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Five Reasons why Narendra Modi will return as the Prime Minister in 2024



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Protests in France Against Immigration

Thousands, including undocumented migrants protest in France against govt's immigration plans

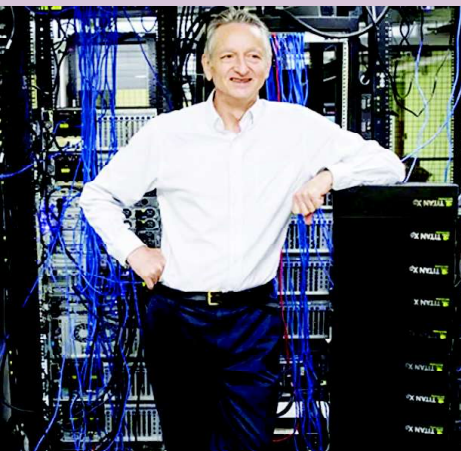
Undocumented migrants were among the thousands of people who staged a protest in various parts of the country, including Paris, over the French government's planned decision to make amendments to the immigration laws.



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'Godfather Of AI'

Geoffrey Hinton Quits Google To Talk About Dangers Of Artificial Intelligence



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ChatGPT is probably nicer than your doctor

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Priyanka Chopra Jonas: Why India's International Star's Report Card Needs Some Good Scores

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Indian-origin man in UK jailed for drug smuggling, money laundering

The Guildford Crown Court in UK handed an eight-year-10-month sentence to 45-year-old Indian-origin man, Raj Singh, who pleaded guilty to charges of supplying Class A banned substance cocaine, conspiracy to supply Class B banned substance ketamine and money laundering.



(South Asian Insider Bureau)-An Indian-origin crime gang boss is serving an eight-year-10-month prison sentence after admitting to drug smuggling and money laundering charges in a British court.

The UK's National Crime Agency (NCA) said its officers proved that Raj Singh (45) from Surrey in south-east England ran an organised crime group and regularly worked together with Waqas Iqbal (41) to buy and sell Class A drugs and firearms.

The duo also planned to launder money and send ketamine to Canada. In February, Singh -- whose full name is Rajinder

Singh Bassi -- pleaded guilty to charges of supplying Class A banned substance cocaine, conspiracy to supply Class B banned substance ketamine and money laundering at Guildford Crown Court.

He also admitted to assault in a separate matter, when he was involved in a pub fight, in which he kicked a police officer's leg as she tried to restrain him.

His sentence includes 16 months for causing actual bodily harm to the officer, who required significant rehabilitation on her knee and cannot return to frontline policing due to the injuries. The NCA revealed details

of the case this week after Iqbal was sentenced to 12 years in prison at the same court in southern England on Friday after he admitted conspiracy to import Class A drugs, conspiracy to transfer a prohibited weapon and money laundering. "Though Iqbal and Singh operated within the London area, they had criminal connections in multiple countries within mainland Europe and further afield," said Dean Wallbank, NCA operations manager.

"Like other high-end dealers, Iqbal and Singh are toxic and responsible for causing very serious levels of harm to society.

They didn't care what bloodshed the guns and drugs led to, just as long as they made money. Protecting the public from the threats of Class A drugs and firearms is a priority for the NCA," he said.

The NCA caught the duo after intercepting their messages to buy and supply Class A drugs and guns on the encrypted communications platform EncroChat. They were not known

by their real names on EncroChat but by "handles", with Singh as Salmonagent and Iqbal as Ghostshooter. The crucial phone evidence also showed the pair conspiring on firearms details. The duo were held as part of the NCA-led Operation Venetic, the UK response to the takedown of EncroChat in 2020 after the messages between Singh and Iqbal revealed how significant their offending was.

India brings back 229 more citizens as Sudan conflict enters third week

Fighting between two Generals in Sudan entered third week on Saturday, while the foreign countries stepped up effort to successfully rescue their citizens from the conflict zones of the African nation.

(South Asian Insider Bureau)-As the armed struggle between rival generals in Sudan entered the third week, indiscriminate firing continued to echo across capital Khartoum on Saturday.

The Sudanese were forced to flee the rift-ridden region, given the grim situation in the country that could potentially witness increased instability if the conflict continues.

Meanwhile, foreign countries, including India, UAE, the UK and the US, have been carrying out their evacuation mission with the help of Saudi Arabia.

On Saturday (April 29), the 10th batch with 135 Indian citizens stranded in Sudan successfully departed from Port Sudan on an IAF C 130J flight.

TOP DEVELOPMENTS ON SUDAN-CRISIS

A 7th outbound flight carrying 229 passengers, under operation Kaveri, has departed from Saudi Arabia's Jeddah and will be landing in Bengaluru today. The information was shared Spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs, Arindam Bagchi.



A total 1,191 Indians evacuated from strife-torn Sudan have arrived in the country so far. Of these, 117 passengers are currently in quarantine as they were not vaccinated against yellow fever.

The United States rescued its citizens, local staff and others with the help of an organised convoy that arrived at the Red Sea city of Port Sudan on Saturday, said State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller.

The United Arab

Emirates evacuated its citizens, other nationalities and humanitarian cases from Sudan by plane on Saturday. Around 128 evacuees, including British and US citizens, landed in the capital Abu Dhabi where they were greeted by officials, reported the news agency Reuters.

Two US citizens were confirmed to be killed in the fighting in Sudan.

One was a US civilian whom officials said was caught in the crossfire. The other was an

Iowa City, Iowa, doctor who was stabbed to death in front of his house and family in Khartoum in the lawless violence that has accompanied the fighting, reported news agency AP.

Since April 15, which witnessed the rivalry between the Army and Paramilitary spiral into a full-blown crisis, more than 500 people have been killed and 4,599 wounded. More than 75,000 people had been internally displaced by the fighting, the United Nations

reported.

In Darfur, at least 96 people had died since Monday in inter-communal violence rekindled by the army-RSF conflict, said UN human rights office spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani.

Among Sudan's neighbours, Egypt said it had taken in 16,000 people, while 20,000 had entered Chad and the U.N. refugee agency said over 14,000 had crossed into South Sudan, which won independence from Khartoum in 2011 after decades of civil war, reported Reuters.

Sudanese former Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, speaking at a conference in Nairobi, said the war must stop and warned that of its consequences would spill even to the foreign region.

"This is a huge country, very diverse ... I think it will be a nightmare for the world. This is not a war between an army and small rebellion. It is almost like two armies - well trained and well armed," Hamdok was quoted as saying by Reuters.

US set to modernise H-1B visa registration after detecting fraud and abuse in computerised lottery system

(South Asian Insider Bureau)- The United States announced plans to modernise the H-1B registration process after the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) detected abuse and fraud by some companies to boost their chances of winning the visa.

This development comes after USCIS on Friday said, based on evidence from the Financial Year 2023 and Financial Year 2024 H-1B cap seasons, it has already undertaken extensive fraud investigations and denied and revoked petitions.

It said that it has found that a small number of companies are responsible for entering the same applicants into the lottery multiple times, with the alleged goal of artificially boosting their chances of winning a visa. "The H-1B programme is an essential part of our nation's immigration system and our economy, and the USCIS is committed to implementing the



law and helping meet the ever-changing needs of the US labour market," it said.

Last year, the government began requiring workers who won the lottery to sign affidavits stating they didn't try to game the system by working with others to file multiple bids under different company names, even if there was no underlying employment offer. By

winning at least once, they could market their services to technology companies that wanted to fill positions but didn't have visas, effectively becoming labor contractors. The USCIS, the federal agency that awards H-1B visas, said it is in the process of initiating law enforcement referrals for criminal prosecution. "We are working on an upcoming

H-1B modernisation rule that will propose, among other improvements, bolstering the H-1B registration process to reduce the possibility of misuse and fraud in the H-1B registration system," it added.

The USCIS said during the registration period for the FY 2024

H-1B cap, it saw a significant increase in the number of registrations submitted compared to prior years. There were 7,80,884 applications for H-1B visas in this year's computer-generated lottery, against 4,83,927 in 2023 and 3,01,447 in 2022 and 2,74,237 in 2021, it said.

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No Khalistani protestor turns up at Indian High Commission despite calls for demonstrations on social media

There was constant patrolling around the Indian High Commission, including police vehicles that were on standby. But there was no trace of the protestors all through the day.



(South Asian Insider Bureau)-Pro-India Sikh voices disassociated with the fragments of separatism as none of Khalistani protestors turned up outside the Indian High Commission in the United Kingdom, despite the call for protests on April 29 on various social media platforms.

UK Police told India Today that they were "aware" of the protest and also sent officers to the HCI. There was constant patrolling by

the Commission, including police vehicles that were on standby. But there was no trace of the protestors all through the day. In the meantime, on April 29, at a diaspora meet and greet with the Minister of Science and Technology and Earth Sciences Dr Jitendra Singh, and a prominent member of the Sikh community acknowledged the efforts of Prime Minister Narendra Modi towards the Sikh community.

Jitendra Kumar said, "Every time on Gurupurab or such event he (PM Modi) pays respect to the holy book. I have not seen any other Prime Minister do this. Every time he visits any country outside, the first thing he does is that he visits the Gurudwara to pay respects. That is what makes us feel so good. That is the reason we feel like going back to Punjab, back to India and thinking about India all the time."

Indian-Origin Ajay Banga Confirmed As Next World Bank President



(South Asian Insider Bureau)-The World Bank confirmed Wednesday that Ajay Banga will be its next president, handing him the reins at a pivotal time as it looks to reshape its role to better address climate change.

"The Board looks forward to working with Mr. Banga on the World Bank Group Evolution process," the development lender wrote in a statement published shortly after executives voted to approve his leadership for a five-year term. The bank also said it looked forward

to working with Banga on "all the World Bank Group's ambitions and efforts aimed at tackling the toughest development challenges facing developing countries."

Banga, the US candidate who was the sole nominee for the top job, will begin his new role on June 2, taking over from David Malpass who is stepping down early amid criticism over his stance on climate change. Under an unwritten arrangement, a US citizen has historically held the presidency of the Washington-based development lender, while the International Monetary Fund has been run by a European. Despite growing public unease over America's continued grip on the bank's presidency from developing and emerging economies, the trend continues with Banga, 63, who was born into a Sikh family in India and is a naturalized US citizen.

35th Sikh Day Parade Organized in New York



EID CELEBRATED



Recently Supervisor Don Clavin, the Hempstead Town Board and the Department of Community Affairs in conjunction with PACOLI Celebrated EID. Few noted community acCongratulations to all the honorees. More than 300 guests attend the event. Attendees enjoyed cultural presentations and ethnic food.



Pyara Sindhi USA Inc. organized its first Sindhi Mela recently at Asamai Temple Auditorium in Hicksville, New York to connect all Sindhis in the tri-state area. This organization is a dream come true by the founder president, Mrs. Indu Gajwani who felt the need of bringing all the Sindhis together.

VAISAKHI Celebrated by Town of Hempstead



Supervisor Don Clavin, the Hempstead Town Board and the Department of Community Affairs in conjunction with LILC, IAAC, LIDC, GD&H, LIONS and NYSACC celebrated VAISAKHI recently.

Supervisor Jennifer DeSena, Sharanjit Singh Thind, Former Human Rights Commissioner & Publisher of The South Asian Insider Weekly, Prof Indrajit S. Saluja Editor in Chief of The Indian Panorama, Baldev Singh Grewal of Shere E Panjab

Weekly and many other noted elected, appointed officials attended the event.

Department of Community Affairs, Town of Hempstead, Executive Director Zahid Syed Congratulated honorees on behalf of Supervisor Don Clavin.

Among Honorees were noted community leaders, activists and business persons. More than 600 guests enjoyed ethnic food, cultural events and other activities. Among organizations that supported and made the event happen, were Pinky Jaggi

of LILC, Deepak Bansal of AICC, Jasbir Jay Singh of Long Island Diversity Council, Ashish Kumar of Global Diversity and Heritage Foundation Inc and Harry Malhotra of South Asian Chamber of Commerce.

Sajjad Ali concert



Recently, artist Sajjad Ali's concert was held at The Space at Westbury Theater, Westbury, Long Island. Here is a picture from the event.

Eid Celebrate



Recently Eid was Celebrated in an event organized by Masjid Al Baki of Bethpage, Long Island. Here is a picture from the event. (Photo courtesy: Harry Malhotra Facebook)

Vaisakhi Press Conf



A Press Conference was recently held in Long Island to announce Vaisakhi to be celebrated on Sunday May 21st in Eisenhower Park in Long Island. Here are some pictures from the event.

Why Sharad Pawar Resigned as Chief of the Party He Had Formed in 1999

(News Agency)- In a bid to get an upper hand within a fragmented and ideologically diverse Nationalist Congress Party, clever fox Sharad Pawar has taken a gamble of sorts in offering to resign as the NCP supremo. Pawar's sudden decision to step down as a head is aimed at either taking back full control of the party that he had formed in June 1999 with a combination of passion and ambition. It is an open secret that Pawar, for the past few weeks, had been trying to restore a semblance of unity among NCP leaders without much success. A section of the NCP was reportedly negotiating with the BJP and attempting to get out of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) coalition consisting of the Congress, NCP and Shiv Sena [Udhav]. Amid weak denials, talks of Pawar's nephew Ajit meeting Amit Shah and other BJP stalwarts were constantly in Mumbai media. While there is no empirical evidence or a formal head count, the possibility of a bulk of NCP MLAs siding with the Narendra Modi and BJP-Shinde-led Sena seemed greater than those opting for Uddhav Thackeray and Rahul Gandhi-controlled parties. In this sense, Pawar's resignation, withdrawal or the issue of Pawar's successor, holds the key to pointing out which way the breakaway Congress is heading. At a broader level, the NCP's



internal dynamics would have a bearing on the 2024 Lok Sabha polls too. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP and the then-united Sena had netted 42 out of 48 Lok Sabha seats. For 2024, a script was sought to be readied had Ajit Pawar managed to walk away with a bulk of NCP MLAs. The split in the NCP would have had a crippling effect not only on MVA but on the Congress in western Maharashtra where it teams up with the NCP. Until May 2, 2023 Ajit Pawar was seen as a strong contender to topple Pawar much like Chandrababu Naidu had edged out father-in-law N T Ramarao or how Akhilesh Yadav had outwitted father Mulayam Singh Yadav. But now, Ajit Pawar would have to formally rebel and show his clout among MLAs. Going by the emotional and

dramatic scenes in Mumbai, Ajit Pawar's hands seem forced and out of depth. Has Sharad Pawar been successful in averting the crisis? It appears to be the case or it's too early to make such a claim. After all, splits in the regional parties have wheels within wheels. Post-2014, some of these divisions merit OTT web series having a heavy dose of emotional drama, family feud and intrigue. Pawar has been a seasoned campaigner in the art of doublespeak. Barely a month ago, he had stunned the Congress and non-NDA Opposition when he abruptly opposed Rahul Gandhi's call for a parliamentary probe into the Adani Group over a report by US short-seller Hindenburg Research. The move had come barely days after Rahul had haphazardly

accepted Pawar's advice not to target Hindutva icon Vir Savarkar, ostensibly, for the sake of Opposition unity for the 2024 Lok Sabha. The precarious compromise has left Rahul with eggs on his face. A politician among politicians, Pawar, 83 now, holds a record of sorts having never lost an electoral battle, a distinction that eluded even former prime ministers like Indira Gandhi and Atal Bihari Vajpayee. As I had mentioned in an earlier News 18 blog, looking back at Pawar's impressive political career, the politician offers a bag full of turning the tables on friends and associates. He became Maharashtra's chief minister for the first time aged just 38 in 1978 when he treacherously toppled the Congress government of Vasantdada Patil, split the party, and formed a government in coalition with the Janata Party under the banner of the Progressive Democratic Front. In 1997-98, the emergence of Sonia Gandhi as supreme leader of the Congress rattled Pawar. A few days before he, P.A. Sangma and Tariq Anwar revolted against Sonia on grounds of her foreign origins in May 1999, Pawar had hosted a soiree on the rear lawns of his Gurudwara Rakabganj Road bungalow which most thought, quite mistakenly, was in celebration of Sonia handing him charge of negotiations with Jayalalitha and other potential allies.

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'I tied the bomb on Dilawar's body': Beant's assassin Balwant Singh Rajoana was remorseless

(News Agency)-As Supreme Court on Wednesday refused to commute the death sentence of former Chief Minister Beant Singh assassination case convict Balwant Singh Rajoana and asked the Centre to take a further decision on his mercy plea as and when it deemed necessary. It was almost 28-year ago on the fateful evening of August 31, 1995, when Beant Singh was killed in a bomb blast at the Punjab and Haryana Civil Secretariat complex in Chandigarh. On the day of his assassination, constable Dilawar Singh Babbar of the Babbar Khalsa International acted as the suicide bomber. At the Secretariat, no one suspected anything as Dilawar approached the Chief Minister's car in the police uniform with files in his hand. Rajoana was the back-up bomber. A resident of Rajoana Kalan village in Ludhiana, Rajoana joined the Punjab Police as a constable in 1987. Lodged in Patiala Central Jail, he justified Beant's assassination, blaming the CM for "extra-judicial" killings of Sikh youths. It was he who tied the bombs on Dilawar's



body.

In his judicial confession recorded under Section 313 of the Criminal Procedure Code in 1996, Rajoana had stated, "I tied

the bomb on Dilawar's body with my own hands and I do not regret my involvement in the murder. I am proud of the sacrifice made by him and I bow my head before him in respect. Anguished over the Operation Blue Star and the anti-Sikh riots of 1984, we decided to kill Beant Singh." The Punjab Police arrested

Rajoana in December 1995, and a special CBI court in Chandigarh awarded him the death penalty on July 27, 2007. He did not even engage a lawyer during the trial as he had expressed no repentance for this murder. In August 2009, he wrote to the Punjab and Haryana High Court Chief Justice for his death penalty case to be considered separate from that of his co-accused, who had challenged the conviction by the trial court. His hanging was scheduled for March 31, 2012. But the SGPC filed a mercy petition before the President and the Union Home Ministry ordered a stay on his execution.

On the commemoration of the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev, the Centre in September 2019 decided to recommend cases of eight Sikh prisoners for special remission under Article 161 of the Constitution to the respective states. The Punjab Government also recommended processing the case of Rajoana for commuting his death sentence under Section 72 of the Constitution. In 2020, Rajoana filed a writ petition in the apex court, seeking directions for the Centre for the expeditious disposal of the case regarding death commutation.

Summer showers sweep north, south, northeast India, IMD issues yellow alert in Himachal



(News Agency)-As weather across India continues to remain contrary to usual expectations, the IMD has issued a cyclonic alert in the Bay of Bengal. The weather department has also issued a yellow warning in the hill state of Himachal Pradesh amid spells of rain.

