1996 while still in jail.

In 2007, the Patna High Court sentenced Anand Mohan to death for abetting the crime, making him the first Indian politician since Independence to get the death penalty and ending his political career as far as fighting polls went.

The sentence was reduced to rigorous life imprisonment in 2008.

After his conviction, Anand Mohan couldn't contest polls but, despite being in prison, he wielded his prowess and

helped his wife, Lovely Anand, in standing as a Congress candidate in the 2010 Bihar election and as a Samajwadi Party nominee in the 2014 general elections. Anand Mohan also has the Robin Hood image among some.

WHY NITISH NEEDS ANAND MOHAN?

A fiery orator, a college dropout who wrote books from jail, Anand Mohan was out on parole for his son's engagement ceremony when the news of his release from jail reached him.

Top political leaders and ministers, including Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, his deputy Tejashwi Yadav and JDU chief Lalan Singh were present at the engagement ceremony of Anand Mohan's son on April 24. Anand Mohan's release comes after the Nitish Kumar government had on April 10 tweaked the Prison Manual, 2012, making changes to rule 481 to facilitate Mohan's release.



The Threat of Civil Breakdown Is Real

National security officials are still not prepared for a far-right revolt.

The Manhattan district attorney's indictment of former President Donald Trump for 34 felonies so far has not resulted in the "death and destruction" that the former president warned of and may have desired. The protests near the courthouse, though loud, were non-violent and essentially performative. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.), who had encouraged the far-right demonstrators, left the scene after five perfunctory minutes, unable to make herself heard over the din.

We and others have written of the prospect of a new civil war in the United States, which seemed a real, if still remote, possibility immediately after Jan. 6. Now it is starting to look less plausible, given the strength shown by the political center in the 2022 midterms and President Joe Biden's largely effective tenure in the White House. Yet full-scale civil war is not the only danger. Far-right Americans are highly unlikely to coalesce into a cohesive force that could wage war, but an army is not

required to wreak sustained havoc and destabilize the country. In a deeply polarized environment, smaller pockets of armed unrest could easily ignite and spread disorder. The hyperbolic reactions of far-right Republican political figures and media commentators to the Trump indictment signal that they certainly do not believe the MAGA fever among their constituents and consumers has broken.

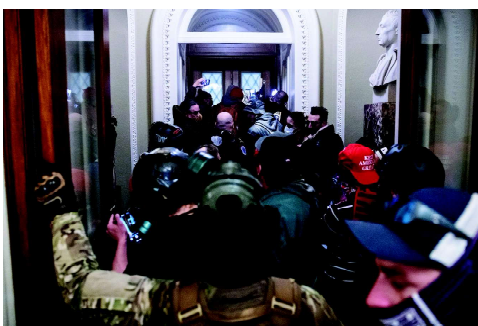
As the 2024 election approaches, the threat of political violence and civil breakdown is only going to increase. And despite all that U.S. national security and law enforcement officials have learned since Jan. 6, the country is still not prepared for a far-right revolt.

Several discomfiting questions arise: How many right-of-center Americans believe violence will be necessary to repel a perceived racial or cultural threat? Do those who harbor that belief have genuine intent to take up arms? If so, what it would take to

make them shoot? Senior U.S. counterterrorism officials assess that the risk of major civil disruption is still salient. While most domestic political violence is perpetrated by lone actors, and federal law enforcement's post-Jan. 6 crackdown has undeniably had a deterrent effect on fence-sitters while incarcerating many who followed through on their beliefs, political polarization has not materially diminished. And it is precisely political polarization that has hindered the federal government's ability to counter domestic extremism. The term "domestic terrorism," however appropriate it may be, is politically toxic to most congressional Republicans. As a result, the federal strategy for countering domestic extremism appears piecemeal and poorly integrated. No single agency is really in charge, and much of the jurisdictional authority lies with locally elected prosecutors reluctant to step on the toes of those who put them in office. And, unlike the United Kingdom,

for example, the United States has no nationwide government agency authorized and equipped to counter radicalization.

The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) would be a logical convenor and coordinator of federal law enforcement agencies charged with executing a variety of counterterrorism missions. But both the NCTC and the Department of Homeland Security lack full access to FBI files. By default, this makes the FBI, for all its known limitations, the analytic lead for producing strategic intelligence on domestic terrorism for the U.S. government. The NCTC has no domestic counterterrorism remit and isn't authorized to produce polished intelligence on domestic terrorist threats, unless there is a transnational link. In the present context, this is a substantial restriction. Despite a transnational convergence of bellicose conservative agendas, there has so far been little practical interaction among activists across the country.





Elon Musk Figured Out the Media's Biggest Weakness

Musk's unnewsworthy high jinks, even though the stories have now become as common as dog-bites-man. Reporters on the Musk beat have a

unnewsworthy high jinks, even though the stories have now become as common as dog-bites-man. Reporters on the Musk beat have a point when they say you never know which one of Musk's outrageous stabs at grabbing attention will actually blossom into genuine news. For instance, when he first said he was going to buy Twitter, who among us could look at his track record and think he would actually complete the deal? Few of the acorns Musk tosses out there end up sprouting into a tree, but enough of them do that maybe his every burp does justify coverage.

But that can't be the main reason the press covers every Muskism that comes over the transom. This column suggested late last year that journalists wean themselves

from the Musk habit. But instead of giving the once-over twice to his antics, the press corps has further devoted itself to his promotion. He offers reporters table scraps.