As rainfall continues to batter several parts of the country, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Wednesday issued a yellow warning for thunderstorms and lightning at isolated places in Himachal Pradesh from May 4 to May 7 after heavy rain lashed parts of the hill state.

According to the weather department, the state received fresh snowfall as the maximum temperature plunged six to 14 notches below normal on Wednesday. The local weather office has predicted light to moderate rainfall at isolated places in the plains and mid-hills and light to moderate rainfall or snowfall in higher reaches from May 4 to May 7 in view of a fresh western disturbance, reported.

Delhi - A thick layer of fog enveloped Delhi-NCR on the fourth day of one of the hottest

months of the year, May. Yesterday (May 3), rains lashed Delhi, inundating low-lying areas and disrupting vehicular movement on key roads in the capital.

The city's minimum temperature settled at 20.2 degrees Celsius and the maximum temperature is predicted to settle around 28 degrees Celsius, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

Northwest India - The IMD has predicted light to moderate, fairly widespread to widespread rainfall/snowfall with thunderstorm/lightning/gusty winds (wind speed 30-40 kmph) over Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhatisgarh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Goa.

A fresh spell of rainfall is likely to commence over the region from May 5, with scattered to fairly widespread rainfall/snowfall over the Western Himalayan region and isolated to scattered rainfall over plains of northwest India for the subsequent two to three days, said the weather department.

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'You Can't Hide Things': Feinstein, When journalists are persecuted, we all suffer Old Age and Removing Senators

By JOANNE KENEN

At age 89, Dianne Feinstein is not the first, and certainly won't be the last, U.S. senator to be caught up in speculation that a cognitive or physical decline has rendered her unable to do her job.

The Senate is full of people in their 70s and 80s, and a smattering have served into their 90s. Some are remarkably sharp and spry. Others, not so much.

And for the "not so much" lawmakers, there's little that their leaders and colleagues can do about it, other than cross their fingers, gently nudge them to resign or count the days until the next election, which in the U.S. Senate can be up to six years away. During the Trump years, administration officials reportedly discussed deploying the Constitution's 25th Amendment, which can be invoked to remove a president deemed unfit to serve. But no similar mechanism exists for dislodging members of Congress.

At the same time, Washington has become a gerontocracy. Match up the demographic reality with the political reality of a deeply polarized Senate and a majority so slender that the absence of a single lawmaker can mean almost nothing gets done, and the cries for reform may grow louder. That's true even as legal scholars and those on Capitol Hill acknowledge how difficult it will be to act.

Stephen Vladeck, a law professor at the University of Texas and an expert on constitutional law, told me that after the Sept. 11 attacks, the special Continuity of Government Commission examined the issue of incapacitated lawmakers. The panel ultimately confirmed that under the Constitution, the sole tool Congress has to oust a member is an expulsion vote, which requires a two-thirds majority.

Expulsion has happened just 15 times in Senate history - and 14 of them were senators who sided with the Confederacy during the Civil War. Expulsion proceedings have started in other cases of alleged corruption or wrongdoing since then, but either they fell short of the two-thirds threshold, or the senator resigned before a vote. None were ousted because of health or disability.

The only other senator expelled in all of U.S. history was for treason back in 1797. In other words, Confederate sympathizers aside, expulsion is so rare that just as many senators - one - have been kicked out as have been elected despite being dead.

Given how many elderly senators there are nowadays, with some risk of becoming incapacitated, "this is a big problem," Vladeck wrote in an email.

"There may not be an obvious way to solve it short of (1) a more robust use of the expulsion power; or (2) a constitutional amendment." The framers, of course, could not have envisioned the problem of a Senate filled with rapidly aging members. Life expectancy in the late 18th century, when the Constitution was written, was much shorter than it is now. A minimum age for senators, 30, was established, but there was no upper limit.

Dementia was less common in those days, simply because people died of other things first. And trying to impose a maximum age at this point would be highly contentious.

"It's an unwieldy solution as not everyone who is older is unable to serve - and it's also disrespectful, if not quite disenfranchisement, of older voters," said Spelman College political scientist Dorian Brown Crosby, as it would deprive them of representation by their peers and send a message that all old people were washed up.

And without any imminent institutional or constitutional way to address fitness and age, Brown Crosby said it's up to lawmakers themselves to "take an internal assessment." She noted that former Speaker Nancy Pelosi and her top lieutenants accepted that the time had come to hand off leadership to a new generation even though they continued to serve in the House.

Under the 25th Amendment, a president can be relieved of their powers if the vice president and a majority of the Cabinet determine the president is unable to fulfil the duties of the office. Could something similar be established for lawmakers?

Amending the Constitution is never easy, although this would be the sort of proposal that doesn't have a built-in partisan advantage, as both Republicans and Democrats get old. Perhaps it could even gain traction among the public in today's populist, anti-establishment moment. But for the moment, there's no such movement bubbling up.

Given the changes in longevity, many people - not just senators - often work past the traditional retirement age of the mid-60s. But some workplaces have mandatory retirement ages; airline pilots are a good example. And employers have other ways, gentle or blunt, of terminating a worker who no longer has the mental acuity to perform the job. Voters have the ultimate say for politicians, but what if something happens in the middle of a term?

Jodie Ginsberg remembers an important lesson from her decade as a Reuters foreign correspondent and bureau chief: there simply is no substitute for being at the scene.

"The first and most important source is what journalists see in front of them - their ability to give a firsthand, eyewitness account," says Ginsberg, now the president of Committee to Protect Journalists, the non-profit advocacy organization based in New York City. A memorable case in point was how two Associated Press journalists last year were able to tell what was happening on the ground in Mariupol, Ukraine. As a Russian siege largely destroyed the city, children's bodies filled mass graves and shells demolished a maternity hospital, but Russian officials tried to deny it and called the horror stories nothing but fiction. "The Russians said this was all a fake, but the AP journalists at the scene were able to say no, and tell the real story," Ginsberg said. One of them, Yevgeny Maloletka, took an unforgettable photograph, seen on front pages around the world, of an injured pregnant woman being carried on a gurney from the bombed-out hospital by emergency workers; her baby was born dead and she died soon afterwards. But with journalists threatened with harassment, danger and even imprisonment around the world, that crucial ability to report on the ground - to get the invaluable eyewitness account - has been sorely diminished.

The situation is dire; as democracy declines worldwide, there are more journalists in prison now than at any time since the CPJ began keeping track. The organization's annual prison census showed 363 reporters in prison at the end of last year - an increase of

20% from the previous year, with the most journalists jailed in Iran, China, Myanmar, Turkey and Belarus.

This ugly trend means less on-the-ground reporting - not only by the imprisoned journalists but by many others who flee conflict zones or are forced to censor themselves in order to avoid the growing dangers. When the Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich was arrested in late March on false espionage charges in Russia - he remains imprisoned - many western journalists finally fled the country joining those who had left months earlier. The threats had simply become untenable. "Evan's arrest sends a powerful message to other journalists - that you may face something similar," Ginsberg told me. "That has a chilling effect on reporting, which is the aim of the repressive governments doing this kind of harassment and imprisonment. It is meant to silence correspondents who face extreme danger. These days, the dominance of authoritarian governments around the world make life hazardous for all kinds of journalists. Local and regional reporters around the world may bear the brunt most, partly because they don't have the protection and legal resources of large news organizations.

In addition to the countries named above, Ginsberg said that Mexico, Haiti, Russia and parts of Latin and South America are particularly difficult places for journalists to do their work now. Concerned people can help. They can show they care about journalism by subscribing to news organizations or donating to free-speech and press-rights organizations including CPJ, Pen America and Reporters Without Borders. And perhaps most important of all, they can keep jailed journalists in mind, and keep their plight in the public consciousness.

By Margaret Sullivan

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2021 Ceasefire Was Not a Pakistani Favour, It Was a Necessity

By: Sushant Sareen

The February 2021 ceasefire agreement between India and Pakistan came as something of a bolt from the blue. Nobody really expected such a development at that time. Relations between India and Pakistan, never good at the best of times, had taken a sharp downturn after the constitutional reforms in Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019. Pakistanis had launched what they thought was a blistering global propaganda campaign against India, directing it personally against the Indian leadership. The bitterness between the two sides had reached a point where it seemed even a civilised conversation was no longer possible. It was against this bilateral setting that the Director General of Military Operations (DGMOs) of the two countries "agreed to address each other's core issues and concerns which have the propensity to disturb the peace and lead to violence. Both sides agreed to strict observance of all agreements, understandings and cease firing along the Line of Control and all other sectors". At that time, the commentariat,



which was utterly clueless about what was being worked out on the back channel between the two adversaries, suddenly acted all knowledgeable about what prompted this agreement. On both sides of the Radcliffe Line, it was almost like an epiphany that the thaw was prompted by India's growing discomfiture over the deteriorating situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China. Convinced that India was trying to defuse the LoC in order to avoid getting caught in a two-front situation with both Pakistan and China acting in collusion, no one really bothered to ask what was in it for Pakistan to agree to the ceasefire, especially since it

meant bailing out India? After all, given the state of relations, Pakistan would have revelled in India's predicament of being simultaneously engaged on two fronts.

The simple reason why Pakistan wanted the ceasefire was because it needed it, perhaps even more than India. Pakistan agreed to the ceasefire not for India's sake but because it served Pakistan's interests; the converse was true in India's case. In other words, both sides entered into a ceasefire because it suited them, not because they were trying to be nice or cute to the other side. For the Pakistanis, there were compelling reasons to cool things

down with India. Recently, Pakistani journalists revealed that Pakistan's former Army Chief Gen Qamar Bajwa had admitted to Pakistani media personnel in 2021 that the Pakistan Army was in no state to fight a war against India. According to Bajwa, the Pakistan Army faced serious equipment and logistics problems - the tanks and aircraft were in bad shape, fuel supplies were running short, the economy was running on fumes and the treasury was empty. Inflation was rising, energy prices were out of control, the rupee was under pressure, and the budgets of the armed forces had been virtually frozen. Pakistan could certainly defend itself against an Indian attack but it would be insane to initiate a war against India. Even the ceasefire violations along the LoC were proving ruinous. The bottom line was that continued confrontation and open hostility was proving unaffordable and Pakistan needed an honourable off-ramp.

Apart from the economic crunch, there was a drift in governance. Meanwhile, the security situation was uncertain. The end game had started in

Afghanistan. Pakistan expected a flood of refugees. There was no clarity on whether Afghanistan would descend into a civil war that would suck in Pakistan. The last thing Pakistan needed in such an uncertain state of affairs was an active eastern front with India. As things turned out, even though there was no civil war or flood of refugees from Afghanistan, there was a new wave of terrorism that came into Pakistan. That the ceasefire came as a boon for Pakistan, which is now contending with multiple crises, is a no-brainer.

To the credit of Gen Qamar Bajwa, he had shown the foresight to anticipate how things might turn out in 2021 and took steps that he thought were best for his country. The fact that some of these steps suited India was incidental. Even so, the convergence of interests in cooling things down was what led to both sides agreeing to a ceasefire. Both countries have since used the peace along LoC to their advantage. They have beefed up their defences, and repaired and strengthened their bunkers and other defensive structures.

China's war on our dollar is really about ruling the world

By Rep. Mark Green

It's never been more important for the United States to turn its attention to Xi Jinping and his malign ambitions for Communist China in the world economy. In its latest gambit, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is trying to make India's Rupee the currency for BRIC countries-Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. If this happens, it will devastate the U.S. economy, damage India, and empower China.

The CCP has been waging a Wei Chi war for years. A Wei Chi war or "encirclement" war involves setting long-term strategic plans to gain power over one's adversaries rather than engaging in open conflict. However, this war "by other means" can be just as deadly.

Communist China has been hard at this game all over the



world. In March, Brazil and China struck a trade deal to ditch the U.S. dollar and BRIC countries announced the formation of a new currency, effectively kicking the U.S. dollar out of trade with them. Even our allies and economic partners are turning away from the United States economy for what they see as a better alternative to a rapidly devaluing U.S. dollar. France has made oil deals with China in yuan, while Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said

there's no reason to continue to rely on the U.S. dollar.

How did this happen? We've become our own worst enemy. And we have no one to blame but ourselves-our own U.S. Treasury that is. The decisions of the Biden administration have decimated the value of our dollar. We cannot continue to spend more money we don't have, only to throw more cash into our economy without considering the repercussions. The more money this

administration prints, the higher the supply of the U.S. dollar, and the lower the demand for it. From a trade perspective, we import about 75 percent of our everyday goods. When the value of our dollar is in freefall, countries who sell us goods demand more money in exchange. That means you, the consumer, pay for the skyrocketing prices. This puts the United States in a dire position for Communist China to exploit. This is how Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party weaken America. As demand for the U.S. dollar drops, the CCP can move in like a weed growing in a garden. Add in China's malign actions to weaken our global standing, plus the decline in demand for the dollar, and more countries will continue to shift towards the yuan or other currencies.

With the United States out of the picture, China can take control

of the world economy. That's why coercing India into making the rupee the currency of BRIC is in China's best interest, not India's. If the rupee becomes the currency for BRIC, its value will increase significantly. Once this occurs, the cost of buying imports decreases and the cost of buying domestic increases dramatically. This would be a bad thing-a very bad thing-for a large portion of India's population.

This is the antithesis of what is happening to our economy today. While our dollar plummets in value, Communist China is looking to saturate India's economy. No economy wants to sit on either end of the spectrum, which is why it's so important to have balance. Devaluing our dollar means consumers pay more for imported goods, while saturating India's economy means their consumers pay more for Indian-made goods. \

New Leftists Are More Radical:

For Them, Aurangzeb is New Akbar and Hinduness is the Root of All Evil

By **Abhishek Banerjee**

Have you heard the expression "idea of India?" Most likely, yes. For a lot of people, it means doing things the Nehruvian way. They just want to roll back everything that has happened since 2014 and go back to how it used to be in the good old days. What could be so bad about that?

Not so fast. Because we are actually looking at a moving target here. 'Pre-Mughals, I don't think there was any idea of India,' says historian Rudrangshu Mukherjee, who is also the chancellor of Ashoka University. He is also one of the authors of a new book with a rather bold title. They called it "A New History of India".

Do you see what is happening? It used to be that eminent historians would attribute the idea of India to Nehru. Here it must be said that Nehru himself made no such claim. In fact, Nehru writes most humbly about his effort to understand India and to discover the ancient nation to which he belonged. But that is not surprising. The courtiers are always more loyal than the king. But that was then. The Congress party has not been in power for a while now. And for a number of historians, Nehru is no longer good enough. The idea of India must belong to the Mughals now. Of course, both points of view are ridiculous. A thousand years ago, Adi Shankara established four mutts at the four corners of Bharat. Over two thousand years ago, the Greeks came in contact with the Mauryan emperors. After Chandragupta defeated Alexander's former general Selukus Nikator, the Greek traveller Megasthenes visited our land and recorded his impressions in his book 'Indika.' India has always been around, before the Mughals and before Nehru. But it is still disturbing if they want to switch one myth with another.

You must have heard about the recent changes made by the NCERT. No, they did not get rid of the Mughals from the textbooks. They merely removed one chapter for students in the twelfth grade. But while many historians fume in public over

these minor changes, they are actually using the downtime to revise their old narratives. They are preparing for a much more radical, dangerous new version of history. As and when a new ruling party comes to town, as it inevitably will, this might be the version they teach in schools. In the name of "desaffronising" textbooks, of course. Nehru would be too much of a Hindu name for their liking. This time it would have to be the Mughals instead. 'India is an overarching and

the seed. The name Bharat is too much of a reminder to Hindus about their ancient nation. Even after Partition, the current geographic form of India is too close to that glorious ancient nation. Too close for comfort, in fact. And thus, it cannot be trusted. It must be torn apart, thread by thread.

It is no use telling these people about Adi Shankara establishing four mutts at the four corners of Bharat. As it happens, Adi Shankara was from modern-day Kerala. One of the places that

its construction. He helped to construct a false Hindu majority and a new Hindu identity." So says philosopher Divya Dwivedi. A bold new conspiracy theory is taking root, with Mahatma Gandhi as the main oppressor of Indians. And what better way to deny a nation to Hindus than to argue that Hindus never existed in the first place.

It's a beautiful thing, the destruction of words, Orwell wrote in his famous dystopian novel. Once the word Hindu is no more, you can do anything to the

He died with "Hey Ram" on his lips. In fact, one wonders how leftist intellectuals let him be all these years, without attacking him. Most probably because the Congress party wanted to claim the legacy of Gandhi. It suited them to keep connecting the Mahatma's assassination to the RSS. As the Congress goes into decline, the left will turn on Gandhi. And Nehru too.

BHAGAVAD GITA, A BOOK OF HATE

By now, you can guess how they would approach this. Where was the Bhagavad Gita revealed? On a battlefield. And so, it "rationalises mass slaughter." That is according to Audrey Truschke, now a celebrated historian on the left. She admits that many Hindus, including Gandhi, read the Bhagavad Gita as a 'standalone work,' and even use it to justify non-violence. "In the Mahabharata's plot, however," writes Truschke, "The Bhagavad Gita rationalises mass slaughter."

In other words, Gandhi and all those other Hindus who honour the Bhagavad Gita are simply taking things out of context. Deliberately or otherwise. Much of Truschke's work has been about establishing Aurangzeb as an enlightened, generous and secular ruler. So maybe Gandhi was bad, but Aurangzeb was good. Would any historian turn such a lens upon any other religion? Do we dare name the books or quote the passages? No, we would not want to be accused of having any phobias. In fact, Truschke complains about how the story of the Mahabharata blurs the line between 'good' and 'evil.' 'The bad guys sometimes act more ethically than the good guys,' she tells the world. Yes, because that is how reality works. And that is what makes the Mahabharata so wonderful. Unlike the simple-minded absolutes of Abrahamic religions, the pagan mind view of the world is more complex. Our minds can deal with ambiguity. The Westerner has always looked at this with disgust. They have always accused pagan cultures of being uncivilized, having no sense of right or wrong. Old prejudice is not new research.



inclusionary idea; Bharat is atavistic, emotional, exclusionary,' Aatish Taseer wrote in 2020. At the time I thought the remark was an aberration or even a joke. The word 'Bharat' is exclusionary? Since when? But Taseer explains his view. The name 'Bharat' reminds Hindus that this is their holy land. Yes, but so what? What is wrong with a Hindu remembering their own culture? Do we all have to become like the soulless bots at the New York Times, the Washington Post, the BBC and Atlantic magazine? You know, serving the US military-industrial complex, and the objectives of globalism. But in the world of intellectuals, no bad idea ever goes to waste. Rudrangshu Mukherjee now claims that the Sanskrit word Bharatvarsha does not even include Dakshina or the south. In other words, they are sowing

they think was not included in Bharatvarsh. You cannot even embarrass these people by pointing out that our constitution begins with the words 'India, that is Bharat.' They already know. The whole point of their radical ideology is to give a handle to those who want to break up the republic. We can guess the ugly ways in which this will play out. Before long, you will see street protests against the use of the term Bharat, from passports to currency notes. The intellectual class knows our faultlines very well, and how to use them.

MAHATMA GANDHI, PUBLIC ENEMY

"The Hindu religion was invented in the early 20th century in order to hide the fact that the lower caste people are the real majority of India. In fact, religious minorities have been victims of this false majority and Gandhi played a very significant role in

leftover groups of people. To their holy places, their history and their culture. How will you describe the oppression of a people if you don't even have a name for who they are?

The old kind of leftist, or 'sarkari leftist' if you will, used to have a bit of a compromise position. But with the Congress party no longer in power, the radical new left wants to take a wrecking ball to Hinduism itself. And openly so. And for that, they must take on Gandhi, arguably the world's most fondly remembered Hindu. "Gandhi theologized politics just when it was beginning on the subcontinent...Of course, he was one of the many upper caste leaders who constructed this origin for this polity, but today we must discard it," Dwivedi adds. He is often pictured holding a Bhagavad Gita. He had favourite bhajans such as "Vaishnav jan toh." He opposed cow slaughter.

Byju's - When Ambition Overrides Good Governance And Ethics

By Pankaj Mishra

So what if Byju's is the world's most valuable edtech startup?

So what if the founder of Byju's believes he has attracted more FDI into the country than any other startup?

So what if Byju's investors range from the Chan-Zuckerberg Initiative to Sequoia, some of the world's most iconic names? If India's most valuable startup cannot come clean on its books, none of the above matters.

It is nothing short of astounding how Byju's, in the face of disgruntled customers, a toxic work culture, and questionable financial practices, continues to project a successful image. How can a company with such a hollow core maintain the facade of being among the world's most valuable edtech enterprises?

The seemingly Teflon-like ability of Byju's to deflect criticism and scrutiny is difficult to comprehend, particularly given the high-profile nature of its investors and board members.

If Byju's founders and investors cannot ensure routine filings about the company's financials, they are all accountable. Delayed financial filings and disgruntled voices from inside and outside the company are signals that Byju's may have skeletons in the closet that

hundreds of crores worth of marketing splurge cannot hide anymore.

In 2022, when Byju's announced it was one of the sponsors for the FIFA World Cup, it followed it up by laying off around 4,000 employees. The reason? Path to profitability.

Why is it that a company that spends hundreds of crores on brand building, including signing Lionel Messi as a brand ambassador, lays off employees and fails to file its financial statements as required by law?

Byju's: A Startup on Steroids

The meteoric rise of Byju's highlights the journey of a startup on steroids, with its insatiable appetite for growth and market dominance taking precedence over all else. In just a few short years, the company's valuation skyrocketed from \$1 billion in 2018 to an astounding \$22 billion by 2022, fueled by an aggressive expansion strategy and the relentless pursuit of acquisitions. However, this breakneck pace has come at a cost, with cracks appearing in the edtech giant's facade.

As the company pumped millions into marketing campaigns, including the high-profile signing of Lionel Messi as brand ambassador, questions about its financial practices and governance began to emerge. Customers complained of subpar

products and services, while employees suffered in a toxic work environment. Despite being legally required, the absence of financial statements further raised eyebrows and cast a shadow of doubt over the company's true worth.

Its unchecked ambition propelled it to the forefront of the global edtech market. Still, it has also exposed the company to the consequences of lax governance, financial irregularities, and a deteriorating reputation.

How did Byju's, India's most valuable startup, manage to evade the scrutiny of its financial practices for so long? What role did the company's board play in overseeing its operations?

These questions demand answers, as Byju's continues to make headlines for all the wrong reasons. The company's rapidly dwindling valuation, disgruntled customers, and toxic work culture all point to a startup prioritising growth at any cost, ignoring the need for transparency and accountability.


The board of Byju's, which only has founders and investors, has remained conspicuously silent in the face of the company's myriad controversies, especially about regulatory filings. This silence raises severe concerns about the board's commitment to corporate governance, accountability, and ethical

conduct. Time and again, we have seen the devastating consequences of the board members' failure to provide adequate oversight, leading to the collapse of seemingly successful companies and the loss of livelihoods for thousands of employees.


As the Indian startup ecosystem watches the Byju's saga unfold, it serves as a cautionary tale of the perils that can arise when unchecked ambition takes precedence over sound governance and ethical practices.

The Consequences of a Founder and Investor-Only Board

The governance issues at Byju's are a wake-up call for the Indian startup ecosystem. The company's board, comprising mainly founders and investors, has failed to hold itself accountable for its actions. This lack of oversight has had severe consequences, as the company now faces investigations for financial irregularities and employee complaints. Theranos, the infamous biotechnology startup once valued at \$9 billion, serves as a chilling reminder of the potential fallout when boards neglect their fiduciary duties. Despite mounting evidence of fraud and deception, Theranos' board members failed to intervene, resulting in the company's spectacular downfall.



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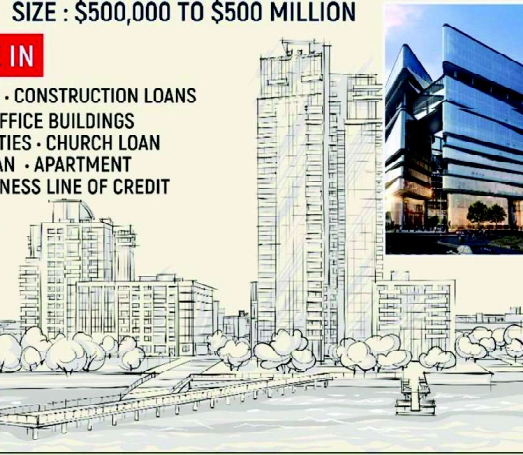
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Alliance with AAP will only haemorrhage Congress further. It should learn from BJP's rise



By SHRUTI KAPILA

There is a fatalism in current Indian politics that the Narendra Modi-led government will return to power in 2024. This has much to do with Modi's own persona and popularity ratings that remain high after nearly a decade of rule. The focus on personality, however, hides in plain sight the crisis of party politics in Indian democracy. If Hindutva is the ascendant idea of India today, then ideological and political contest remains multipolar and even fragmented. The central paradox of Indian politics today is that while there

may be two ideas and ideologies on the identity of India, they are not represented by any two national parties despite an astonishing number of political parties in the country. If anything, a successful coalition of opposition parties, as is being floated currently, will extract the greatest amount from and will be at the cost of the Indian National Congress. As the only party with a national footprint, any prospect of a grand alliance will be staked on and paid for by the Congress. This crucial lack of bipartisanship, arguably, has only led to the domination of the

Any prospect of a grand alliance will be paid for by the Congress. The lesson of the cynical coalitions of the '90s is that they empowered the BJP.

Bharatiya Janata Party or BJP's Hindutva politics.

For all the recent talk, photo ops, and frenetic activity among India's opposition politics, the idea of unity is not only spectral but mainly lacks confidence and even credibility. Here, Modi can take further credit for uniting, if momentarily, what is ultimately divergent. There is, after all, little that binds an Arvind Kejriwal with a Rahul Gandhi, apart from the sharp wedge of court cases prosecuted by an overzealous State machinery.

Ever since the arrival of multi-party politics in the late 1980s, India has continued with the model of one dominant party in a sea of several contending parties. There are two reasons why Indian politics isn't bipartisan. One is ideological, and the other is caste or the political remaking of India's social fabric. AAP and Congress don't go together

The new opposition unity talk is

based on a thin ideology, which is primarily posited as anti-BJP or Hindutva. Without a powerful, positive precept and animating idea, the opposition is but just that - a single-minded non-force. The history of coalition governments in India, starting with the first-ever such experiment in 1977 (with the formation of the Janata Party) and beyond, especially through the heyday of coalitions in the 1990s, reveals the coalition pattern to be strongly non-ideological.

Earlier, the only binding force was a strong anti-Congress sentiment, which indeed ceded the ideological space to a rising BJP for it to capture the national mood through the LK Advani-led Ram Mandir movement. The opposition has yet to recover from that loss of ideological momentum. The singular failure of the 10-year Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) rule was its inability to

forge a political and emotional dynamic around developmental nationalism that had led to its ascendance to power in the first place. In the same decade, the BJP transformed itself with aggressive agility as it sought to absorb the full range of nationalist sentiment. Whether it is development or foreign policy - to say nothing of its pursuit of a Hindu First polity - the BJP's ideological space is now both broad and exclusionary.

By contrast, the new momentum associated with the Aam Admi Party is resolutely anti-ideological. As a key opposition player, the party's rise and potential pose the greatest threat not to the BJP but to the Congress, and this threat will not be restricted to direct competition in places like Delhi and Punjab. Overarchingly, the AAP and the Congress are vying for the same ideological and political space of the centre.



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As Hate and Fear Take Grip, World Needs a Moral Idol Like the Dalai Lama

By Pema Dhondup Gakyil

Haters of the Dalai Lama, judging him with a picture or a small clip they saw, must understand that they are not hurting an old spiritual man but the very manifestation of Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva who represents compassion. In other words, for us Tibetans, he is our god. Now, imagine any other religious figure of any faith or their messiah being trashed like that for nothing.

There are also those that call themselves atheists and see an old lustful man in that video or the picture. Ask yourself as an atheist, like we Buddhists do, because Buddhism is an atheistic religion that does not have a creator and is based on logic, reasoning and learning, which leads to acceptance and practice. Did you atheists try to find out the entire story behind the picture or the doctored video?

I've been waiting in India to begin a documentary series project: Search: Finding the Dalai Lama for nearly a month now. It is an attempt that started more than a decade ago. So it's not just a passion



project but an attempt to tell the world about the genesis of the Dalai Lama lineage. How? Why? When? All these questions about the Dalai Lama institution will be dramatised and answered, not to propagate but to let the world learn that the core purpose of the Dalai Lama lineage is to spread compassion and peace in the world. The current Dalai Lama is the 14th. Obviously, there were 13 before him.

Some days ago, an "almost sensational" news grabbed the world. What happened? That was the reaction I got when a friend frantically called and another passed me a clip of a video going viral. Some lowlifes had used

publicly available footage of a Dalai Lama event and doctored it to narrate a story of child abuse! Media, as usual, grabbed it and spread it further. People started churning out blogs for their subscribers. I had watched that event live and although I did feel many would misunderstand the gesture, I forgot about it because it was not a big deal for us Tibetans. I still kiss my grown-up daughter on her lips when I say goodbye. I know the West would show disapproval but she is my only daughter and she is who I care about the most, not anyone else.

My affection and care is pure. His Holiness's gesture to the boy was

far more than that. Just the mere fact that the kid got close and hugged him is considered a blessing that none of us Tibetans would ever get, not only in this life but in many others. So you see, those who spewed hate and continue to do so, have no idea how much they have hurt us. Yet, we remain non-violent. Well, that is what His Holiness has taught us. He says the enemy is your best teacher. They allow you to use your compassion. You can practice it, otherwise, even compassion remains a theory, he says.

A young boy in attendance, at a public event organised by his parents, who are seated next to the Dalai Lama, asks His Holiness for a hug. His Holiness calls him up. They hug. They bond. His Holiness then begins his playful self. After a kiss on the cheek, he says now you can kiss my lips. That barely happens and he continues the jest asking the kid to suck his tongue. My mother used to do that to us when we were kids. It means that she has given us everything and is left with nothing but her tongue to satisfy our hunger. Was my mother abusing us? It is foolish to even

contemplate that. Perhaps, if she was alive and did that in public today to her grandkids, she would be called a child abuser and separated from her family. Ridiculous!

The incident happened a month ago. Suddenly, news reports and online trolls began to appear which had nothing but dark intentions to malign him. The President of the Central Tibetan Administration said at a press conference that they found the source to be people that are 'Pro-China' propagandists.

I believe him. But, the damage was done. Hate was so toxic that I was shocked like all Tibetans and literally couldn't work for a few days. A person working with me on the documentary, calling it a 'spiritual journey', throughout our development phase up to this moment, suddenly had an opinion too. He decided to pull out and said, "Pema, no one wants to be attached with the Dalai Lama anymore. These people are working in the media and have an image to protect!" I felt the world must be coming to an end. There's so much fear and hate here.

Why Delhi Never Stops Chasing the Chimera of Peace Despite Pakistan Zealously Pursuing a Bleed-India Policy

By: Utpal Kumar

Pakistan has been a riddle - for India and the West. A nation that joined the Western bloc very early in its nationhood journey remained forever a self-proclaimed citadel of Islam. It fought the war against terrorism alongside the US-led alliance while simultaneously fathering the Taliban and other terrorist outfits. Maybe it was because of the nature of its origins wherein the worst of the Islamist forces were invoked. It may also be due to Pakistan's aspiration to be the "Land of the Pure" - an ideal that could manifest itself only when everything, including time, travels back to seventh-century Arabia.

No one, however, is more befuddled by the idea of Pakistan than an Indian. To him, Pakistan remains a muddled notion, so contrasting and contradictory that even after



seven decades of Partition and being at the receiving end of Islamabad's three-and-a-half wars and decades-long terrorist activities, an Indian still is not sure if he would be better off with or without a strong, prosperous Pakistan!

Partly, it's the result of the Hindu failure to comprehend the idea of the Abrahamic religions, especially Islam - and the Pakistani ingenuity at inventing

its Arab roots. A Hindu, grown up with the pluralistic notions of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', often finds it difficult to believe the division of the world into the ummah and the kafir and a theological sanction for the perpetual damnation of the latter even when he had lived a near-perfect life! Pakistan is the physical manifestation of this Islamist mindset, which is constantly locked up in a

civilisational battle with India. What makes Pakistan dangerously anti-India is its paranoiac search for Arab roots. It disowns its indigenous history and invents another to suit the Islamist worldview. Thus Mohammed bin Qasim becomes the "first citizen of Pakistan" - the very invader from Arabia who killed, maimed and raped thousands of Sindhis in 712 AD. Everything before him is consciously forgotten. Everything after him is suitably distorted. Pakistan is today, in the words of VS Naipaul, "a dreadful mangling of history", where "too much has to be ignored or angled" (Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions Among the Converted Peoples).

Even the early Muslim campaigns have been used to bolster the morale of the Pakistan Army - one of the favourites being the Battle of Badr, where just over 300 Muslim men with no military

training defeated 1,000 seasoned soldiers equipped with armour, 700 camels and 100 horses. It is this mindset that makes Pakistanis constantly challenge India. They think the Battle of Badr can be repeated. What further makes Islamabad a perennial enemy is the Pakistan Army's belief that "retaining the ability to challenge" New Delhi itself is victory. Elaborating on this, American author C Christine Fair writes in *Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army's Way of War*: "For Pakistan's men on horseback, not winning, even repeatedly, is not the same thing as losing. But simply giving up and accepting the status quo and India's supremacy, is, by definition, defeat... Pakistan's generals would always prefer to take a calculated risk and be defeated than to do nothing at all."

By Maj Gen Jagatbir Singh

Residents of Sangiote village in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district did not celebrate Eid. The village was the destination of the army truck of 49 Rashtriya Rifles, which was ambushed on April 20, leaving five soldiers dead and one critically injured. Four of these soldiers were from Punjab and one from Odisha. The vehicle was carrying fruits and other items from the Bhimber Gali Camp for an iftar gathering meant to be held in Sangiote later that evening.

According to reports, invitations had gone out to several people in the village for the event at 1900 hours, and arrangements were being taken care of by the 49 Rashtriya Rifles (RR). Unfortunately, a shadow group of the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), People's Anti-Fascist Front (PAFF) that carried out this deadly attack during the holy period, had other plans. The terrorists took advantage of the terrain, treacherous stretch of road and bad weather and, as per reports, used Chinese-origin steel core ammunition that created a terrible incendiary fallout leading to the death of these brave hearts. The PAFF emerged after the abrogation of Article 370 and they are now threatening to carry out attacks at the G20 venues in Srinagar and Leh. It is believed that seven to eight terrorists were involved in this attack. This little-



Poonch Terror Attack:

Low-intensity Conflict in J&K Must Not Be Allowed to Bounce Back

known group has been morphed from JeM and is a ploy to avoid sanctions under the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). Massive search and combing operations are ongoing in Bhata Dhurian-Tota Gali and neighbouring areas to hunt down the terrorists involved in the attack. Bhata Dhurian is a notorious infiltration route for terrorists from across the Line of Control (LoC) because of its topography, dense forest cover and natural caves.

Special Forces and National Security Guard are also engaged in the operation in the dense forest areas. It is being said that drones, sniffer dogs and metal detectors are also being used. On April 26, a man was detained by the Security Forces who admitted that he "sheltered" the terrorists for two months and provided them support. The Northern Army Commander, Lieutenant General Upendra Dwivedi, while taking stock of the ongoing operation,

during a visit to Poonch and Rajouri has 'asked the troops to be relentless in their pursuit'. The terrorists reportedly hid themselves in a culvert on this road stretch before attacking the vehicle. Over 50 bullet marks have been found on the vehicle that shows the intensity of the firing. During the search operation, troops came across a few natural cave hideouts in the area, which could possibly have been used by the terrorists in the past, they said,

adding the troops are also looking for any improvised explosive devices (IEDs) terrorists may have planted in the densely forested areas, especially in deep gorges and caves. The attack has significance in the context of the G20 Tourism Working Group meeting to be held in J&K next month. The ambush also took place soon after the announcement that Pakistan Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto will attend the Goa meeting of the Foreign Ministers' Council of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). The aim naturally being to derail these events.

In the past also, any positive movement in India-Pakistan relations has invited a terrorist response. Clearly, the perpetrators of the attack and their handlers from across the border must be hoping to throw a spoke into India's plan of hosting these meetings and thereby deny India a larger global role. However, such cowardly actions need not deter the nation as we cannot afford to let terror groups hold us hostage. A terror incident also restores the image of J&K as a conflict zone. That, in turn, might lend Pakistan some badly needed credibility on its Kashmir narrative. There are updates already about the fact that these terrorists had local support and had been in the area for some time spreads a false narrative that the locals resent the Indian Army.

Change or Face an Existential Challenge:

Seven Jolts Radical Islam Has Been Dealt With Lately

By: Abhijit Majumder

Let us begin with a caveat: Islamic terrorism and fundamentalism is in no hurry to disappear.

According to the website the religion of peace.com which tracks reported cases of Islamist terrorism, 741 people died in 145 attacks across the world during Ramzan (March 23 to April 23) this year in the name of Islam. From Al Shabaab deadly Bar Sangunni strike in Somalia that killed 32 to five Indian soldiers killed in Poonch, and from 52 of a farming community massacred in Nigeria to 60 butchered in Burkina Faso, jihadists made the Holy month awash with blood.