They turn it into a banquet. He picks a petty fight. They report it as if it were a global war. He's got the media machine's number, and keeps pressing it. Some of these pranks can be dismissed as good-natured fun. But most of them stand as critiques of the press, showing how credulous and easily manipulated journalists can be. When Musk engages in his kind of publicity hounding, he consciously exploits the media's frailty and appetite for copy. His promises, his kayfabe Twitter spats, his controversy-mongering offer the press a preassembled cast of characters, an element of conflict and questions to answer. A grateful press appreciates how the wow factor of a Musk publicity stunt makes the routine coverage of quarterly reports, city council meetings and weather seem mundane. If Musk isn't on the press corps payroll, he should be.

What's in it for Musk? He has long disdained advertising, believing that the

unearned media of a stunt (or the quality of a great product) is advertising enough. According to Ashley Vance's book, *Elon Musk: Tesla, SpaceX, and the Quest for a Fantastic Future*, Musk ordered his Tesla staff to produce at least one barnburner of a public relations announcement a week to stimulate interest in the company's cars. But in a 2021 court appearance, Musk made transparent how he keeps playing the press. "If we are entertaining, then people will write stories about us, and then we don't have to spend money on advertising that would increase the price of our products," he said.

Naming one of his children X Æ A-12, as he did in 2020, or pushing a Tesla roadster into space or challenging Vladimir Putin to "single combat" or issuing a Ukraine peace plan or selling 20,000 flamethrowers are prime examples of how Musk garners notice for his brands and his products. These advertisements for himself, to pinch a phrase from Norman Mailer, create a buzz about him and his ventures, and project the image of an omnipresent, charismatic guy who makes hot copy. When the press briefly turned against him in 2018 for some of his business miscues, Musk went all meta on reporters by announcing a press-watch site called Pravduh.com. Like so many Musk projects, it arrived stillborn and was soon forgotten, but not before he got a burst of publicity out of it. Which was the point, anyway. Since acquiring Twitter, Musk has made media stunt-work one of his prime occupations — announcing plans, ending them, releasing Twitter files to Matt Taibbi and other journalists, and even tweeting from the toilet. He'll do anything to keep it and himself in the news, and every day the news media rewards his showboating with an avalanche of running coverage and commentary. But you've got to wonder. Is Elon Musk the problem here? Or is it the press, which understands how it's being manipulated by Musk but just can't quit him?

Nobody says, "Hey, look at me!" with an authority and confidence to match that of Elon Musk. Not the Kardashians, not Donald Trump, and not even Marjorie Taylor Greene when she sees a camera following her. Like clockwork, Musk feeds a compulsion to work himself in the daily news cycle with a tweet, a threat, a product promise, a media interview or a stunt like smoking dope on Joe Rogan's show.

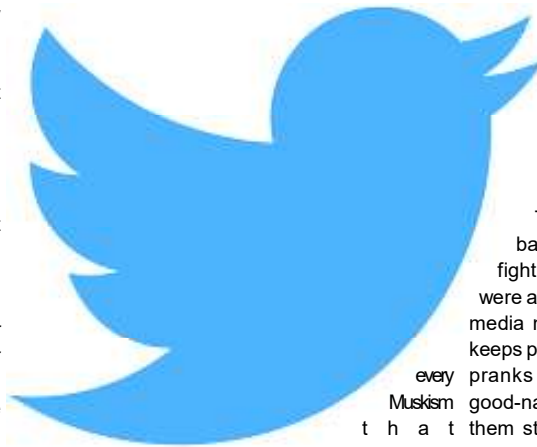
This week alone, Musk earned headlines for vowing to sue Microsoft, for talking to the BBC about the "painful" part of running Twitter, for promising to compete with ChatGPT by creating his own AI platform, for attaching the "government-funded media" label to NPR, BBC and CBC's accounts and then dropping it, for claiming Twitter is "roughly breaking even," for telling Tucker Carlson birth control will lead to the "end of a civilization," for sharing his views on violent crime in San Francisco and for anointing his dog the CEO of Twitter. As Elon Musk media weeks go, it was a light one. But it illustrates his strategy, almost certainly calculated, to hog our newsfeeds by quipping and provoking those around him, by making promises or predictions, and by lofting crude insults or weird theories. In a free country, there's no law against being a dork or a fantasist of the Musk type, so we can't ride him too hard for his incitements. And given his status as one of the world's richest men, he probably deserves at least some of the outsize attention he draws from the press. But factoring all of that in, why do reporters and editors continue to treat his every gesture from the grandstand as worthy of paper and ink, airtime and Internet pixels? Why has the press become such a willing accomplice in his narcissism? A

vapor trail of broken Musk promises and failed predictions, all of which became news stories, have been documented by the [elonmusk.today](https://www.elonmusk.today) website. Musk vowed to build an "everything" Twitter app, but hasn't. A full-time litigation shop? No sign of it yet. To convert atmospheric CO2 into rocket fuel? A no-show. The list continues: To create a super-fast Starlink service. Produce ventilators. Build a flying car.

Distill a Tesla liquor ("Teslaquila"). Start a candy company. Sorry, not yet. When not making news by making promises, Musk enters dropping it, for claiming Twitter our news diet by insulting people. He's knocked a U.S. senator with a vulgar tweet, called a Thai cave rescuer a "pedo guy," ridiculed Bill Gates' beer belly and mocked a disabled Twitter employee. When predictions and insults fail to win him publicity, Musk has gained public attention by sharing conspiracy theories, signaling his support of the presidential candidacy of Ye, better known as Kanye West (and then withdrawing it), endorsing hydroxychloroquine as a Covid-19 treatment and by making a poop emoji the auto-response to questions the press sends to Twitter. This unbroken stream of Musk blarney and BS should be enough to deter the press from automatically reporting the tycoon's publicity hounding. But as with Donald Trump, the press seems unable to resist splashing coverage on

point when they say you never know which one of Musk's outrageous stabs at grabbing attention will actually blossom into genuine news. For instance, when he first said he was going to buy Twitter, who among us could look at his track record and think he would actually complete the deal? Few of the acorns Musk tosses out there end up sprouting into a tree, but enough of them do that maybe his every burp does justify coverage.