A mob in Indonesia reportedly beat up two women and threw them into the sea for eating in a café

instead of observing the Ramzan fast. While in India's Gujarat, young Muslim woman Shaista was allegedly killed by five of her family members for falling in love with a Hindu man.

So, let us not fool ourselves. It will take very long for the corpse train to stop. But brakes have been applied, and even if it takes a long time, the beast will weaken and hopefully stop some day. Here are seven jolts radical Islam has been dealt with lately. None of them are superficial. All of them contain the power to change. Any attempt at innovation, interpretation and integration come at a high price in Islam. The decree that the Quran is not to be challenged continues to stymie new ideas.

Muslims who deviated famously

paid with blood. Salman Rushdie lived under threat for decades and was finally stabbed because his Satanic Verses seemed to mock Mohammad. Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz was stabbed because his book, The Children of Gabalawi, offended Egypt's highest Islamic authority, Al Azhar. Arab scholar Suliman Bashear was thrown from a second-story window by his students at the University of Nablus in the West Bank after he suggested that Islam developed as a religion slowly rather than emanating fully from the mouth of the Prophet.

Degreed to live forever in 7th century wisdom, Islam fails to come up with ideas on issues concerning newer generations like climate change, women's

development, LGBTQ+, cryptocurrency, virtual dating, artificial intelligence and atheism without twisting itself up in an inarticulate rage.

2. INTERNET AND EX-MUSLIMS- In the past, even the harshest and most problematic tenets of Islam used to be passed down by parents and grandparents who tempered those down with their common sense and compassion. Internet has cut out that benign intermediary. It brings the verses raw to its audience.

It has also amplified the dissent of those like Taslima Nasreen, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Dina Nayeri, Tarek Fatah and others. Their work would have gone quietly and prematurely to the grave - perhaps along with their authors - if there

were no internet.

This has also spawned movements like Ex-Muslims and Awesome Without Allah, a silent but rapidly spreading body blow to the Ummah.

3. OIL ECONOMY WANING

Perhaps the biggest and most profound long-term threat to radical Islam is the bleak future of oil and rise of renewable/green energy. Since 2010, the stock value of the four largest oil firms has plummeted by more than half. In 2020, there were write-downs of \$145 billion of oil reserves and related assets. Oil money from West Asia has powered Islamic fundamentalism for very long. With that economy shrinking, radical Islam will have to find an alternative goldmine. And that won't be easy.

The Hypocrisy Of Maharashtra's Progressives

By Vinay Sahasrabudde

As Maharashtra celebrates its 63rd Foundation Day, some politicians in the state are causing controversy over the location of a petroleum refinery at Barsu village in the Sindhudurga district. Nothing highlights the hypocrisy and doublespeak of the Shiv Sena, the principal opposition party in the state, more vividly than this. A forward-looking Maharashtra is being forced to close doors to development and take the path of negativism.

One wonders what happened to its much-touted legacy of progressivism. Maharashtra was once known for intellectual giants such as Lokmanya Tilak, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, and C D Deshmukh, social reformers like Mahatma Phule, builders of institutions that revolutionised popular thinking like Dr Hedgewar, Vinoba Bhave, Maharshi Karve and Vithal Ramji Shinde, freedom fighters like VD Savarkar, and politicians like YB Chavan. Recently, Maharashtra seems to be struggling to provide truly honest intellectual leadership. The reasons for this decline are not far to seek. Firstly, the virus of hypocrisy has seriously afflicted the thinking circles in the



state. Not a single politician or social leader who takes pride in Maharashtra's progressive legacy ever forgets to mention that this is the land of Phule, Shahu Maharaj, and Ambedkar. For many, merely mentioning these names has served as an umbrella to hide all their undemocratic, feudalistic, and even obscurantist acts.

It was the era of post-Mahatma Gandhi's assassination that saw the sowing of the seeds of hypocrisy in Maharashtra's politics. The riots and arson, plunder and loot that were witnessed in the state immediately after Gandhi's dastardly assassination met with only feeble condemnation. Selective amnesia and

recognising only convenient facts were to become almost permanent ingredients of the approaches of most in the political class in Maharashtra, later!

Many from this so-called progressive cabal have closed their eyes when intellectual untouchability and thought-apartheid ruled the roost. Otherwise, known for tom-tomming about freedom of expression, they chose to look the other way when PB Bhave, a literary giant, was almost thrown out of the Marathi Sahitya Sammelan held immediately after the Emergency. All of a sudden, their liberal values vanished when Ramesh Patange, a senior RSS leader and author, was not allowed to speak at a seminar

held by progressives where he was an invited speaker. They were tight-lipped when a needless controversy was manufactured on the subject of Maharashtra Bhushan to be given to historian Babasaheb Purandare. When it comes to politics of hurt emotions, these tsars and tsarinas of Marathi progressivism have always taken a religion-specific approach and silently watched the gagging of the likes of Taslima Nasrin. The duplicity of their approach came to the fore when they remained silent on the ban of the Satanic Verses and created a brouhaha over a complaint against the famous Ghashiram Kotwal, decades before, both cases of alleged hurting of emotions!

What is more appalling is the progressive cabal's willingness to crawl in front of the Thackerays when, in fact, they are asked to bend. Today, whatever remains of the so-called Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA), parties that had opposed the ban on Ambedkar's Riddles in Ramayana have joined hands with those who had advocated the same from the rooftop. Shiv Sena politics was always known as anti-democratic. Balasaheb

Thackeray had defended the infamous Emergency of 1975. Besides the party's openly anti-South Indian or anti-Gujarati positions and the Robin Hood brand of politics, which is many times fuelled by protection money mechanisms, there are many aspects of Shiv Sena's style of functioning that no genuine progressive would ever accept. However, simply to cater to their own pathological hatred of RSS and BJP, progressives have been turning a blind eye to Shiv Sena's uncivil activism.

Throughout these years, Marathi progressives have developed a ghettoised mindset. With thought apartheid top of mind, most of them refuse to be seen in the company of a Sanghwal, deny recognition to any artist, litterateur, or journalist with an RSS background, and totally ignore the number of social work projects started by RSS persons. In the land of Phule-Shahu-Ambedkar, the progressives have promoted crass intellectual untouchability, and that too in the name of those who were true epitomes of all liberal values. All this puts a big question mark on Maharashtra's ability to provide thought leadership to the nation.

India Looks All Set To Miss A Huge Chance This Week



By Sudheendra Kulkarni

Neighbours should never stop talking. It's as axiomatic as former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's sage counsel that you can change your friends, but not your neighbours. Uninterrupted dialogue is the sine qua non of good neighbourliness. Dialogue should continue even when neighbouring countries are not on good terms with each other. Indeed, dialogue at multiple levels - people-to-people, between government leaders, diplomats,

traders and business groups, scholars, artists, sportspersons, and so on - is indispensable for changing the relations from bad to good, from unfriendly to friendly. The alternative to talking is fighting wars, and wars have consequences that are rarely positive.

All this is true. But strange are the ways the governments of India and Pakistan conduct their relations. Just how strange - indeed, how bizarre - is something we will soon know when the foreign ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation

Organisation (SCO) meet in Goa on May 4 and 5. With New Delhi assuming the rotating presidency of this multilateral organisation this year, it has invited Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari to participate in the meeting, which he has accepted. But if you think this will mark the resumption of long-stalled dialogue between India and Pakistan, and thus break the ice in their frozen relations, you will be disappointed. In all probability, there will be no bilateral meeting between Bhutto and his Indian host, Dr S Jaishankar, on the sidelines of the SCO event. If - and this too is a big if - the two ministers simply shake hands and exchange a few pleasantries, it would have exceeded everyone's expectations. Ahead of the Goa meeting, both sides have already dampened expectations to the lowest possible level. Pakistan's foreign minister has stated that "this visit should not be seen as a bilateral". His participation, he has

sought to explain, reflects "Pakistan's continued commitment to the SCO charter and process along with the importance that Pakistan accords to the region in its foreign policy priorities". As if the SCO charter bars any two member countries from having a bilateral meeting. The very first goal in the charter is "to strengthen mutual trust, friendship and good neighbourliness between the Member States". When asked if there will be a separate meeting with Bhutto, Jaishankar has virtually ruled it out by saying, "It is very difficult for us to engage with a neighbour who practices cross-border terrorism against us." Why have India-Pakistan governmental attitudes become so inflexible as to leave no scope for readiness to avail even rare opportunities? The blame must be shared by both sides. For long, Islamabad has made meaningful dialogue with New Delhi conditional upon the resolution of the Kashmir dispute.

Its own condition for dialogue on the dispute has changed widely over the decades, depending on who has been at the helm of the government and sometimes within the tenure of the same ruler. Thus, its demands have varied from insistence on a plebiscite under the UNSC resolution of 1948 to, most recently, rolling back the decisions taken by the Indian Parliament on 5 August 2019. The first demand has become irrelevant over time, and due to the enormous changes in the geopolitical realities in the geography of the erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir state, not the least of which is the fact that a part of Ladakh and also Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) is now under Chinese control. Bhutto himself has recently admitted that Pakistan is facing "an uphill task" in getting the Kashmir issue onto the agenda of the United Nations.

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Modi govt not leveraging its parliament strength for economic reforms. Using it for politics

BJP's pro-business, pro-economic reform image is now being dented, even though this regime is better positioned to make positive change than most before it.

By TCA SHARAD RAGHAVAN

The Narendra Modi government has been quite successful in using its majority in Parliament to push its socio-religious agenda but has failed to convincingly use this advantage to implement economic reform effectively. Further, while supporters of the government will praise the Prime Minister for his decisiveness, a quality detractors will call arbitrariness, the fact is that this quality greatly increases policy unpredictability. And that's not good for business confidence. But what's at stake here is something larger. When the BJP won the 2014 election, corporate India, small businesspersons, and traders around the country reacted positively, and with great enthusiasm. That pro-

business, pro-economic reform image is now being dented, even though this government is better positioned to make positive change than most before it. Squandering parliamentary majority

Let's start with the parliamentary actions. In its very first year in power, to which it came with a historic majority, the Modi government passed an ordinance to amend the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (RFCTLARR) Act 2013. This Act had been brought in by the UPA to replace the Land Acquisition Act 1894.

The government tried various times to get its amendments through. First as an ordinance, then as a bill, and again as an ordinance once the bill failed to be passed in Parliament. With a

simple majority, the government should have been secure enough to have held a debate on the issue. Instead, it allowed Opposition protests to scupper the matter.

More recently, this is what happened with the farm laws as well. Instead of encouraging debate in the Lok Sabha, an arena it was in control of, the Modi government allowed the agitation to spill over into the streets and the media.

In both cases, with the land and farm laws, the government had to withdraw its legislation.

While supporters will try to frame this as the government being responsive to differing opinions, they can't hide the embarrassment of public defeat. Another example of the Modi government squandering its parliamentary majority is the complete lack of movement on the



Labour Codes. Passed over the course of 2019 and 2020 in Parliament, the four Labour Codes are yet to be notified either by the Centre or the states.

Again, it can be seen as a good thing that the government isn't forcing through the legislation since it has been criticised by several stakeholders. But it can also be said that the government should have held more extensive consultations while framing the codes. It could have then used its majority in Parliament to pass legislation so that it actually sees the light of day. Again, a majority squandered.

The Modi government also has this

peculiar fondness for bringing in legislation through ordinances.

This is hard to understand since it only serves to undermine confidence in the parliamentary system, something the Modi government should instead be keen to bolster given its strength in that institution.

Then there are instances where the government has used Parliament well, but has then-through no fault of its own—seen responsibilities passed on to other, less decisive, bodies. Take the example of the Goods and Services Tax (GST). It was a landmark economic reform for the country.

Political lobbyists are pretending to be NGOs & fooling tax dept. Modi govt defanging them

By JAITHIRTH RAO

There has been quite a bit of noise about the current dispensation being against what is referred to as "civil society". One expects this kind of diatribe from illiberal Lefties. But such is the stranglehold of these ideas and ideologies that this slanted view has now started gaining wider traction. The principal objection seems to be that the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act 2010 is being weaponised against some NGOs. This and related issues are worth examining in some detail. When the Congress-led UPA 2 introduced draconian provisions in the FCRA law in 2010, I had gone on record opposing it. My article on that issue is available in the public domain. I mention this because I want it to be clear that I am not the usual adversary - the "fascist" supporter of the FCRA.



The FCRA is supposed to regulate foreign contributions. It has a provision that if foreign funds are received by an NGO, then the latter is required to use it for its own charitable purposes. The funds are not to be diverted to other NGOs or charity organisations. Based on the advice of some dubious and clever chartered accountants, some NGOs, instead of making contributions to other non-profits

- which they are now prohibited from doing - have come up with an "innovative" solution. They are "paying" other NGOs for "services". These services are usually in the grey and ambiguous domain of "consultancy". Now, clearly, the NGOs are trying to "indirectly" achieve what the law prohibits them from doing "directly".

None of these NGOs are babes

in the woods. They are acquainted with common law cases. There are hundreds of cases in the US, a country close to the purse strings of these NGOs, saying that it is impermissible to do indirectly what is not permitted directly. How can it be that if the Indian State invokes a common law principle so clearly enunciated in the US, it suddenly becomes a fascist enemy of decent NGOs? As it turns out, virtually all the regulatory action against foreign-funded NGOs has been for this reason. Don't tread where MNCs failed.

As someone who has dealt with tax authorities in nine different countries over the last 49 years, let me assure the clever chartered accountants advising these NGOs that corporations and banks have been experimenting with these devices and playing with these loopholes for decades and have rarely, if

ever, succeeded. The amateurish attempts by these NGOs to fool the tax department are going to get them nowhere. Where large multinational corporations (MNCs) have failed, NGOs should not tread.

Several ill-advised NGOs have gone one step further. They have tried to pretend that contributions received from their foreign donors have not been donations but payments for the elusive consultancy services rendered by their Indian arms for their foreign payments. Such obviously foolish attempts are bound to get them into trouble. There is no point in complaining after the fact.

Foreign-funded NGOs are welcome in our country if they wish to perform "charitable" acts like helping the visually challenged, the terminally ill, or the differently abled. As a country,

US calls on Beijing to halt 'provocative, unsafe conduct' in South China Sea

The Philippines on Friday accused China's coast guard of "aggressive tactics" following an incident during a Philippine coast guard patrol close to the Philippines-held Second Thomas Shoal. The US department called on Beijing to desist from its 'provocative and unsafe conduct'.

(News Agency)-The United States on Saturday called on China to stop harassing Philippine vessels in the South China Sea, pledging to stand with the Philippines at a time of simmering geopolitical tension. "We call upon Beijing to desist from its provocative and unsafe conduct," the U.S. State Department said in a statement. The Philippines on Friday accused China's coast guard of "aggressive tactics" following an incident during a Philippine coast guard patrol close to the Philippines-held Second Thomas Shoal, a flashpoint for previous altercations located 105 nautical miles (195 km) off its coast.

The Second Thomas Shoal is home to a small military contingent aboard a rusty World War Two-era U.S. ship that was intentionally grounded in 1999 to reinforce the Philippines' territorial claims. In February, the Philippines said a Chinese ship



had directed a "military-grade laser" at one of its resupply vessels. China claims sovereignty over almost the entire South China Sea with a "nine-dash line" on maps that stretches more than 1,500 km off its mainland and cuts into the exclusive economic zones of Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia. An international arbitral ruling in 2016 dismissed that line as having no legal basis. China's foreign ministry on Friday said the Philippine vessels had intruded into Chinese waters and made deliberate provocative moves. The State Department said Washington "stands with our Philippine allies in upholding the rules-based international maritime order."

Ahead of Bilawal's Goa trip for SCO meet, a look at Bhuttos tryst with India

India and Pakistan are newbies in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and if you look at the complexities of the relationship dynamics, it can be legitimately considered a miracle that they are meeting at all.

(News Agency)-Amnesia is helpful when it comes to international relations. An air of incongruous expectation surrounds the prospective arrival of Pakistan Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) meeting in Goa on May 4-5.

Now, the SCO consists of India, currently chairman of the group in which capacity it is hosting the summit; China, a country with which relations are strained over Himalaya-sized unanswered questions of cartographic and other sorts of aggressions by the People's Liberation Army; Russia, which is in earnest combat with Ukraine, and a host of proxy interests with half a finger on the nuclear button; and Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, countries many people may not be able to point out in a map even. Tagged along as observers, a shorthand for knocking to join the

strange grouping, are four countries - Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia; more over six countries - Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia, Nepal, Turkey and Sri Lanka - have a dialogue partner status. It is quite a collection.

India and Pakistan are newbies in the organisation and if you look at the complexities of the relationship dynamics, it can be legitimately considered a miracle that they are meeting at all. It is therefore slightly unlikely that the SCO, after Goa, will suddenly become a pillar of "the emerging more representative world order based on the supremacy of international law, primarily the UN Charter" as piously envisaged in one of the groupings noteworthy but baffling declarations.

That brings us to young Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. The arrival of a Pakistani Foreign Minister on Indian soil is looked upon with the same noteworthiness attached to rare passing comets. They don't

visit often but when they do there is a sound and light show. Some of it in Pakistan and some of it in India. The significance is amplified if the personage happens to bear the name Bhutto.

After the crushing loss to India in the 1971 war, Bhutto's grandfather, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the forebearer of Pakistan's fledgling democracy, emerging from the shadows of fourteen years of military rule, came to India, more particularly to Shimla, where he signed the Shimla Accord, with Indira Gandhi. Bilawal's mother Benazir, then a teenager, accompanied her father on that fateful trip, where her father thrashed out an agreement which came to be regarded in Pakistan as a sell-out. In India, where lateral inversion is an axiomatic political phenomenon, there remains wonderment, now mostly political, though not residual, as to how an opportunity was



squandered for a durable settlement barely six months after the creation of Bangladesh? To rephrase that cliché, how could India lose on the negotiating table what the army had gained in the battlefield? These are not troubling questions but facile ones.

P.N. Dhar, Indira Gandhi's principal secretary, provides some inferential analysis to Mrs Gandhi's approach to the Shimla summit in Indira Gandhi, the 'Emergency', and Indian Democracy (OUP). She was anxious that it should go off well.

"The day before he (Bhutto) arrived she inspected the rooms he was to occupy (at Himachal Bhavan) and spent a

lot of time getting curtains, carpets and furniture rearranged. She took me along for a final inspection and threw a tantrum when she saw a large portrait of herself in what was going to be Bhutto's sitting room. She ordered it removed as it was the last thing that would make him relax. She was mollified when she saw that the toiletries in the bathroom were all made in India." (page 202). That the summit has not lived fully up to Indian expectations is a bit of an understatement. It is not clear what history has recorded as young Ms Bhutto's impressions. It must have been difficult, in her mother's absence; her mother for some reason could not make it to Shimla.

Food pushes Pakistan inflation to record 36.4% in April



(News Agency)- Pakistan inflation rose to a record 36.4% in the year to April driven mainly by food prices, the highest rate in South Asia and up from March's 35.4%, the statistics bureau said on Tuesday.

Pakistan's rural areas recorded food inflation of 40.2%, the bureau told Reuters. Food inflation for both rural and urban areas reached 48.1%, the

highest since FY16 when the bureau started recording the categories separately.

Prices rose 2.4% in April from March, the bureau said in a press release.

"The higher reading was expected over the hyperinflation in the food segment," said Amreen Soorani, head of research at JS Capital, a Karachi based investment company.

"While the trend may continue

for a couple of months more, the base effect is likely to kick in from June-2023, slowing the pace."

The finance ministry said headline inflation was expected to remain at elevated levels in the months to come, despite contractionary monetary policy by the central bank.

Pakistan has been in economic turmoil for months with an acute balance of payments crisis

while talks with the International Monetary Fund to secure \$1.1 billion as part of a \$6.5 billion bailout have not been successful.

The country has taken measures to try to secure the funding, including removing caps on the exchange rate, resulting in a depreciating currency, increasing taxes, removing subsidies and raising key interest rates to a record high of

21%.

The finance ministry said a successful completion of talks with the IMF will eventually attract more capital inflows, stabilise the exchange rate and alleviate inflationary pressures.

Persistently high inflation has resulted in major lifestyle and consumption changes, with a greater number of people seeking help.

Taliban FM to meet Pakistan, China foreign ministers: Media

Taliban's interim foreign minister gets UN clearance to travel for meeting with counterparts in Pakistan.

(News Agency)-A United Nations Security Council committee has agreed to allow the Taliban's interim foreign minister, Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi, to travel to Pakistan from Afghanistan to meet with Pakistani and Chinese counterparts, according to news reports.

The Reuters news agency reported on Monday that Pakistan's UN mission requested an exemption for Muttaqi to travel between May 6 and 9 "for a meeting with the foreign ministers of Pakistan and China".

Muttaqi has long been subjected to a travel ban, asset freeze and arms embargo under UN Security Council sanctions. The UN Security Council committee agreed to allow Muttaqi to travel to Uzbekistan last month for a meeting of the foreign ministers of neighbouring



countries of Afghanistan to discuss urgent peace, security, and stability matters.

Afghanistan's TOLONews outlet said earlier on Monday that media in Pakistan were reporting on the upcoming visit and that Muttaqi would meet with Pakistan's Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari. Afghanistan's foreign ministry had not yet commented on the

reported trip, according to TOLONews.

News of the Taliban official's trip comes as representatives of nearly two dozen countries and international institutions met on Monday in Qatar with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres for talks on Afghanistan, focusing particularly on the plight of women and girls under the

Taliban administration.

Taliban authorities were not invited to attend the closed-door two-day meeting in Doha, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.

The meeting aims "to achieve a common understanding within the international community on how to engage with the Taliban", said Dujarric, who noted that recognition of Taliban rule "is not up for discussion". Key discussion topics include women's and girls' rights, inclusive governance, countering terrorism and drug trafficking, he said.

Since seizing power in August 2021, Taliban authorities have imposed rules that the UN has labelled "gender-based apartheid".

"Any meeting about Afghanistan without the participation of the Afghan government is ineffective and

counterproductive," Abdul Qahar Balkhi, the Taliban foreign ministry spokesperson, told Al Jazeera.

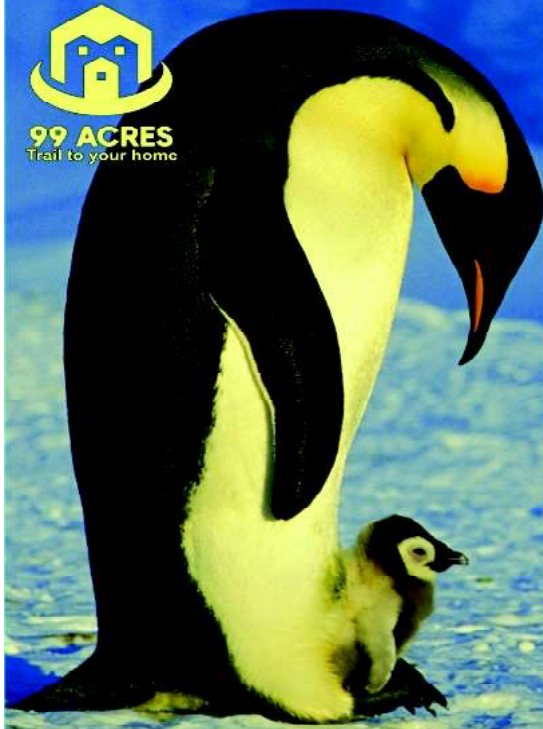
Women have been barred from almost all secondary education and universities, and prevented from working in most government jobs. Last month, Taliban authorities extended the ban to working with UN agencies.

The Taliban administration says the ban is an "internal issue" that should not influence foreign dealings. But, in response, the UN has ordered a review of its critical relief operation in Afghanistan, where many in the 38-million-strong population rely on food aid. The review is due to be completed on Friday. The UN has said it faces an "appalling choice" over whether to maintain its relief efforts in Afghanistan.

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Writer defends rape claim against Donald Trump in court after judge rejects his mistrial plea

Writer E Jean Carroll denied making up rape claims against former US President Donald Trump for publicity as a Manhattan federal court denied Trump's request for a mistrial.

(News Agency)-E. Jean Carroll, the writer accusing Donald Trump of rape and defamation, on Monday denied making up her claims to drive publicity for her memoir.

Testifying in Manhattan federal court after the judge denied Trump's request for a mistrial, Carroll said she wasn't seeking attention through appearances on TV and podcasts, while acknowledging they were an important driver of book sales.

Carroll also resisted efforts by Trump's lawyer Joe Tacopina to show she experienced no suffering because, as Trump has

claimed, the rape did not happen. She said she hides her inner suffering in her role as an advice columnist, and that going to parties related to her lawsuits against Trump and stating publicly she was doing "fabulous" didn't mean she was lying about him.

"In this courtroom, I'm being forced to tell the truth," she told Tacopina on her third and final day of testimony, including two under cross-examination.

Carroll, 79, says Trump, 76, raped her in a Bergdorf Goodman department store dressing room in late 1995 or early 1996, and

then tarred her reputation and career by lying about it online.

Her defamation claim concerns an October 2022 post on Trump's Truth Social platform, where Trump called the former Elle magazine advice columnist's case a "complete con job" and "a Hoax and a lie."

Carroll used to write for Elle magazine, and is now at Substack.

The rape claim was included in her memoir, "What Do We Need Men For? A Modest Proposal," excerpts of which were published in New York magazine in June 2019.

Carroll is seeking unspecified damages in her civil lawsuit.

She is suing Trump separately for defamation after he denied her claims, using similar language, after the book excerpts were



published.

Trump has not attended the trial, now in its fourth day. On Monday, he was in Scotland to visit his golf courses there.

In seeking a mistrial, Tacopina sent an 18-page letter early on Monday accusing U.S. District Judge Lewis Kaplan of bias against Trump.

Tacopina said several "unfair and prejudicial" rulings by Kaplan reflected a "deeper leaning" toward Carroll, including court comments where the judge "openly expresses favoritism." Trump is leading the Republican

field in the 2024 presidential race.

Tacopina said Kaplan, an appointee of Democratic President Bill Clinton, should have let him question Carroll about why she did not seek security camera footage of the alleged rape.

He also challenged Kaplan's statement that Trump might be "sailing in harm's way" after his son Eric Trump discussed on Twitter how LinkedIn co-founder Reid Hoffman was helping fund Carroll's case.

US scrambles fighter jets after another mysterious balloon spotted over Hawaii



(News Agency)-A mysterious high-altitude balloon was spotted off the coast of Hawaii over the weekend, months after a Chinese spy balloon was sighted in US airspace and shot down, officials said.

The US military on Monday (local time) said it is tracking the balloon, whose owner remains unknown. It was detected and seen floating at approximately 36,000 feet above the Pacific on April 28, CBS news reported. The US Air Force scrambled three F-22 Raptor stealth fighters to intercept the high-altitude balloon before concluding that "it posed no threat", the US Indo-Pacific Command said in a statement.

There were no indications that the balloon was being maneuvered or controlled by any foreign actor. The object did not cross over sensitive areas, did not pose a

threat to military and people on the ground, and did not disrupt air traffic over Hawaii, according to officials.

A Defence Department spokesperson said Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin agreed with the military commanders' recommendation on not taking action against the balloon. However, the US military and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) are still tracking it, the spokesperson added.

According to an official, the balloon is not present in Hawaii airspace and is outside of US territorial waters.

The sighting of the object came after a Chinese spy balloon transversed US earlier this year before it was shot down off the coast of South Carolina. The incident led to a diplomatic confrontation with Secretary of State Antony Blinken cancelling his planned visit to China.

Russian troops suffer radiation sickness after digging trenches near Chernobyl nuclear plant

Several Russian soldiers suffered radiation sickness after they dug trenches in Chernobyl forest during their occupation in the area. The Chernobyl nuclear plant gained worldwide attention when its Reactor No 4 exploded in 1986, killing scores of people and leaving hundreds scarred by radiation.

(News Agency)-Several Russian troops are down with radiation sickness after they dug trenches in the Chernobyl forest, near the nuclear power station which exploded 37 years ago, authorities said.

Ukrainians residing near the nuclear station warned the Russian troops, who had occupied the area last year, against setting up a camp in the forest, a report by The Independent said.

In what was considered to be the world's worst nuclear disaster, Reactor No 4 exploded on April 26, 1986, killing scores of people and leaving hundreds scarred by radiation.

Following the Chernobyl disaster, teams of chemical experts were sent to dig up the contaminated topsoil and bury it beneath the ground in the Red Forest -- which was named after the colour the trees turned in the aftermath of



the accident.

Quoting The Times, a resident who warned the Russian forces said they "understood the risks", but "were just thick". The resident said they dug trenches six miles (nine kilometres) from the power plant, inserted the reactor's cooling channel -- flush with catfish -- and shot dead animals. Russian forces crossed into Chernobyl on February 24 last year, the day

when the invasion began. They remained there for five weeks before their withdrawal from the area. Recalling a confrontation with the Russian forces, 90-year-old Baba Hana told The Times, "I started yelling at them." "I tried to give them political information, explaining what was happening in their country... I am a Russian speaker, I asked what they were doing there, who they thought they were liberating," Hana said.

US could run out of cash in a month, warns treasury's Yellen; Biden calls meet on debt ceiling



The US may run short of cash to pay bills after June 1, warned Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, prompting US President Joe Biden to call a meeting to discuss a possible debt ceiling hike.

(News Agency)- US President Joe Biden on Monday summoned the four top congressional leaders to the White House next week after the Treasury warned the government could run short of cash to pay its bills by June. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in a letter to Congress that the agency will be unlikely to meet all US government payment obligations "potentially as early as June 1" without action by Congress. The estimate raised the risk that

the United States is headed for an unprecedented default that would shake the global economy, adding new urgency to political calculations in Washington, where Democrats and Republicans were girding for a months-long standoff. Biden called Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in Jerusalem, where he is on a diplomatic trip, to invite him to a May 9 White House meeting. The two leaders haven't sat down to discuss the issue since February.

Biden also extended invitations to House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Republican leader Mitch McConnell. McConnell, whose fall in March sidelined him for weeks, said he and Biden had a "good conversation" today, adding: "I'm sure we'll be speaking again." House Republicans passed a bill to raise the debt limit last week that includes steep cuts to spending from healthcare for the poor to air-traffic controllers, which the Democratic-controlled Senate and Biden say they will not approve. Biden has steadfastly said he will not negotiate over the debt ceiling increase, but will discuss budget cuts after a new limit is passed. Congress has often paired debt-

ceiling increases with other budget and spending measures. A White House official said Biden, who had previously said he wouldn't meet McCarthy at all to discuss the debt limit, would "stress that Congress must take action to avoid default without conditions" on May 9. The new potential "X-date," which takes in to account April tax payments, is largely unchanged from a previous estimate, issued in January, that the government could run short of cash around June 5. But Yellen added some wiggle room, noting federal receipts and outlays are "inherently variable." The actual date that Treasury exhausts extraordinary measures "could be a number of weeks later than these estimates," she wrote.

"It is impossible to predict with certainty the exact date when Treasury will be unable to pay the government's bills," she wrote. After hitting the \$31.4 trillion borrowing cap on January 19, Yellen previously told Congress that Treasury would keep up payments on debt, federal benefits and make other spending by using extraordinary cash management measures. One such step Treasury is taking is suspending the sales of securities that state and local governments use to temporarily hold cash. In 2011, a similar debt ceiling fight took the country to the brink of default and prompted a downgrade of the country's top-notch credit rating. This time, negotiations may be even more difficult, veterans of 2011's face-off say.

Conflict in Sudan could force 8 lakh people to flee, warns United Nations

Hundreds of people have been killed and thousands wounded over 16 days of battles since disputes between the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) erupted into conflict on April 15.

(News Agency)- The United Nations warned on Monday that the conflict in Sudan could force 800,000 people to flee the country as battles between rival military factions persisted in the capital despite a supposed ceasefire. Hundreds of people have been killed and thousands wounded over 16 days of battles since disputes between the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) erupted into conflict on April 15. The crisis has unleashed a humanitarian disaster, damaged swathes of Khartoum, risked drawing in regional powers and reignited conflict in the Darfur region. Many fear for their lives in the power struggle between the army chief and RSF head, who shared control of the government after a 2021 coup but fell out over a planned transition

to civilian rule. Both sides agreed on Sunday to extend a much-violated truce by 72 hours, and the U.N. told Reuters the rival forces may hold ceasefire talks in Saudi Arabia. But air strikes and artillery rang out on Monday as smoke hung over Khartoum and neighbouring cities. UN official Raouf Mazou said the body's refugee agency was planning for an exodus of 815,000 people including 580,000 Sudanese as well as foreign refugees now living in the country. The country's population numbers 46 million. Some 73,000 have already left Sudan, he said. Egypt reported 40,000 Sudanese had crossed its border, and those who made the journey said conditions were arduous. Others have gone to Chad, South Sudan and Ethiopia, or sailed across the

Red Sea to Saudi Arabia on evacuation boats. At least 528 people have been killed and 4,599 wounded, the health ministry said. The United Nations has reported a similar number of dead but believes the real toll is much higher. **HARDSHIP, DANGER** Foreign governments pulled out their citizens over the past week in air, sea and land operations, though several countries ended efforts. The U.S. government said on Monday that its convoys from Khartoum to the Red Sea harbour of Port Sudan evacuated more than 700 people over the weekend. Britain said it was exploring ways to provide humanitarian assistance to Sudan along with its international allies, the United Nations and aid organisations after evacuating nearly 2,200 people. Meanwhile, those Sudanese



who stayed behind faced hardship and danger. "I show up to work for two or three hours then I close up because it's not safe," said Abdelbagi, a barber in Khartoum who said he had to keep working because prices were rising. People who ventured onto the streets on Monday were shocked by the transformation. "We saw dead bodies. The industrial area that was all looted. We saw people carrying TVs on their backs and big sacks looted from factories," said resident Mohamed Ezzeldin. Power and water supplies are

uncertain, there is little food or fuel, most hospitals and clinics are out of service and soaring transport costs are making it ever harder to leave. The U.N. and other aid organisations have cut services, though the World Food Programme said it was resuming operations in more secure areas on Monday after staff were killed early in the war. "The scale and speed of what is unfolding in Sudan is unprecedented," said Martin Griffiths, a senior U.N. official for humanitarian and emergency relief who will visit Sudan on Tuesday.

6 killed, over 30 injured after massive dust storm causes crashes on highway in Illinois

At least six people were killed after a massive dust storm swamped central Illinois, causing numerous crashes on Interstate 55. Thirty others suffered injuries and were rushed to hospitals.

(News Agency)- A windstorm in central Illinois kicked up dangerous clouds of blinding dust off farm fields on Monday (local time), causing numerous crashes that killed at least six people on Interstate 55, police said.

The late morning crashes involved 40 to 60 cars and multiple tractor-trailers, two of which caught fire, Illinois State Police Major Ryan Starrick said.

He said at least six people died, all in the northbound lanes, and more than 30 people on both sides of I-55 were transported to hospitals with injuries.

"The only thing you could hear after we got hit was crash after crash after crash behind us," said Tom Thomas (43) who was traveling south to St. Louis. I-55 was shut down in both



directions in Montgomery County, 75 miles (120 kilometres) north of St. Louis, and likely won't reopen until Tuesday. Starrick told reporters that it was a spring version of a "whiteout situation" typically seen in winter snowstorms. Governor JB Pritzker described the scene as "horrific".

"The cause of the crashes is due to excessive winds blowing

dirt from farm fields across the highway, leading to zero visibility," Starrick said.

Dairon Socarras Quintero (32), who was driving to St. Louis to make deliveries for his custom frame company based in Elk Grove Village, said that after his truck hit the vehicle in front of him, he exited and moved to the side of the road to ensure his safety, then returned after the chain reaction of crashes

ended behind him.

Socarras Quintero said the dust continued to blow ferociously as he checked on other motorists and emergency personnel arrived. He held up his backpack, which was caked with dust even though it was inside a closed truck cab.

Winds at the time were gusting between 35 mph (56 kph) and 45 mph (74 kph), the National Weather Service said.

"It's very flat, very few trees," meteorologist Chuck Schaffer said. "It's been very dry across this area really for the last three weeks. The farmers are out there tilling their fields and planting. The top layer of soil is quite loose."

Evan Anderson (25), who was returning home to St. Louis from Chicago, said a semitruck turned before striking his vehicle, sparing him from even

more damage.

"You couldn't even see," Anderson said. "People tried to slow down and other people didn't, and I just got plowed into. There were just so many cars and semitrucks with so much momentum behind them."

Kevin Schott, director of emergency services in Montgomery County, said it was a "very difficult scene" and one that's "very hard to train for".

"We had to search every vehicle, whether they were involved in the accident or just pulled over, to check for injuries," he said, adding that people were "upset - visibly so, understandably so," Schott said. Authorities set up staging areas away from the crash site to help travelers reunite with friends and family.

In biggest crackdown on tobacco industry, Australia to ban recreational vaping, tighten e-cigarette laws



generation of nicotine addicts," Health Minister Mark Butler will say in a speech at the National Press Club, excerpts of which were seen by the agency.

"This is a product targeted at our kids, sold alongside lollies and chocolate bars," Butler will say. "Vaping has become the number one behavioural issue in high schools. And it's becoming widespread in primary schools." Prescriptions will be

necessary for legal vaping products, which will be required to have pharmaceutical-like packaging.