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'Titan of biz'

Ratan Tata awarded Australia's highest civilian honour

Industrialist Ratan Tata was awarded Australia's highest civilian honour for his efforts in strengthening India-Australia bilateral relations.

Ratan Tata, the Chairman Emeritus of Tata Sons, was conferred with Australia's highest civilian honour, the Order of Australia, for his efforts in strengthening the India-Australia bilateral relations.

Australia's High Commissioner to India, Barry O'Farrell, shared the images of the ceremony on Twitter and said Ratan Tata has made a significant impact on the island nation. "Ratan Tata is a titan of biz, industry and philanthropy not just in India, but his contributions have also made a significant impact in Australia. Delighted to confer Order of Australia (AO) honour



to Ratan Tata in recognition of his longstanding commitment to the India-Australia relationship," the diplomat said in a tweet.

The Order of Australia honour comes a month after the industrialist was appointed as an Honorary Officer in the General Division of the Order of Australia (AO) for his service to foster Indo-Australia ties, specifically in trade, investment, and philanthropy.

Known for his humility, Ratan Tata took charge as the chairman of the group in March 1991 and stepped down in 2012.

Shaadi.com founder Anupam Mittal loses Blue Tick on Twitter, says now he wont buy Tesla car

Some of the prominent figures who lost their verification badge included Shah Rukh Khan, Amitabh Bachchan, Priyanka Chopra, Bill Gates among others.

Elon Musk raked up a storm on Twitter when he removed Blue Ticks from all the legacy verified accounts. Some of the prominent figures who lost their verification badge included Shah Rukh Khan, Amitabh Bachchan, Priyanka Chopra, Bill Gates among others. Though the Blue Ticks are now back on some accounts, Shaadi.com founder and Shark Tank judge Anupam Mittal got a tad cheesed off when his Blue Tick was taken away. He got so annoyed that he even announced that he would not buy the Tesla car he had planned to purchase. In a tweet, Anupam Mittal expressed his unhappiness over losing his Blue Tick on Twitter. He decided to take revenge on Musk by dropping the idea of buying a Tesla car. Mittal said, "Am cancelling my planned purchase of a Tesla &€œ ticked off." His tweet got mixed reactions from



the users.

One of the Twitter users called out Mittal's "hypocrisy". He reminded him that even Shaadi.com charges as much as Musk is charging for its premium subscription plan. The user named Devesh Tiwari, who

himself is a Twitter Blue subscriber, wrote, "isn't it hypocrisy? One who charges premium on @ShaadiDotCom for same concept but throws tantrum for \$8 per month while being consumer of other platform."

While others called him out for not being able to pay Rs 560 a month despite running such huge businesses. The user named Mitul Mehra said, "You can pay for @Tesla but you can't pay 560 bucks for @TwitterBlue. Honestly, you don't deserve one.

Some users also suggested the Tiago EV, which is a cheaper electric vehicle available in India. Several prominent figures including Amitabh Bachchan, Shah Rukh Khan and others lost their Blue Tick. Bachchan even called out Musk for removing his verification badge. However, soon after the chaos on Twitter, the public figures got their Blue Tick back. Musk even volunteered to pay for the subscription plans for his personal favourites including Stephen King and LeBron James.

However, even then King was not amused. He asked Musk to give his Blue Tick to charity. He wrote, "I think Mr. Musk should give my blue check to charity. I recommend the Prytula Foundation, which provides lifesaving services in Ukraine. It's only \$8, so perhaps Mr. Musk could add a bit more."

6 lifestyle habits that are messing up your hormones

We have several hormones in the body that affect the blood sugar level, blood pressure, growth, fertility, sex drive, metabolism and even sleep. Their influence can change the way we act, think and spend our day-to-day activities.



Hormones are little molecules that are powerhouses in creating a balance in how we feel in the body. There are lifestyle habits that can alter the production of hormones, which are responsible for many physiological processes. Hormonal imbalances can cause illnesses and various skin diseases.

We have several hormones in the body that affect the blood sugar level, blood pressure, growth, fertility, sex drive, metabolism and even sleep. Their influence can change the way we act, think and spend our day-to-day activities. Insulin is a fat hormone that is released into the pancreas and regulates your metabolic processes. If not enough insulin is generated it can cause your blood sugar level to fluctuate and cause serious

lifestyle diseases like diabetes. Melatonin is an important hormone produced in the brain which is instrumental in the sleep-wake cycle of the body. It regulates the body's internal clock. When it gets dark, it triggers the production of melatonin, which helps you sleep. However, interruptions can cause melatonin levels to drop and affect a person's sleep quality.