The federal budget, due to be out next week, will include A\$234 million (\$155 million) to fund the new measures to protect against the harm caused by tobacco and vaping products, according to the excerpts of the speech.

Australia has one of the toughest anti-smoking laws in the world after the country in 2012 forced producers to abandon distinct colourful branding and sell their cigarettes in uniformly drab packets with no adornments.

(News Agency)-The country proposed to tighten e-cigarette laws, including introducing new controls on the import and packaging to stamp out vaping, especially among kids, in the biggest crackdown on the tobacco industry in more than a decade, reported news agency Reuters.

The government will also reportedly impose restrictions on flavours, colours, nicotine concentrations and other ingredients.

"Just like they did with smoking, Big Tobacco has taken another addictive product, wrapped it in shiny packaging and added flavours to create a new

We regret...: Ukraine apologizes for Kali tweet, says country respects Indian culture



(News Agency)- Ukraine's Deputy Foreign Minister Emine Dzhaparova on Tuesday issued an apology after the country's ministry of defence tweeted a picture of Goddess Kali. Emine Dzhaparova said Ukraine "regrets" the defence ministry's depiction of goddess Kali in a "distorted manner" and that the European country "respects unique Indian culture and highly appreciates support from India". This comes a day after the tweet in question sparked outrage among

netizens. Kanchan Gupta, senior advisor, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting called the image "an assault on Hindu sentiments". Gupta was among the many netizens who demanded an apology from Ukraine over the image. The Ukraine defence ministry's tweet, which has now been deleted, was captioned "Work of art" with an image of Goddess Kali superimposed over a blast fume.

Many had slammed the Ukraine government, saying it is insulting a goddess widely

worshipped in the country after seeking help from India. The defence ministry's tweet had come just days after Emine Dzhaparova visited India. She was the first high-ranking Ukrainian official to visit India ever since the Russia-Ukraine war broke out in February, 2022. Emine had met Union Minister Meenakshi Lekhi and handed her a letter from Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking India's intervention in the Russia-Ukraine war.

Thousands, including undocumented migrants, protest in France against govt's immigration plans

: Thousands of people, including many undocumented migrants, marched in Paris and other French cities on Saturday (local time), protesting planned changes to immigration laws and evictions from the Indian Ocean island of Mayotte. In the French capital, demonstrators marched behind a banner proclaiming "No to the Darmanin law. Against repression, imprisonment and deportations, for a welcoming migration policy", a reference to Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin. Organisers said that 2,300 people turned out for the protest in Paris. The immigration bill, which the government has just postponed

until the autumn, "is a racist law, which aims to criminalise foreigners" and lead to "more deportations", said Aboubacar (31), an undocumented Malian. "The problem is not immigration. It's exploitation and rogue bosses," said the post office subcontractor who, with colleagues, has been fighting for 17 months to obtain his official documents to live and work in France. The protesters also took aim at Operation Wuambushi (Take Back) being carried out by the authorities on the French Indian Ocean Island of Mayotte to send back illegal immigrants, most from neighbouring Comoros, currently housed in unsanitary shanty towns. "The way undocumented Comorans are

treated is unworthy of a country like France," said Marie-Christine Vergiat, vice-president of the French Human Rights League and a former member of the European parliament. The Darmanin bill and the operation in Mayotte are linked, Said Mhamadi, a Comoran civil leader, said in the southern port city of Marseille, where up to 300 people demonstrated. 'CONTROLLING IMMIGRATION' The controversial bill, entitled "Controlling immigration while improving integration", is aimed, among other things, at providing greater scope for deportation, especially for foreigners who commit crimes. It would require a minimum level of French before a multi-year

residence permit could be granted, would introduce mandatory fingerprinting, and tighten requirements for the renewal of long-term permits. On Wednesday, the French government once again failed to reach consensus on the immigration bill, which is considered too divisive in an already abrasive social climate. The government is promising a balance between the expulsion of foreigners who threaten public order and better integration of undocumented migrants, in particular by regularising workers in sectors where manpower is needed. But while its critics believe the reforms are too authoritarian, Eric Ciotti, the head of the right-

wing Republicans, believes they don't go far enough. "No more rights for illegal immigrants, no more social benefits from the first day" for regular immigrants, he said. The government needs the support of the Republicans, as it has a majority in the upper-house Senate. President Emmanuel Macron lost his parliamentary majority in elections last June. On Saturday, in the northwestern city of Rennes, over 1,500 people took to the streets chanting "down with the police state". "I came in solidarity with the Comoros and to protest against the brutal measures taken by France in Mayotte, it's very violent and there are other ways of dealing with it," 32-year-old Theodore Sobezy told AFP.

'Godfather Of AI' Geoffrey Hinton Quits Google To Talk About Dangers Of Artificial Intelligence

Geoffrey Hinton, often called the "Godfather of AI" on Monday, confirmed that he quit his role at Google last week to speak out about the "dangers" of the technology he helped develop. In a statement to the New York Times, Mr Hinton, aged 75, announced his resignation from Google, saying he now regretted his work. Mr Hinton tweeted he quit his job at Google, so he can freely speak out about the risks of AI. In his tweet, he wrote, "In the NYT today, Cade Metz implies that I left Google so that I could criticize Google. Actually, I left so that I could talk about the dangers of AI without considering how this impacts Google. Google has acted very responsibly." In a BBC interview on Monday, he said, "I can now just speak freely about what I think the dangers might be. And some of them are quite scary. Right now, as far as I can tell, they're not more intelligent than us. But I think they soon may be." Notably, Mr Hinton worked for Google for over a decade and was one of the most respected voices in the field. His major AI breakthrough came when working with two graduate students in Toronto in 2012. The trio was able to successfully

create an algorithm that could analyze photos and identify common elements, such as dogs and cars, according to the NYT. One of the students who worked on the project with him now works as OpenAI's chief scientist. His pioneering work on neural networks also shaped artificial intelligence systems, powering many of today's products like

ChatGPT, reported CNN. However, he told the BBC that chatbots could soon overtake the level of information that a human brain holds. "Right now, what we're seeing is things like GPT-4 eclipses a person in the amount of general knowledge it has and it eclipses them by a long way. In terms of reasoning, it's not as good, but it does already do simple

reasoning. And given the rate of progress, we expect things to get better quite fast. So we need to worry about that," he noted. In an interview with the Times, Mr Hinton expressed his concerns about AI's potential to eliminate jobs and create a world where many will "not be able to know what is true anymore." "It is hard to see how you can prevent the bad actors from

using it for bad things," he added. He also expressed concerns about the spread of fake imagery and text. Mr Hinton further cited his age as a reason for his decision. "One is, I'm 75. So it's time to retire. Another was, I actually want to say some good things about Google. And they're more credible if I don't work for Google," he said.

ChatGPT is probably nicer than your doctor

Time pressures and health care bureaucracy have eroded the bedside manner of many doctors. Burned-out physicians have to balance tight appointment times with copious administrative work giving them less space for humanity. For more compassionate care, it may be time to bring in the robots. Yes, seriously. A new study found that the artificial intelligence bot ChatGPT gave not only more thorough, but also more empathetic, responses to patient questions than those provided by an actual doctor. How it worked: Researchers took 195 questions and answers posted on the Reddit forum / AskDocs, a community where individuals post their most pressing health concerns and doctors

respond, and let ChatGPT have a go. A panel of five experts, all with some form of clinical licensing, evaluated the physician responses against ChatGPT's answers and found that 78 percent of the time ChatGPT provided better answers. Takeaway: "It's not only what you say, but also how you say it," said John Ayers, the lead author on the study and associate professor of medicine at the University of California San Diego. Ayers believes ChatGPT could, if regulated appropriately, both help reduce doctor workload and help patients achieve better outcomes cost effectively. There's also an opportunity, he said, to test whether bots can help patients stay on track with medications, follow doctors' orders, and come to their next appointment.

Even so: Check out our next item on new evidence on ChatGPT's deficiencies. This is where we explore the ideas and innovators shaping health care. Pounding the pavement could actually be good for your knees and other joints, according to mounting evidence. One study, for instance, found that the arthritis rate among marathon runners was half the expected rate. Share any thoughts, news, tips and feedback with Ben Leonard at bleonard@politico.com, Ruth Reader at rreader@politico.com, Carmen Paun at cpaun@politico.com or Erin Schumaker at eschumaker@politico.com. Send tips securely through SecureDrop, Signal, Telegram or WhatsApp. Today on our Pulse Check podcast, Ruth talks with

Ben about legislation that would give Medicare patients permanent access to virtual care and the DEA regulation that could simultaneously curtail telemedicine access to some drugs. ChatGPT may know how to spread the kindness, but its health care expertise is still a work in progress. In fact, if ChatGPT were a medical student, it'd be in danger of failing out. That's judging by the artificial intelligence bot's performance on medical board certification exams, according to two new reports. JAMA Ophthalmology reported that researchers asked the chatbot 125 questions for board certification in ophthalmology. It whiffed - a lot, getting just 58 of them correct, or 46 percent.

Priyanka Chopra Jonas: Why India's International Star's Report Card Needs Some Good Scores

Much happens in Citadel, the Amazon Prime Video science fiction action drama series starring Richard Madden and India's very own Priyanka Chopra Jonas as Mason Kane and Nadia Sinh, respectively. Kane and Sinh are elite spies of an international network predictably called, yes, Citadel. The first of the two episodes available at the moment shows both of them inside a train - with a purpose. They must retrieve a bag of highly enriched uranium from a Russian agent.

Action follows. The train blows up. Both the spies escape death. Time goes by. Kane and Sinh lead vastly different lives without any memory of their past as spies. By the time the second episode ends, the visibly expensive series evolves into an actioner that promises to deliver more exciting moments in the coming episodes.

Seen in one of the leading roles in the series created by Josh Appelbaum, Bryan Oh and David

Weil, Priyanka is not the only reason why we watch Citadel. But she is, without question, an important reason why the series has appeal. The actress, now 40, is undoubtedly glamorous. She shares excellent chemistry with Madden, her gifted co-star. She is equally impactful in the action sequences, a feature of the series that targets the average Amazon Prime subscriber looking for some cool fun during the weekend.

Hollywood has produced numerous first-rate actioners, whose stories reveal the writer's ability to surprise the viewer with admirable consistency. And, here is the inescapable fact. Citadel is not one of them. However, the series allows Priyanka to showcase her talent on television once again.

FINE ACTING ABILITY

Anyone who has followed Priyanka's career closely knows she is a gifted and versatile actress. Her highlights from Hindi films include her role in Madhur

Bhandarkar's flawed but realistic drama Fashion (2008) in which she is a small-town girl who enters the world of modelling. In Vishal Bhardwaj's brilliant 2011 black comedy 7 Khoon Maaf, she is a woman who commits a series of murders and does away with her husbands.

She is outstanding as the autistic woman in Anurag Basu's sensitive romantic comedy Barfi! (2012). She plays the boxer-protagonist of Omung Kumar's biographical sports drama Mary Kom (2014) with admirable conviction. And, she makes the maximum impact among the main characters with her performance as Kashibai, the first wife of Peshwa Bajirao I, in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's period epic Bajirao Mastani (2015). Her film-going fans might believe that the list of her good performances in India could have been much longer. Those who do aren't wrong. Priyanka has been doing a considerable amount of work in the West. Many of her


American fans still relate to her as the 'Quantico girl' Alex Parrish, the protagonist of Joshua Safran's thriller drama Quantico that aired on American Broadcasting Company (ABC) for three seasons (2015-2018). The first South Asian to play the leading role in an American drama series, a significant achievement, Priyanka's character of Parrish is an FBI field agent who becomes the suspect in a terrorist attack. The character's eventful journey through life is the focus of the widely popular series, which helped Priyanka take a big step forward in her career.

Her track record in films, sadly, has not been half as good or popular. She appears in Seth Gordon's action comedy Baywatch (2017) as Victoria Leeds, the drug dealer-antagonist. It is a strictly passable performance in a film with forgettable weaknesses such as a half-baked script and uninspired direction.


Transgender director Silas Howard's 2018 drama A Kid Like Jake, a sensitive film with a great idea, shows her as the divorced friend of a couple dealing with their child's gender non-conformity. Hers is a supporting role in a film dominated by Claire Danes and Jim Parsons, who excel as parents of the child.

In Todd Strauss-Schulson's genre-bending rom-com Isn't It Romantic (2019), she appears as a 'yoga ambassador'. It is, once again, a supporting role with little substance. Her character of the exile program named Sati in Lana Wachowski's science fiction film The Matrix Resurrections (2021) did not make much of an impact either. Will Priyanka come into her own in James C Strouse's upcoming romantic comedy Love Again in which she reportedly plays Mira Ray, a woman who has lost her fiancé? It will be great if she does, considering much of her potential as an actor in films remains unused in the West.

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.



Five Reasons why Narendra Modi will return as the Prime Minister in 2024

With the Lok Sabha elections less than 12 months away, there is a wide understanding that Narendra Modi is headed for another term as the Prime Minister of the country, backed by a similar massive mandate that the party achieved under him in 2019. Naturally, the opposition parties are making efforts to stop Modi's return to power, like they have unsuccessfully done in the past.

With lunches and dinners and subsequent photo-ops, the opposition is trying to project 'unity'. Multi-pronged efforts are being made to create a perception that the opposition is united. The projection notwithstanding, on the ground, there is no concrete shape that this solidarity has taken as yet. But this is not the only factor playing to Modi's advantage. Several factors make its return to power inevitable.

CHARISMA INTACT

One may easily recall that in the Lok Sabha elections of 2019, when the questions of 'face' and 'leadership' emerged, Modi had taken a clear lead. Nearly five years down the line, the situation hasn't changed much. The entire spectrum of opposition leaders does not have a 'face' to match the incumbent Prime Minister. Not just his supporters, even Modi's opponents believe that he is the country's first choice when it comes to electing a Prime Minister. Even at a personal level, Modi is far ahead of any leader in terms of popularity. So much so that no one seems to be getting around him, at least in 2024. 'Face Modi' has emerged stronger on the test of credibility. After the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir and the beginning of the construction of Ram Temple in Ayodhya, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP),

under the leadership of Modi, has only grown stronger. The absence of a face to take on Modi's widely popular persona will be a major reason for the BJP's comfortable return to power.

Periodic surveys also indicate that most people want Modi to be their Prime Minister. On the one hand, the BJP has a charismatic face like Narendra Modi, on the other hand, the opposition's biggest weakness is the lack of 'face' and leadership. Significantly, the biggest weakness of the opposition is the biggest strength of the BJP.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE AND STRENGTH

It was because of Modi's charismatic leadership that a large section of voters joined the BJP in the years following 2014. This was the reason why the BJP's vote percentage increased to the best in history when votes were counted in 2019. For voters who passionately reposed faith in Modi's leadership, this was a great opportunity to connect and communicate with the BJP.

Even as more and more people have joined the BJP, the party has made concerted efforts to connect voters, who joined the fold believing in Modi, with its organization. The BJP has continuously communicated with them, got them party membership and thus expanded the party's reach to every section of the society, working at the micro level. These organisational activities have been working nonstop over the past nine years. Contrary to this, other parties do not see any such continuous activity of organizational expansion.

According to one estimate, the biggest success for the BJP at the organizational level in the past nine years has been how it has been able to connect the

voters directly with the party. The BJP currently has around 17 crore members. With coordination between the organisation and the government, the BJP has strengthened its ground in the past nine years, a model that no party has been able to implement so far.

STRATEGY TO WOO NEW VOTERS

Prime Minister Modi created a new electorate through schemes for welfare of the poor. Through schemes such as Jan Dhan, Ujjwala, Saubhagya, Awas Yojana, Swachh Bharat, Ayushman and Kisan Samman Nidhi, Modi has strengthened his credibility amid the economically marginalised and vulnerable sections of the country. In 2014, Modi got around 17,16,57,000 votes. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, it increased by about 5 crore votes.

The increase was attributed to beneficiary voters, or those whose lives improved because of the policies of the Modi government.

Now, through schemes such as free ration, free Covid vaccine and Har Ghar Nal Se Jal, Narendra Modi has been able to reach a larger beneficiary group than in 2019. About 80 crore people are beneficiaries of free ration. The impact of this widening reach was seen in the 2022 Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections. Due to a strong and motivated organizational base, reaching out to beneficiaries is part of the BJP's routine work. Over the past five years, the BJP karyakartas have contacted the beneficiaries several times. Modi, in fact, directly communicates with the beneficiaries regularly. The pattern makes it clear, in the 2024 elections, the BJP is set to get a wider support than 2019.

The Modi model of politics has worked to weed out the roots of casteism and appeasement politics in the country. As a result, the base of regional parties is shrinking.

One of the major strengths of PM Modi is that people look at him with expectations, and he is able to fulfil those. It is this aspect of his leadership which evokes sabka vishwas (everyone's trust). PM Modi strengthened this trust in the difficult times of Covid. He has emerged as a samvedanshil (sensitive) leader who is empathetic to the problems of the common people. This is the reason why despite repeated attacks by the opposition, the people's trust in him remains unshakable.

DISINTEGRATION OF OPPOSITION AND LACK OF LEADERSHIP

The biggest challenge that political analysts have been talking about against Modi is opposition unity. As of now, there is no visible form of an 'intact alliance'. Apart from the symbolic rhetoric of alliances on different forums, no formula has emerged on the basis of which it can be said that there is 'unity' at the national level against Modi. At the national level, there is no 'Grand Alliance' in sight. On the question of leadership, the leaders of this 'coalition of imagination' are unable to give any concrete answers. It is a good sign for the BJP that at a time when the opposition remains fragmented, all the constituents of the BJP unitedly seem ready to contest the elections under the leadership of Narendra Modi. While the BJP-led NDA has almost made its nature clear, the anti-BJP alliance seems amorphous. The factor will play to the BJP's advantage. The biggest cri-

sis in opposition unity is their policy-less approach. If the opposition parties think they will succeed in the name of 'Remove Modi', then this strategic blunder could cost them a bigger political rout than 2019.

PEOPLE'S FAITH IN A TAINT-FREE TENURE

One of the highlights of Modi's nine-year rule has been that there has been no taint on him or his government. This will be a major reason for the BJP's return to the Centre in the upcoming elections, because in 2014, Modi came to power raising the issue of corruption and irregularities in governance. Even today, Modi is seen to speak and act against corruption with consistency. Under Modi, there is an unprecedented transparency in policies and their implementation.

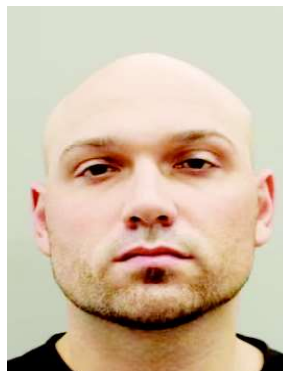
The opposition does not have any allegations of corruption that they can put on the Modi government and hope for it to stick before the public. Rahul Gandhi may have been raising the issue of Adani, but people do not seem to be believing any of it. Earlier in 2018, Gandhi had raised the Rafale issue in a similar way, but it failed to hold water before the public.

In fact, the question here is not about the accusations. The issue is trust. Voters have more faith in Modi. Voters do not believe Rahul Gandhi. Modi has earned this trust over years of his public service - first as chief minister and then as Prime Minister - over the last two decades. On the other hand, the Gandhi scion has consistently lost credibility because of the contradictions in his words and deeds. Organisational strength, charismatic image, taint-free tenure and outreach to new voters are the reasons why Modi seems to be headed to 7 Lok Kalyan Marg once again in 2024.

Texas man pauses date to shoot dead fake parking attendant who scammed him of \$40

A Texas man, who was allegedly scammed of \$40 in parking fees while on a date, shot and killed the scammer before returning to his dinner. The accused, identified as Erick Aguirre, 29, continued with the dinner after telling his date that "everything was fine" after he allegedly killed 46-year-old Elliot Nix in a car park near Houston's Rodeo Goat restaurant. According to police, on the

evening of April 11, Aguirre and his date parked their vehicles near the burger spot and the victim told them that it would cost \$20 each. Aguirre paid Nix \$40 and was later told by restaurant staff that Nix did not work for the parking lot. A witness who saw Aguirre's initial interaction with Nix told police he then saw the defendant sprint to his car, grab a gun and run after Nix who was out of his



view, reported CNN citing court documents.

After allegedly attacking Nix, the suspect told his date he had just scared the victim. But court records state that instead of taking their table the couple left as Aguirre looked "uncomfortable."

Following the shooting, Houston Police released a surveillance photo showing Aguirre and his date together, asking for the public's help with iden-

tification. As per the police, the suspect's date contacted them a few days later.

"She wanted to do the right thing. She wanted to make sure that she came forward and told the police what she knew," Rick DeToto, the woman's attorney was quoted by The Independent as saying. The suspect, who lives near Corpus Christi, Texas, appeared in court on Thursday on murder charges.



Biden Isn't the Only Official Who Could Pardon Trump

If the former president is convicted, there are a range of ways that he might be pardoned for his crimes.

Now that the criminal justice system has begun bringing charges against former President Donald Trump, it's only a matter of time before he gets convicted of something, somewhere. And as soon as that happens, the next question to face our political system is, will he be pardoned? The answer is more complicated, and surprising, than you might think. There are three ways Trump could be pardoned: by a state executive, by the current president or by himself.

State-level pardons

Let's take the state level first. Each state has its own process for pardons and commutations, which differ from pardons in that they reduce the punishments for crimes rather than wiping them out altogether. Some states lodge those powers with their governor and some with a range of executive officials.

Trump currently faces actual or potential criminal charges in two states, New York and Georgia. He has been indicted by a Manhattan grand jury on 34 felony counts of falsifying business records under New York law. The only pertinent pardon power related to those charges

belongs to New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, a Democrat, who is unlikely to agree to pardon the former Republican president. The second state-level investigation is ongoing in Fulton County, Ga., in connection with Trump's infamous recorded call imploring Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger that "I just want to find 11,780

votes" to swing that state in his column. If district attorney Fani Willis produces an indictment, which she recently announced could be forthcoming this summer, Trump would have to turn to a five-member Georgia State Board of Pardons and Paroles for a pardon. Georgia's Republican Gov. Brian Kemp has the power to appoint members, but they serve staggered, seven-year terms that are subject to confirmation by the state Senate. And unlike presidential pardons, which can be doled out arbitrarily with few legal constraints, Georgia's pardon program has stringent eligibility requirements. Trump could only apply for a pardon in Georgia after he is indicted and convicted, and only after five additional years have passed since completion of his sentence.

In both New York and Georgia, therefore, a politically motivated pardon — which Trump himself embraced unabashedly by pardoning the likes of advisors Steven Bannon, Roger Stone and Paul Manafort (his 2016 campaign manager) — is not in the cards.

Federal pardons

But if a federal indictment issues, the law — and history — around the presidential pardon power are less clear.

Trump is currently embroiled in three criminal probes at the federal level. Attorney General Merrick Garland tasked Special Counsel Jack Smith with looking into the classified documents Trump unlawfully kept at Mar-a-Lago months after the FBI and the National Archives requested their return. A

second federal investigation involves the Securities and Exchange Commission plus a federal grand jury, which are considering whether his company, Trump Media, violated federal criminal laws in connection with its initial public offering for his social media platform, Truth Social, as well as its reported receipt of \$8 million in related loans wired from entities connected to an ally of Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin. The third is Smith's investigation of Trump's role in the Jan. 6, 2021 insurrection at the Capitol, a probe that now reportedly includes possible wire fraud in connection with the massive fundraising that occurred over his false election claims. If any of these produces an indictment, the question will inevitably arise: Should President Joe Biden pardon Trump? Given the precedent set by President Gerald Ford's pardon of a disgraced former president, Richard Nixon, there will be considerable pressure on Biden to do so. (And given the nearly ubiquitous attacks on Manhattan district attorney Alvin Bragg's indictment decision, it's fair to assume that such pardon pressure would come from both the right and the left.)

As a matter of historical precedent, Ford broke new ground by pardoning Nixon before any charges were brought, ushering in a modern norm of presidential unaccountability. Ford wrote in his pardon that "a trial of Richard Nixon, if it became necessary, could not fairly begin until a year or more has elapsed. In the meantime, the

tranquility [of] this nation . . . could be irreparably lost by the prospects of bringing to trial a former President of the United States." The same logic could hold true for Trump: He is the frontrunner for the Republican presidential nomination in 2024, and a federal trial would likely stretch past the election. Ford's move is widely believed to have cost him a second term. Biden just announced that he is running again. That decision changes any potential political calculus around pardoning Trump.

Naturally, clemency for the first indicted former president in American history would be measured against a long tradition of presidents issuing pardons in the name of amnesty — or in order to heal the nation after times of crisis. Long before Ford pardoned Nixon, Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson both pardoned Confederate soldiers en masse after the Civil War, with Johnson explaining that his action would "renew and fully restore confidence and fraternal feeling among the whole people, and their respect for the attachment to the National Government, designed by its patriotic founders for the general good."

On his first full day in office in 1977, Ford's successor, President Jimmy Carter, granted an unconditional pardon to tens of thousands of Americans who evaded the draft during the Vietnam War, many having immigrated to Canada in fear.

The elusive 'why' behind the recurring sacrilege of Sri Guru Granth Sahib



Sri Guru Granth Sahib was desecrated at a gurdwara in Punjab's Morinda on April 24. There is no justification for anyone to display any lack of respect towards Sri Guru Granth Sahib, given its content and collective authorship.

"My mind became enriched when I saw the ancestral treasure," writes Guru Arjan Sahib, who compiled the first recension of Sri Guru Granth Sahib in 1604. The fifth in line of the ten Gurus, he put together the anthology of the greatest thoughts and enduring ideas, some going as far back as the 12th century.

WHYDUNIT?

Why would anyone in the 21st century desecrate such a treasure, especially in its heartland of Punjab? This question has remained unan-

swered, while several of those who have committed such sacrilege in the past have been unconvincingly played down as lunatics. Monday's reprehensible desecration of Sri Guru Granth Sahib at Punjab's Morinda, which was wildly promoted by certain politicians via tweets, has, therefore, necessitated a focus on why it happened rather than who did it.

UNIQUE CORPUS

There is no justification in the first place for anyone to display any lack of respect to-

wards Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Krishna, Ram, Shiv, Ganesh, Hanuman, Indra, Brahma, Vishnu, Parvati, Lakshmi, Prahlad, Dhruv and so forth. The sacred anthology contains writings in almost two dozen different languages/dialects/expressions that developed in South Asia during the medieval pe-

riod, written in Gurmukhi script, all conveying an uncompromisingly monotheistic message. In Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the one divine source of all creation is referred to varying-ly as Hari, Narayan, Ram, Antanjami, Jagdish, Prabhu, Gopal, Satnam, Allah, Khuda, Kartar, Nirankar, Shyam Sundar, Murari, Thakur, Veethal, Gobind, Mohan, Waheguru, Karim, Rahim, Parvdagar and many more. Besides, there are numerous mentions of the revered

Sufi mystic Sheikh Farid to Guru Tegh Bahadar Sahib, whose writings were incorporated in the final edition in 1705 by Guru Gobind Singh Sahib, Sri Guru Granth Sahib contains verses of 15 Hindu and Muslim poets/scholars of the Bhakti tradition, eleven Bhatt bards and three contemporary Sikhs in addition to six of the ten Gurus.

AUTHORSHIP SPANNING FIVE CENTURIES
From the celebrated 12th-century Sanskrit poet Jaidev and Sufi mystic Sheikh Farid to Guru Tegh Bahadar Sahib, whose writings were incorporated in the final edition in 1705 by Guru Gobind Singh Sahib, Sri Guru Granth Sahib contains verses of 15 Hindu and Muslim poets/scholars of the Bhakti tradition, eleven Bhatt bards and three contemporary Sikhs in addition to six of the ten Gurus.

CONGREGATION OF DIVERSITY
The disparate backgrounds of poet-writers like Namdev, Trilochan, Parmanand, anyone do such a thing?

Sadhna, Ramanand, Kabir, Pipa, Beni, Dhanna, Sain and Ravidas reveal that they were all revolutionary thinkers of their time and many were discarded by state and religious powers because of their ideas and/or birth.

The Gurus, starting from Guru Nanak Sahib, embraced their writings, their conversations eventually documented in Sri Guru Granth Sahib for eternity. It is a tragedy that anyone would disrespect such a treasury that honours the highest values of humanism and the oneness of God. Desecrating Sri Guru Granth Sahib is tantamount to desecrating the collective wisdom of generations of spiritual seekers, revolutionary thinkers and traditions. Why would anyone do such a thing?

China's exit bans multiply as political control tightens under Xi Jinping

Rights group Safeguard Defenders reported that ever since Xi Jinping took power in 2012, "China has expanded the legal landscape for exit bans and increasingly used them" against scores of Chinese and foreigners.

China is increasingly barring people from leaving the country, including foreign executives, a jarring message as the authorities say the country is open for business after three years of tight Covid-19 restrictions.

Scores of Chinese and foreigners have been ensnared by exit bans, according to a new report by the rights group Safeguard Defenders, while a Reuters analysis has found an apparent surge of court cases involving such bans in recent years, and foreign business lobbies are voicing concern about the trend.

"Since Xi Jinping took power in 2012, China has expanded the legal landscape for exit bans and increasingly used them, sometimes outside legal justification," the Safeguard Defenders report reads.

"Between 2018 and July of this year, no less than five new or amended (Chinese) laws provide for the use of exit bans, for a total today of 15 laws," said Laura Harth, the group's campaign director.

The group estimates "tens of thousands" of Chinese are banned from exit at any one time. It also cites a 2022 academic paper by Chris Carr and Jack Wroldsen that found 128 cases of foreigners being exit-

banned between 1995 and 2019, including 29 Americans and 44 Canadians.

Attention on the exit bans comes as China-US tensions have risen over trade and security disputes. This contrasts with China's message that it is opening up to overseas investment and travel, emerging from the isolation of some of the world's tightest Covid curbs. The Reuters analysis of records on exit bans, from China's Supreme Court database, shows an eight-fold increase in cases mentioning bans between 2016 and 2022.

China last week beefed up its counter-espionage law, allowing exit bans to be imposed on anyone, Chinese or foreign, who is under investigation.

Most of the cases in the database referring to exit bans are civil, not criminal. Reuters did not find any involving foreigners or politically sensitive subversion or national security issues.

By comparison, the US and European Union impose travel bans on some criminal suspects but generally not for civil claims.

DUE DILIGENCE

China's Ministry of Public Security did not respond to Reuters requests

for comment on exit bans, including inquiries on how many individuals, including foreigners, are subject to them. One person prevented from leaving China this year is a Singaporean executive at the US due-diligence firm Mintz Group, according to three people familiar with the matter.

The company, the executive and China's Public Security Bureau did not respond to requests for comment. Mintz said in late March the authorities had raided the firm's China office and detained five local staff. The foreign ministry said at the time Mintz was suspected of engaging in unlawful business operations. Police visited Bain & Co's office in Shanghai and questioned staff, the US management consultancy said last week. "Because of rising tensions between the US and China, the salience of this (exit ban) risk has risen," said Lester Ross, a veteran lawyer in China who has handled exit ban cases. "I've seen a rise in companies and entities being concerned about this and asking for our advice on how to prepare and reduce risks" of exit bans, said Ross, the head of the American Chamber of Commerce's China policy committee.

UNCERTAINTY IS HUGE

Foreign businesses are concerned about the heightened scrutiny and the vague wording of the counter-espionage legislation, which says exit bans can be imposed on those who cause "harm to the national security or significant damage to national interests". "The uncertainty is huge," said Jorg Wuttke, head of the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China. "Can you do due diligence? Clarity has to come." The EU chamber told Reuters in a statement: "At a time when China is proactively trying to restore business confidence to attract foreign investment, the exit bans send a very mixed signal."

People barred from leaving China include regular Chinese embroiled in financial disputes as well as rights defenders, activists and lawyers, and ethnic minorities such as Uyghurs in China's north-western Xinjiang region, according to the Safeguard Defenders report.

It cites a Chinese judicial report saying 34,000 people were placed under exit bans between 2016 and 2018 for owing money, a 55% rise from the same period three years earlier.

Anand Mohan out of jail

Why Nitish Kumar's move may be shocking but not surprising

The decades-long complex relationship of social justice messiahs Nitish Kumar and Lalu Yadav with Rajput bahubali Anand Mohan also hides why it's folly to see Bihar's politics through the simplistic prism of backward-forward conflicts.

After Independence, Bihar, like most other states, saw the dominance of the upper-caste politics of Congress leaders. The first shift happened in the 1960s when Ram Manohar Lohia launched a socio-political campaign. Several states, including Bihar, saw their first non-Congress governments. When things went back to square one, another socialist stalwart and former Congressman, Jayaprakash (JP) Narayan, mounted his Total Revolution in the 1970s. This time, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi also lost power and her former minister, Morarji Desai, took charge of the Janata Party government.

There had to be a pushback. In Bihar, Anand Mohan Singh launched his Samajwadi Kranti Sena in 1980 to espouse the causes of the upper castes, especially his fellow Rajputs. Born into a farmer's family in Pachgachhia village in Bihar's Saharsa district, Anand Mohan, whose grandfather was a prominent Gandhian freedom fighter, had different plans.

Charges of his involvement in criminal cases began collecting as he often rode a horse and was to soon take on the image of a don. He served three months in jail in 1983. This surprised some because he was part of the JP Movement at age 17. But contradictions came easily to Anand Mohan. In fact, he had come into the political limelight after displaying black flags to Morarji Desai at a public meeting in



Saharsa. Be that as it may, the Samajwadi Kranti Sena wasn't enough. In 1990, under the third socialist wave, this time led by the Janata Dal, former Congressman VP Singh, a UP Rajput, became the prime minister, and Lalu Yadav grabbed power in Bihar. His old friend Nitish moved to Delhi where he would soon become a central minister. Anand Mohan had no qualms about becoming an MLA from Mahishi in Saharsa district from the Janata Dal, a party whose idea of social justice was drastically different from his.

When VP Singh announced the implementation of the Mandal Commission report, granting reservation to Other Backward Classes (OBCs), such as the caste people of Lalu (Yadavs) and Nitish (Kurmis), in addition to the existing quota for Dalits and Tribals, Lalu got a weapon to tighten his hold over the state.

Anand Mohan revolted and formed his Bihar People's Party (BPP) in 1993. He drove a new forward versus backward, Rajput versus Yadav narrative, through his long-running political battles with Lalu's man Pappu Yadav. Big crowds turned up to listen to Anand Mohan emerging as a challenger to Lalu.

But there was something else upset with Lalu, though for different reasons. Nitish Kumar felt the Yadavs

had become the new upper castes in Bihar and other OBC communities like his own caste people remained stuck in a time warp. With George Fernandes and some others, Nitish founded the Samta Party in 1994. Anand Mohan was by Nitish's side. They had a common enemy: Lalu. 1994 was a watershed year. BPP leader and Anand Mohan's man, Chhotan Shukla, was killed in a police encounter. The next day, Anand Mohan and his supporters were returning from Shukla's funeral when Gopalganj District Magistrate G Krishnaiah was spotted in his official car. Egged on by Anand Mohan, the mob lynched the Dalit IAS officer in Lalu's government to vent their anger over Shukla's killing. The arrests happened swiftly. Anand Mohan pleaded innocence and Nitish and his party believed he was being implicated in the lynching case. Their association continued.

Around the same time, Anand Mohan's wife, Lovely Anand, also accused in the DM lynching case, won the Vaishali Lok Sabha bypoll.

In the 1995 Bihar election, Nitish teamed up with the Left to oust Lalu. Though associated with the Samta Party, Anand Mohan, out on bail, fielded about 100 BPP candidates and contested from three seats. He

lost them all. Nitish and the Samata-Left combine also suffered humiliation. Lalu returned to power. His bail cancelled, Anand Mohan contested the 1996 Lok Sabha elections from jail and became Sheohar MP. He was part of the Samta Party that backed the BJP-led NDA at the Centre. However, Prime Minister Vajpayee lost power in 13 days, making way for two Janata Dal PMs. This was also the time when Lalu, caught in the fodder scam, had to step down and install his wife, Rabri Devi, on the CM's chair. The NDA thought power in Bihar was within striking distance.

Anand Mohan won again in the 1998 Lok Sabha polls but lost in 1999. There was more bad news coming. Lalu won Bihar again in 2000. But the year also marked the bifurcation of Bihar, giving birth to the state of Jharkhand. This meant Nitish in Bihar became stronger, numerically, and, in 2003, the Samata Party was rebranded as the Janata Dal-United or JDU. In the 2005 Bihar assembly election, the NDA ended 15 years of Lalu-Rabri rule, often called a jungle raj for rising crime and corruption and poor development, and Nitish became the chief minister. Anand Mohan was part of the JDU. He played a role in bringing together the Bhumihars and the Rajputs, the state's most in-

fluential land-owning upper castes.

But two years into power, Nitish faced a major challenge. The local court convicted Anand Mohan and many others in the DM lynching case. He became the first politician in independent India to get the death sentence.

It was difficult for Nitish to say anything in public, but George Fernandes reached Patna's Beur jail in a 40-strong motorcade to meet Anand Mohan and later described the charges against him as false. The BJP also backed Anand Mohan as he came from a community that was its key voting constituency.