Estrogen is the female sex hormone that is released in the ovaries that is crucial in the development of various parts of the body including the breasts, the widening of the hips, bone formation, blood clotting, and the health of the skin and nails. Its production levels can affect mood swings and depression. Testosterone is another sex hormone that's

manufactured in the male testicles as well as the female ovaries. It is associated with sex drive but also regulates the production of muscle and bone mass and the distribution of fat cells. Among the important hormones released in the body, cortisol is quite essential. Called the stress hormone, when the cortisol fluctuates it can cause migraines, weight gain, anxiety, heart problems, irritability, brain fog and sleep disturbances. Hormonal imbalances can cause major problems in the body. There are major lifestyle changes that can cause an imbalance of hormones in the body. Nutrition and Diet

"A balanced diet infused with good clean nutrition is one of the main contributors towards a healthy gut, which is so closely linked to our mental state of

being, inflammation markers and even our hormonal balance. An imbalanced gut can lead to digestive tract issues, poor immunity, imbalance hormones and a mental strain leading to stress, anxiety and depression," Malika Singh, Integrative Nutrition Health Coach, told IndiaToday.in. Pay attention to your macronutrient intake i.e. the split of protein, carbohydrates and fats in your diet. Be sure to balance them out well and have a significant measure of protein and limited healthy fats.

Limit the number of inflammatory foods you consume. You may want to check in with your doctor to run a food sensitivity test to determine what foods don't suit you. Some of the common inflammatory foods include

refined grain products like white flour, trans fats, hydrogenated oils, added sugar, and sometimes dairy.

Increase your probiotic and prebiotic food intake. This includes fermented foods like Idli, dosa yoghurt, kefir and prebiotics foods like oats, bananas, onions, apples, flaxseeds and garlic.

Add substantial sources of fibre to your diet from vegetables, legumes, and whole grains.

Consume healthy fats in healthy quantities. Nuts & seeds, avocados, coconuts, and olive oil are some great sources of healthy fats. Caffeine

Caffeine has the ability to disrupt our hormonal imbalance when it is overconsumed. "Caffeine causes the body to produce extra cortisol which is our stress hormone.

Malaria is a life-threatening disease that is spread by some types of mosquitoes. In the last few years, India has seen an 85.1 per cent decline in malaria cases and 83.36 per cent in deaths from 2015 to 2022.

During a recent event on Malaria Elimination, Dr Mansukh Mandaviya, Union Minister for Health & Family Welfare said that malaria is not just a public health issue but also a social, economic and political challenge. Malaria mostly spreads to people through the bites of some infected female anopheles mosquitoes. It is caused by a plasmodium parasite, transmitted by the bite of infected mosquitoes. Other methods of getting infected by malaria are blood transfusion and contaminated needles.

The early symptoms of malaria are fever, headache and chills. The symptoms usually start within 10-15 days of getting



WORLD MALARIA DAY

These precautions could save you from the life-threatening disease

bitten by an infected mosquito. Severe symptoms of malaria include extreme tiredness and fatigue, impaired consciousness, difficulty in breathing, dark or bloody urine, abnormal bleeding and jaundice. On World Malaria Day, April 25, experts share ways you can keep yourself safe from malaria. Being a mosquito-borne

disease, cases of malaria witness a rise during the months of June, July and August when it's monsoon and there's stagnation of water. Dr Vijay Kumar Gurjar, Senior Consultant and Head of the Department of Geriatric Medicine, Primus Super Speciality Hospital told IndiaToday.in that the parasite that causes malaria is spread to

humans through the bites of infected mosquitoes.

"Malaria is a deadly infectious disease. Tropical and subtropical areas, where mosquito breeding is possible, are where the disease is most common," said Dr Vijay Kumar Gurjar. Use mosquito nets, particularly at night, and always sleep beneath a net that has been treated with

insecticide. "Remain indoors at night as malaria-carrying mosquitoes typically bite during the evening and night, so make an effort to remain inside during these hours," said Dr Gurjar.

According to Dr Nidhi Mohan, Consultant, Internal Medicine, Narayana Health City, Bengaluru, remove stagnant water from your surroundings.

"Mosquitoes breed in stagnant water, so make sure to eliminate any standing water around your home, such as in flower pots, buckets, and other containers," said Dr Nidhi Mohan. She added, "Wear protective clothing: Cover yourself with long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and closed-toe shoes, especially during dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active." Take antimalarial medication, as directed by a doctor, if you're visiting a region where malaria is common, said Dr Gurjar.

'We have no communication'

China's Zhurong rover is dead on Mars

Months after it was observed that China's Zhurong rover was stationary on the surface of Mars, Beijing has finally broken the silence on the status of its mission on the Red Planet.

Zhang Rongqiao, chief designer for China's Mars exploration program has confirmed that the Chinese space agency has had no communication with the spacecraft on the surface of Mars.

The rover has remained for longer than expected in the hibernation state on the Red Planet. "We have not had any communication from the rover since it entered hibernation. "We are monitoring it every day and believe it has not woken up because the sunlight

has not yet reached the minimum level for power generation," Zhang told China's CGTN adding that the rover has already completed 358 Martian days of exploration before it hibernated. The motorised rover Zhurong, named



The motorised rover Zhurong, named after a mythical Chinese god of fire, was expected to have woken up in December after entering a planned sleep mode in May 2022.

after a mythical Chinese god of fire, was expected to have woken up in December after entering a planned sleep mode in May 2022 as falling solar radiation with the advent of winter cut its power generation. A camera on board a

NASA probe orbiting Mars showed the Chinese rover had not moved since at least September, according to official images. An unforeseen pile-up of dust most likely affected power generation and Zhurong's ability to wake up,

Chinese state television reported on Tuesday, quoting Zhang Rongqiao, chief designer of China's Mars exploration programme. Powered by solar energy, Zhurong also looked for signs of ancient life, including

any subsurface water and ice, using ground-penetrating radar. The rover traveled for 1,921 meters (2,100 yards), Zhang said, far exceeding its original mission. Meanwhile, China released the first colour-coded global map of the Red Planet. The 76-meter spatial resolution provides better quality for conducting future Martian exploration projects. The map was released jointly by the China National Space Administration (CNSA) and the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS). The map has been developed by data provided by the Tianwen-1 orbiter, which has been revolving around Mars. It was the Tianwen-1 mission, which carried the Zhurong rover to Mars. The orbiter conducted 284 orbital remote sensing imaging tasks from November 2021 to July 2022, providing coverage of the entire Martian surface. Mission time span of three months.

WhatsApp introduces ability to use one account on multiple phones, here is how to enable

WhatsApp has introduced the ability to use one WhatsApp account on multiple phones. The linking process is similar to how you connect your one WhatsApp account to different devices.

WhatsApp has announced the rollout of one of the biggest features for both Android and iOS. It has introduced the ability to use one WhatsApp account on multiple phones. Until now, people were only able to use one account on different devices like desktops and laptops, but not phones. But, this will change with the latest update. Here is everything you need to know. People can now switch between phones without signing out using one WhatsApp account and pick up chats where they left off. Also, if you're a small business owner, any of your employees will now be able to respond to customers directly from their phones under the same WhatsApp Business account. "Last year, we introduced the ability for users globally to message seamlessly across all their devices, while maintaining the same level of privacy and security. Today, we're improving



our multi-device offering further by introducing the ability to use the same WhatsApp account on multiple phones," WhatsApp said.

In addition to this, the Meta-owned company also confirmed that it will also add an alternative and more accessible way to link to companion devices, but this

will be released over the coming weeks. You can link your phone to up to four additional devices, just like how you link with WhatsApp on web browsers, tablets and desktops. The linking process is similar to how you connect your one WhatsApp account to different devices. The multi-device sharing feature would be available on

WhatsApp's main page > settings section > Linked devices. You can then simply tap on Link a device and follow the instructions on the screen to enable the feature.

You can now also enter your phone number on WhatsApp Web to receive a one-time code, which you can use on your

phone to enable device linking, rather than having to scan a QR code. Here are the steps for QR code scan. Step 1: Open WhatsApp on your phone. Step 2: Tap on More options > Linked devices. Step 3: Tap on Link a device. Step 4: Unlock your primary phone. Note: If your device has biometric authentication, follow the on-screen instructions. If you don't have biometric authentication enabled, you'll be prompted to enter the pin you use to unlock your phone. Step 5: Point your primary phone at the screen of the device you want to link, and scan the QR code. WhatsApp says each linked phone connects to WhatsApp independently, and a user's personal messages, media, and calls are end-to-end encrypted. "If your primary device is inactive for a long period, we automatically log you out of all companion devices," it added.



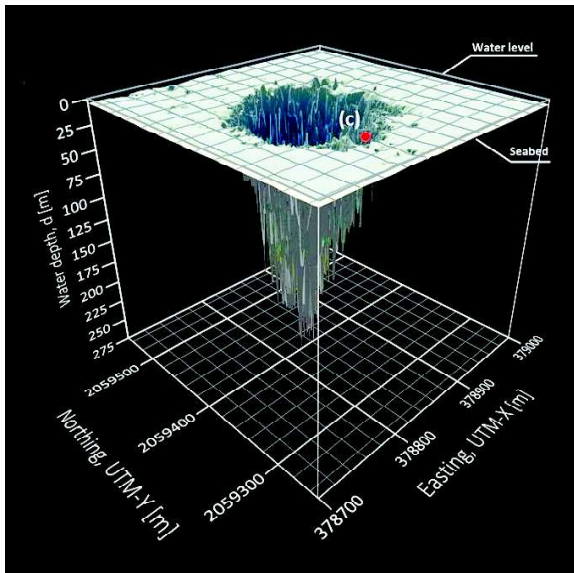
Mysterious 900-foot-deep blue hole discovered in Mexico. No one knows how it formed

Spread over an area of 13,660 square meters, the giant, underwater cavern is located in Chetumal Bay and has been named Taam Ja' which means "deep water" in Mayan.

Scientists have discovered a massive sinkhole off the coast of the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico. The giant blue hole is around 900 feet deep and scientists have dubbed it the second deepest blue hole found on the planet.

The blue holes found on coastal karst platforms around the world, including the Caribbean Sea and the Yucatán Peninsula, contain unique environments within them. Spread over an area of 13,660 square meters, the giant, underwater cavern is located in the Chetumal Bay and has been named Taam Ja' which means "deep water" in Mayan. The submerged blue hole has a nearly circular shape at its surface with steep sides that

form a large conic structure covered by biofilms, sediments, limestone, and gypsum ledges. Researchers from the Department of Observation and Study of the Land, the Atmosphere, and the Ocean, Chetumal, Mexico have published their findings about the blue hole in *Frontiers in Marine Science*. The study states that submarine exploration was conducted through echosounding, thermohaline profiles, chemical analysis of collected water samples, and scuba diving, leading to the first documentation of this geomorphologic



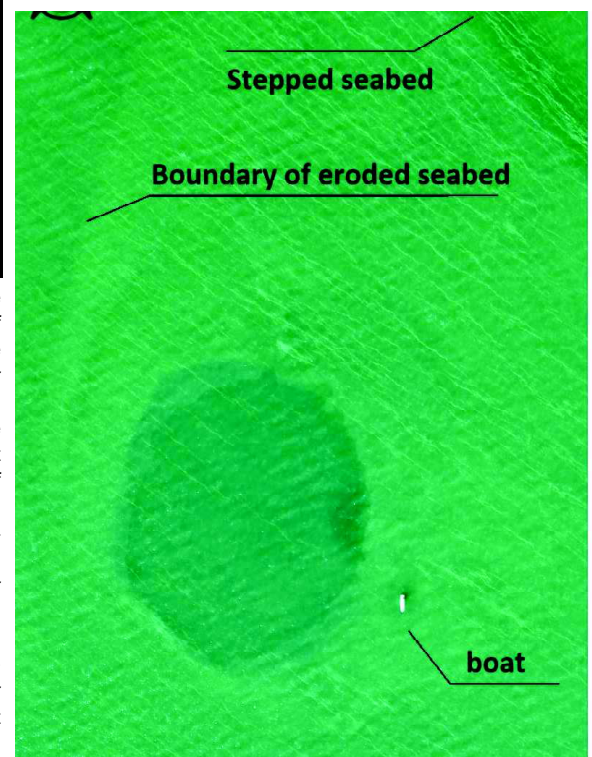
feature. The blue hole first discovered in 2021 could offer a glimpse of how life evolved through the millennia in the marine world. Researchers have in the past found bacteria at such depths in blue hole in the Caribbean, where no other lifeform was found, indicating the evolution of life at those depths. The blue hole was found in the central portion of Chetumal Bay, where submerged coastal karstic sinkholes locally named 'pozos' have been reported. Researchers conducted scuba dives into the blue hole in September 2021 to conduct

chemical water sample extraction. A series of discontinuous terraces were detected at water depths, near the eastern and northwestern walls of the blue hole before developing steep and almost vertical slopes. "The structure of the blue hole can be described as a conic shape that is north-skewed with a volume of ~1 million m³. The maximum water depth of the blue hole exceeds 270 mbsl, with the deeper areas located mostly scattered on the northern side," the paper read. The team noticed significant variations in salinity and

temperature inside the blue hole. The surface salinity values were that representative of the brackish conditions of the Chetumal Bay estuary, while salinity values at deep layers inside the blue hole showed that the main water source is seawater. "Monitoring of the temporal changes in the physicochemical and biological

features inside the TJBH is needed to understand the possible variability in biogeochemical processes and to explore the water exchange with the surrounding estuary of Chetumal Bay," researchers said.

The deepest blue hole found on the planet is in the South China Sea and is 987 feet deep.





Ponniyin Selvan 2: Aishwarya Rai, Trisha Krishnan and others deck up in ethnics for press meet

Mani Ratnam's magnum opus is slated to get back to the theatres on April 28. Ponniyin Selvan's first part was released last year and garnered a lot of praises from the audience and critics alike. Starring a multi star-cast, Ponniyin Selvan's second part is slated for a release in two days. The cast of the film is busy with the promotions. From Kochi to Hyderabad to Mumbai, Ponniyin Selvan's star cast is traveling everywhere for the promotions of their film. From Aishwarya Rai to Trisha Krishnan to Jayam Ravi, the film stars the A-listers from the industry. A day back, Ponniyin Selvan's



press meet was held in Mumbai evening to remember. From Jayam Ravi, everyone dropped and it was a star-studded Aishwarya Rai to Karthi to by in their best attires for the

event. Aishwarya looked stunning as ever in a white and golden salwar suit. The actor, who is an absolute fashionista, picked the glam attire for the evening and looked ravishing as ever. The white long salwar featured golden embroidery work throughout. In a matching dupatta with golden zari work at the borders and a contrasting green necklace, Aishwarya aced the look to perfection. Trisha Krishnan, on the other hand, twinned with Aishwarya in a white and golden six yards of grace. The sheer white georgette saree featured thread work in golden resham threads and a golden zari border. In a matching white sleeveless blouse with a halter neckline, Trisha looked stunning as she sported her brightest smile for the cameras.

Sobhita Dhulipala, who is playing the role of Vaanathi in the film, picked an ochre salwar decorated in blue and golden resham threads. She teamed it with a pair of contrasting bright blue sharara set featuring intricate embroidery work in shades of golden, and a blue georgette dupatta with golden zari work. In statement golden earrings and golden bangle, she further accessorised her look for the day. Aishwarya Lekshmi decked up in stunning red for the event. The actor looked gorgeous as ever in a red georgette saree with minimal floral patterns in shades of pink throughout the length of the saree. In golden earrings and a bracelet, she smiled with all her heart for the cameras.

It's mango season! Here are the benefits of having them after your meal

As heatwaves are soaring temperatures across several states, paying heed to proper nutrition is essential for your health. Hydrating foods can help keep the body's electrolyte levels in check and keep you safe from heatstroke.

Increasing the intake of seasonal fruits like watermelons, musk melons and mangoes can help with digestion, eliminate dehydration and improve metabolism. When it comes to mangoes, there are always doubts about the right time and amount to eat them.

There have been several benefits associated with having mangoes



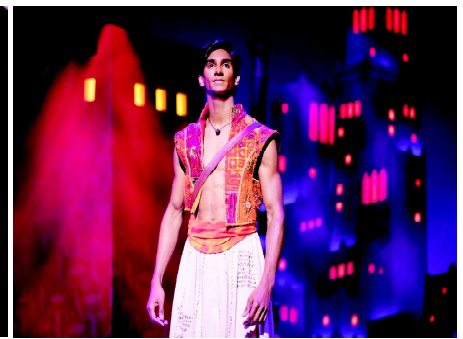
after meals. In her Instagram post, dietitian Manpreet Kalra shared why you should have a mango after your lunch.

"When we eat food it goes in the

stomach wherein digestion occurs. Here is when the food is broken down by bile (a fluid secreted by the liver), digestive enzymes and stomach acid.

Sometimes, these digestive enzymes are not secreted properly because of which the body is not able to digest the food well, which leads to bloating and gas,"

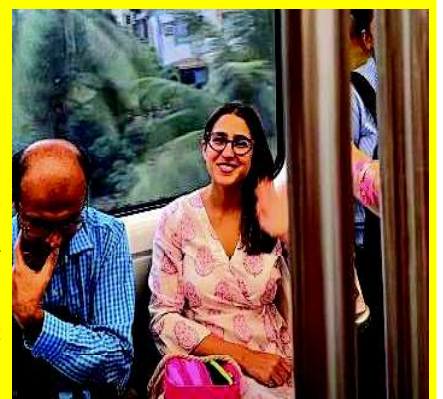
the expert said in the video post. In the caption, she wrote, "Mangoes contain digestive enzymes like amylase, protease and lipase which help in breaking down carbohydrates, proteins and fats in the meal and prevent digestive discomforts such as bloating and gas." She added that mangoes contain fibre which regulates bowel movements and blood sugar levels and prevents constipation. "A slice of mango post meals can help you with digestion," she said. Rich in vitamins, minerals and antioxidants, mangoes may help prevent diabetes and contain immune-boosting nutrients. They support heart and eye health.



Aladdin, the hit musical based on the Academy Award®-winning animated film, is celebrating its 9th anniversary on Broadway! The production has broken 16 New Amsterdam Theatre house records, spawned nine productions on four continents, and welcomed over 16 million people worldwide. A special media day to celebrate this anniversary was recently held in New York. Michael Maliakel (Aladdin), Sonya Balsara (Jasmine), Angelo Soriano (Iago) and more from the Aladdin cast came to interact with members of the media. We have exclusive pictures for the readers of The South Asian Insider.

Sara Ali Khan travels by metro in Mumbai

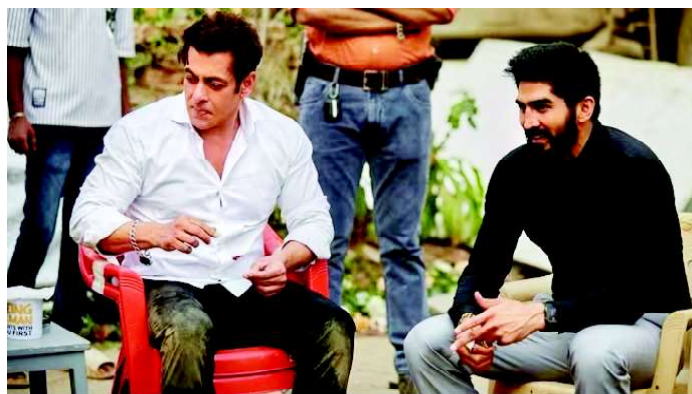
Actress Sara Ali Khan recently took a Metro ride in Mumbai. Taking to Instagram Story, Sara dropped a video, which shows her seated in the Metro. Dressed in a white kurta and spectacles, Sara waved at the camera while smiling widely. "Mumbai meri jaan... Didn't think I would be in Mumbai metro before you guys," she captioned the post, tagging her Metro In Dino co-star Aditya Roy Kapoor and director Anurag Basu. Seems like Sara has started shooting for Metro In Dino, a film that apparently draws its title from the popular song In Dino from Life in a... Metro. The project will showcase bittersweet tales of human relationships based in contemporary times.



Vijender Singh talks about shooting action scenes with Salman in KKBKKJ, wishes to work with SRK in Pathaan 2

Saman Khan's latest release Kisi Ka Bhai Kisi Ki Jaan may just be capitalising on the star power of its hero- the protagonist, however, what is worth watching is the negative character played by Olympic medalist, Vijender Singh. The sportsman actor plays the role of a baddie, Mahavir.

Kisi Ka Bhai Kisi Ki Jaan, which was released in theatres on April 21, coming in as a grand Eid celebration, features an ensemble star cast offering a variety on the table for the movie buffs. Amid all the characters that hold their significance, Vijender essays the role of a hot-tempered businessperson from Haryana. As an antagonist, his only aim is to kill everyone's beloved Bhaijaan (played by Salman Khan) and to take over the mohalla (colony) where the latter is worshipped and lives with his brothers. **NEGATIVE ROLE IN KKBKKJ**



It was amazing. Bhai ke saath kaam karna and when I met him, I told Salman bhai that I had watched Tere Naam thrice in one week. He was really happy and now working with my hero is just surreal. I even told the same to Bhumika Chawla who is also a part of KKBKKJ. And now you can imagine how it feels to share the screen space with both of them in one film. It was just like a dream.

EQUATION WITH SALMAN KHAN

It was in 2008 when I met Salman Khan at his house and trust me, since then, he has just been like a great friend to me. It was an on-and-off thing where I used to congratulate him on call. During Sultan, he called me and said that he is was making a film on boxing. Dosti nibhane wale insaan hai Salman bhai (he is someone who knows how to

keep up with friendships). I met him for the first time in 2008 at his house. There was an event in Taj happening and a person named Gautam Singhania told me let's go and meet Salman. Post finishing the event, we went to meet the actor at his residence. I remember other than Salman bhai, Arbaaz and Katrina were also there. We partied hard and enjoyed ourselves.

HOW DID YOU BAG ROLE IN KKBKKJ

I didn't ask him anything. I just said Bhai apke saath mera koi shot hai? apke saath kaam kame ka mauka milega? (I just asked about getting any chance of working with him. I want to play

a role with you someday. So he was like, yes, there will be some fighting scenes in the future.

ONE QUALITY OF SALMAN KHAN He trains every day. There was a proper gym on the set with proper equipment and weights. So, even if he is not shooting, you will find him in the gym training and that is one thing I like about him.

DIFFICULTY IN SHOOTING ACTION SCENES WITH SALMAN KHAN

It was very difficult for me to shoot for that fight sequence with him. It was Salman Khan's film, he was doing the action sequences and he was the one getting beaten up by stones. So you can imagine how difficult it was for us to shoot.

Towards the end, Vijender concluded and said that if given an opportunity, he would like to work with Shah Rukh Khan in Pathaan 2.

Priyanka Chopra slays at Citadel's LA premiere



After Mumbai, London, and Rome, Priyanka Chopra and team Citadel is in Los Angeles for the premiere. Priyanka looked glamorous in a pink dress at the event, and wore her hair straight.

Priyanka will share the screen space with Richard Madden and Stanley Tucci in the Prime Video series, which is set to start streaming from April 28.

Also read: 'Richard Madden, Priyanka Chopra together are

hot stuff, celebs review Citadel after premiere. Priyanka's photos from the LA premiere of Citadel were shared on a fan page on Instagram on Wednesday. A comment on the post read, "Woowww...!!! Soooo stunningly beautiful!!!!"

Another one read, "She is stunning." Priyanka also posed with Richard Madden

at the premiere. Just days ago, Priyanka was joined by husband-singer Nick Jonas for the Citadel premiere in Rome. For the



event, she had worn a green bodycon dress and teamed it with a shawl that featured fur detailing. Priyanka has been, despite her busy schedule, sharing glimpses of her latest outings on Instagram. Sharing pictures of herself and Nick from Rome, Priyanka wrote in her caption, "Roman holiday".

The actor had also shared a video from the Rome premiere of Citadel on Instagram Reels. The clip opened to Priyanka and her Citadel co-stars Richard Madden and Stanley Tucci greeting fans at the premiere. Along with the video, Priyanka wrote in her caption, "Not just a stop on our world tour but an important piece in the Citadel story... Italy holds so many of our secrets. Thank

you, Rome for all the love... see you soon... Catch @citadelonprime on 28th April!" Citadel features Priyanka Chopra as elite spy Nadia Sinh alongside Richard Madden's Mason Kane. Earlier this month, Priyanka began the global promotion of Citadel from Mumbai, India. Speaking to media during an interaction at the time, Priyanka had said, "I'm very excited to be starting the global campaign for Citadel in India, my home. We will be travelling across the globe after this, but I've got good luck from millions from my country and I will carry it wherever I go, like I always do."

After Citadel, Priyanka will be seen in the romantic Hollywood film Love Again with Sam Heughan. She will also be working on Farhan Akhtar's Jee Le Zaraa with Katrina Kaif and Alia Bhatt.

Alia Bhatt leaves fans in awe with her without makeup glow as she returns from Dubai, fans praise her 'flawless skin'



Alia Bhatt returned from Dubai Tuesday night after a day-long trip. The actor was spotted at the Mumbai airport upon her return and briefly posed for the paparazzi. She looked lovely without makeup, in a denim on denim look as she wore a denim jacket over blue jeans. She also carried a black handbag in one hand and a smaller pink bag in another hand. Also read: New mom Alia Bhatt gets 'wonderful welcome' at Dubai hotel and it has something to do with daughter Raha Kapoor. As a paparazzo shared a video of Alia from the airport on Instagram, fans of the actor took to comments section to praise her glowing skin and her physique. A fan wrote, "Have to admit she has got flawless skin." Another wrote, "Her glowing face omg she better drop that skin routine." One more commented, "Her flawless skin and natural beauty."

Aishwarya Rai on playing Nandini again after 23 years: 'Its amazing na ki aisa hua bhi hai'

Aishwarya Rai has opened up about playing a character named Nandini in her 1999 blockbuster Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam and then playing queen Nandini in the 2022 Tamil film Ponniyin Selvan I. She said it was a blessing to play such strong women on screen, which touch the hearts of the audience. She will once again be seen as Nandini in Ponniyin Selvan II releasing in theatres on April 28. Also read: Aishwarya Rai looks effortlessly gorgeous in ivory anarkali, gives warm hug to Mani Ratnam at Ponniyin Selvan 2 event

At a promotional press conference in Mumbai on Tuesday, Aishwarya was asked about playing Nandini again on screen. She said, "Beautiful coincidence na. It's amazing na ki aisa hua bhi hai (it's amazing to know that



such a thing actually happened). In fact, yes even Nandini in Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam was very, very memorable. She has lived on people's hearts and I am

so, so thankful that I got to play Nandini then too and she has remained special for the audience and of course to me. And that was with Sanjay Bhansali ji and today of course with my Mani garu I got to play Nandini in Ponniyan Selvan. I mean that's just tremendously a blessing that I got to play such strong women, such layered women and women with character that touches the lives of so many women out there. There is a relatability, so I'm very very very grateful." Aishwarya had first played Nandini in Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam. The film showed Aishwarya in traditional ensembles. Her character was in love with Salman Khan's Sameer, but was forced to marry Ajay Devgn's Vanraj, who made an effort to reunite the two lovers. Aishwarya has a dual role in Ponniyin Selvan II.



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