There was some relief when the Patna High Court commuted capital punishment to life imprisonment, something the Supreme Court also upheld in 2012.

After his conviction, Anand Mohan couldn't contest the 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. She lost.

Meanwhile, there was a shift in 2013 when Nitish dumped the BJP and went with Lalu's RJD (formerly Janata Dal), the Congress and the Left. Then, the Mahagathbandhan defeated the BJP in the 2015 Bihar polls. But two years later, Nitish dumped the Mahagathbandhan and returned to the BJP. And amidst all this, Anand Mohan felt betrayed by his friend. And then another somersault happened, this time from Anand Mohan. In the run-up to the 2020 Bihar assembly election, Anand Mohan's wife, Lovely Anand, and their son, Chetan, joined the RJD to defeat Nitish.

Pakistan's Economic Crisis: What Went Wrong?



The country is currently running on foreign loans taken on high rates of interest. It will have to repay \$80 billion in the coming three years.

In March-April, the Pakistan government set up distribution sites across the country to provide sasta aur muft aata (low-cost and free flour) to people to ease their burden amid spiraling prices and the ongoing economic crisis in the country. But instead of doing good, the initiative caused trouble in several places where stampedes broke out, killing and injuring people. Pakistanis are putting their lives at risk to collect something as basic as a sack of flour. It illustrates how the rising cost of food and other necessities is driving desperation and impacting the masses.

With inflation running at over 30 percent – a 50-year high – putting food on the table for the poorest, who comprise one-third of Pakistan's population, has become harder than ever before. When the recent stampedes over food flooded social media, so did the deeper questions: How did the country end up here? What does this economic crisis mean for the majority of the Pakistani people and for Pakistan's international projects, especially those with China under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which Pakistan considers vital for its future economic growth? Pakistan's current GDP, per capita income, and GDP growth are the lowest in its neighborhood; only war-torn Afghanistan's economy is weaker. Likewise, its unemployment and inflation rates are one of the highest in the region. The Human Development Index, which measures a country's achievements through three basic dimensions – health, knowledge, and standards of living – placed Pakistan in the 161st position out of 185 countries in 2022. In other words,

Pakistan is among the 25 countries with the lowest human development in the world. The country's current situation has multiple causes, including overall poor economic management, corruption, and excessive spending on defense and the armed forces. In a country where half the population is under the age of 22, investing in the education and technical skills of youth can generate opportunities for a more sustainable economy. Many also associate the current economic crisis, especially the rise in food staples, with last year's floods, which caused extensive damage to agricultural land, livestock, thousands of kilometers of road, and other infrastructure. This is

partially right, as inflation touched a record high after the floods in August last year. But the war in Ukraine also halted grain supply to a number of countries, including Pakistan, resulting in a sharp increase in prices of foodgrains.

But the situation was not stable even prior to these crises. According to a World Bank report on inflation and development in Pakistan, food-related shortages and transportation challenges caused by the floods and the war in Ukraine that impacted essential grain imports significantly contributed to the inflation, but so did a hike in fuel and oil subsidies. Pakistan heavily relies on imported oil. A constant decline in the value of the country's currency has resulted in much higher tariffs with every import of oil. The unceasing decline in the value of Pakistan's currency over the months has been triggered by the country's inability to repay its foreign debt. Pakistan is

essentially running on foreign loans, an economic model that only leads to borrowing more, which eventually results in bankruptcy. Between February 2023 and June 2026, Pakistan will have to repay around \$80 billion in foreign debt.

As of December 2022, Pakistan held \$126.3 billion in external debt and liabilities, of which 30 percent is owed to China. As much as the Chinese government has supported Pakistan's infrastructure development through CPEC, which Pakistan is determined to benefit economically from in the future, for now, the federal government is having to repeatedly turn to the Chinese for refinancing and a rollover of debts. Although the Chinese government and commercial banks have helped Pakistan by deferring debt repayment or rolling over debts in the past, it is hard to predict if China will continue to do so.

So far, of the numerous projects agreed upon under

CPEC, only a few have been completed. Chinese frustration over endless delays in project completion, halting of projects, and security threats to its nationals working in Pakistan has resulted in hesitation to invest in new projects. Yet Pakistan remains one of the biggest beneficiaries of Chinese loans. Many blame China for the high interest it charges on loans that have burdened many developing countries including Pakistan. Instead of the promised economic growth through CPEC, China's loans may have worsened Pakistan's economic crisis. But it is still too early to conclude whether CPEC debts will drain the Pakistani economy or open up opportunities for growth in the future. For now, transparency over government spending is the need of the hour, along with restructuring the country's economy from one that overspends on defense institutions and excessively relies on foreign debt with high interest to a model that is sustainable.

China Strengthens Grip on Sri Lanka's Colombo Port

China Merchant Port Holding Company (CMPH), which already has a dominant presence in Sri Lankan harbors, will be setting up a warehousing hub in Colombo port.

China is strengthening its grip on Colombo port after securing an agreement to build, operate, and transfer a warehousing hub within the port. The China Merchants Port Holdings Company (CMPH) will have an 85 percent stake in the warehouse facility and will operate it for 50 years. The Sri Lankan government assigned the \$392 million project to CMPH, a Chinese state-owned enterprise, without open tendering. The CMPH already has an 85 percent stake in the Colombo International Container Terminal (CICT), a star performer among Sri Lankan and South Asian terminals. The CMPH also controls Hambantota port in southern Sri Lanka, in which it has an 85 percent stake and enjoys a 99-year lease. According to CMPH chairman Miao Jianmin, the latest deal will bring its total investments in Sri Lanka to over \$2 billion, making the

company the single largest foreign investor in the island nation. Another Chinese company, China Harbor Engineering Company (CHEC), is partnering with Access Engineering Ltd. of Sri Lanka and the Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) to build the Eastern Container Terminal in Colombo port. The CHEC is also the builder of Colombo Port City, which is designed to be an international financial hub. Shipping sources in Colombo said that they had advocated for the government to award the Colombo port warehousing project on the basis of an open tender. Instead, the government unilaterally gave the project to the CMPH, according to these sources. No other Sri Lankan or foreign party had raised this issue; as a result, the deal "is done and dusted," as Rohan Masakorala, CEO of Shippers' Academy in Colombo, put it. For the purpose of

setting up the warehouse, to be called the South Asia Commercial and Logistics Hub, the CMPH has set up a fully-owned subsidiary, Fortune Centre Group Limited (FCGL). The FCGL gets the rights to name the chairman and managing director/chief executive officer, as well as appoint five directors to the project company. Access Engineering, a Sri Lankan construction company, and the SLPA, the two local collaborators, can name one director each. The issued share capital of the FCGL will be \$84 million. FCGL agreed to contribute, in cash, \$58.8 million, representing 70 percent of the total. Access Engineering and SLPA each agreed to contribute \$12.6 million (15 percent of the total). Under the agreement, SLPA is not allowed "to grant any third party the right to carry out port-related logistics or warehousing

services at the Port of Colombo at a rate lower than the royalty fees payable by the project company," filings by China Merchants Port show, according to Sri Lanka's The Sunday Times. At the end of 50 years, the hub company "shall hand back" the leased site and "transfer all assets of the logistics center to SLPA," the Sunday Times reported. China Merchants Port called its stake in the logistics complex "a giant leap forward" for its influence in South Asia. Geopolitical Implications The warehousing project has an international strategic dimension, especially for India. After the Mahinda Rajapaksa government gave the CICT project to China in September 2011, India felt a pressing need to have a foothold in Colombo port because of its strategic and economic interest in the Sri Lankan port.

Air pollution exposure linked to increased risk of arrhythmia: Study

The study states that exposure to air pollution increases the risk of arrhythmia. Is air pollution bad for your heart? A comprehensive study of 322 Chinese cities published in CMAJ indicated that acute exposure to air pollution was linked to an increased risk of arrhythmia - irregular heartbeat. The common arrhythmia conditions atrial fibrillation and atrial flutter, which can progress to more serious heart disease, affect an estimated 59.7 million people globally. Air pollution is a modifiable risk factor for heart disease, but the evidence linking it with arrhythmia has been inconsistent. To determine whether there is a link, Chinese researchers evaluated hourly exposure to air pollution and the sudden onset of symptoms of arrhythmia using data from 2025 hospitals in 322 Chinese cities. Air pollution in China is well above the World Health Organization's guidelines for air quality, and the researchers conducted their analyses using air pollutant concentrations from monitoring stations closest to the reporting hospitals. "We found that acute exposure to ambient air



pollution was associated with increased risk of symptomatic arrhythmia," says Dr. Renjie Chen, School of Public Health, Fudan University, Shanghai, China, with coauthors. "The risks occurred during the first several hours after exposure and could persist for 24 hours. The exposure-response relationships between 6 pollutants and 4 subtypes of arrhythmias were approximately linear without

discernable thresholds of concentrations." The study included 190 115 patients with acute onset of symptomatic arrhythmia, including atrial fibrillation, atrial flutter, premature beats (originating in either the atria or ventricles of the heart) and supraventricular tachycardia. Exposure to ambient air pollution was most strongly associated with atrial flutter and supraventricular

tachycardia, followed by atrial fibrillation and premature beats. Additionally, among 6 pollutants, nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) had the strongest association with all 4 types of arrhythmias, and the greater the exposure, the stronger the association. "Although the exact mechanisms are not yet fully understood, the association between air pollution and acute onset of arrhythmia that we observed is biologically plausible," write the authors. "Some evidence has indicated that air pollution alters cardiac electrophysiological activities by inducing oxidative stress and systemic inflammation, affecting multiple membrane channels, as well as impairing autonomic nervous function." The authors note that the association was immediate and underscores the need to protect at-risk people during heavy air pollution. "Our study adds to evidence of adverse cardiovascular effects of air pollution, highlighting the importance of further reducing exposure to air pollution and of prompt protection of susceptible populations worldwide," they conclude.

DASH diet voted best for heart health

The DASH diet includes foods that are rich in potassium, calcium and magnesium, all the nutrients that help control blood pressure.

Our diet plays a major role in our heart health. However, misinformation about food and nutrition has taken a controversial turn due to social media, with people conforming to fad diets. However, according to the American Heart Association (AHA), the best diet, especially for the heart, is the DASH diet.

Published in the journal *Circulation*, the AHA in a new study found that the Mediterranean, DASH-style, pescetarian and vegetarian eating patterns strongly aligned with heart-healthy eating guidelines, while the popular paleo and ketogenic diets contradicted them.

"The number of different, popular dietary patterns has proliferated in recent years, and the amount of misinformation about them on social media has reached critical levels," said statement writing committee chair Christopher D. Gardner, the Rehnborg Farquhar Professor of



Medicine at Stanford University in California. The report evaluated how well each of 10 popular diets or eating patterns aligns with nine of the 10 features of AHA's dietary guidance for heart-healthy eating.

These 10 features include:

- " Consuming a wide variety of fruits and vegetables
- " Choosing mostly whole grains instead of refined grains
- " Using liquid plant oils rather than tropical oils
- " Eating healthy sources

of protein, such as from plants, seafood or lean meats

" Minimising added sugars and salt

" Limiting alcohol

" Choosing minimally processed foods instead of ultra-processed foods

" Following this guidance wherever food is prepared or consumed

" The diets were rated on a scale of 1 to 100 for how well they adhered to AHA's guidance.

" The diets were divided

into four tiers based on their scores, which ranged from 31 to 100. Only one, the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) eating plan, got a perfect score.

" WHAT IS THE DASH DIET?

" According to AHA, the DASH eating pattern is low in salt, added sugar, tropical oil, alcohol and processed foods and high in non-starchy vegetables, fruits, whole grains and legumes. Proteins mostly come from plant sources, such

as legumes, beans or nuts, along with fish or seafood, lean poultry and meats and low-fat or fat-free dairy products.

" The DASH diet includes foods that are rich in potassium, calcium and magnesium - all the nutrients that help control blood pressure. This diet also limits sodium, saturated fat and sugar intake.

" The Mediterranean eating pattern, which has often been regarded as the best diet in the world, had a slightly lower score (89) because, unlike DASH, it allows for moderate alcohol consumption and does not address added salt. The pescetarian diet (92), which allows for seafood in addition to plant-based foods, and the vegetarian diet (86) also were in the top tier.

" The authors noted that efforts need to be made to include historically marginalised groups in the further studies and research to reduce the impact of structural racism on diet-related diseases, and policies are needed to dismantle unjust practices that limit access to healthy foods in some communities, according to the report.

Go First files for bankruptcy, blames failing Pratt & Whitney engines



Go First has filed an application with the National Company Law Tribunal, Delhi, for resolution under section 10 of the Insolvency

Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), Delhi. The airline said it is no longer in a position to continue to meet its financial obligations and has taken the step "to protect the interests of all stakeholders". In a statement, Go Airlines said they had to take the step due to the "ever-increasing number of failing engines supplied by Pratt & Whitney's International Aero Engines". Facing a severe cash crunch, Go Airlines also suspended all its flights for the next three days- May 3, 4, and

5. **HERE'S WHAT GO AIRLINES SAID**

Go Airlines (India) Limited ("GO FIRST"), India's third largest airline, today filed an application with the National Company Law Tribunal ("NCLT") Delhi for resolution under section 10 of the Insolvency Bankruptcy Code ("IBC"). GO FIRST has had to take this step due to the ever-increasing number of failing engines supplied by Pratt & Whitney's International Aero Engines, LLC, which has resulted

in GO FIRST having to ground 25 aircraft (equivalent to approximately 50% of its Airbus A320neo aircraft fleet) as of 1 May 2023. The percentage of grounded aircraft due to Pratt & Whitney's faulty engines has grown from 7% in December 2019 to 31% in December 2020 to 50% in December 2022. This is despite Pratt & Whitney making several on-going assurances over the years, which it has repeatedly failed to meet.

Florida board appointed by Governor Ron DeSantis countersues Disney over 'backroom deals'

A district board appointed by Governor Ron DeSantis to oversee development around Disney theme parks in Florida filed a lawsuit, seeking to invalidate an agreement prior board members made with the entertainment giant, arguing it amounted to a one-sided deal that was rubber stamped.

A district board appointed by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis to oversee development around Walt Disney Co's Florida theme parks sued the company on Monday (local time) to void "backroom deals" favorable to the entertainment

giant. The state court lawsuit escalates tensions between Disney and the Republican governor and likely presidential candidate. It comes in response to a case Disney filed last week in federal district court against DeSantis and members of the Central Florida Tourism Oversight district board. Disney accused DeSantis and his supporters of illegally using the state government to punish the company for exercising its free-speech rights last year when Disney criticised a state measure banning classroom

discussion of sexuality and gender identity with younger children. DeSantis who is expected to soon declare his candidacy for US president, has repeatedly attacked "woke Disney" in public remarks.

"Since Disney sued us, we have no choice now but to respond," board Chair Martin Garcia said at a Monday meeting. The lawsuit in state court in Orange County, Florida, seeks to invalidate an agreement prior board members made with Disney, arguing it amounted to a one-sided deal that was rubber stamped. The Central Florida



Tourism Oversight District board maintained that Disney rushed development within the 25,000 acres of land in and around Walt Disney World.

Morgan Stanley plans to cut 3,000 jobs amid worsening economic outlook

Morgan Stanley plans to eliminate approximately 3,000 jobs in the second quarter of the ongoing financial year.

Global investment bank Morgan Stanley is planning its second round of job cuts in six months amid the worsening economic outlook and lack of deals. Morgan Stanley plans to eliminate approximately 3,000 jobs in the second quarter of the ongoing financial year, reported news agency Reuters. A source quoted in the news agency's report



said slow dealmaking and a tough economic environment are prompting the investment bank to look at its headcount. Morgan Stanley chief Sharon Yeshaya said last month that "expense management" was a priority given the broader market uncertainty and elevated inflation.

It may be noted that Wall Street's investment banks have suffered from a downturn in deals as investors grew more cautious about

volatile markets and rapidly rising interest rates, which have already hurt several US banks and led to the failure of three prominent lenders. Meanwhile, initial public offerings have also come to a standstill as start-ups have shelved plans to get listed, at least till some sort of improvement in investor sentiments. Mergers and

Acquisition volumes have also halved in the first quarter from a year earlier, putting further pressure on investment banks like Morgan Stanley.

Morgan Stanley CEO James Gorman said in December 2022 that the bank would make "modest" job cuts worldwide without giving an exact number. The investment bank had more than 82,000 employees as of March and the layoff will impact nearly 4 per cent of its staff.

US headed for 'unprecedented' default that could shake global economy: Report

The problem seems to be directly related to the debt ceiling, which is a legal limit on the amount of money that the US government is authorized to borrow to meet its financial obligations.

The US government could run short of cash to pay its bills by June, said US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen in a letter to Congress. In the letter, Yellen warned that the agency will be unlikely to meet all US government payment obligations as

expected to discuss the matter related to the debt ceiling limit. The US president has also extended invitations to House Democratic leader Hakeem



Jeffries, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, and Republican leader Mitch McConnell. The

problem is directly related to the debt ceiling, which is a legal limit on the amount of money that the US government is authorized to borrow to meet its financial obligations. The debt ceiling is decided by Congress and is periodically raised to accommodate any increase in national debt.

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Kylie Jenner looks red hot in a thigh-high slit gown

In a red Jean Paul Gaultier asymmetric dress with a thigh-high leg slit, Kylie Jenner was a vision to behold at Met Gala's red carpet. Wondering how to carry a thigh-high slit gown in the most stylish way? Kylie Jenner's Met Gala 2023 look will definitely help you. On Tuesday, Kylie arrived at New York's biggest fashion event Met Gala wearing a red Jean Paul Gaultier asymmetric dress with a thigh-high leg slit. The lavish ensemble also featured a matching two-toned robe in baby blue and bright red colours.

The mother of two, who was also joined by sister Kendall Jenner, 27, and older half-sister Kim Kardashian, 42, added extra height to the look with a pair of sophisticated red pumps. Kylie attended last year's Met Gala in a bridal avatar. The 24-year-old reality star's gown included a dramatic ruffled skirt and a draped bodice atop a mesh T-shirt with the Off-White logo. Jenner accessorized with a veil attached to a backwards baseball hat. Meanwhile, Kendall

showed off her model physique in a sparkling black sequin bodysuit with a silver collar, and platform boots. Kim, on the other hand, hit the Met Gala 2023 red carpet in Schiaparelli gown embellished with pearls. This year's theme of the Met Gala is "Karl Lagerfeld: A Line of Beauty," based

on the new Costume Institute exhibition exploring the work of the iconic designer. Lagerfeld, who died in 2019 at the age of 85, spent decades creating clothes for Balmain, Patou, Chloe, Fendi and Chanel in addition to his own namesake label.



5 habits that hamper your sleep

Numerous things we do have an adverse effect on how well we sleep, which unwittingly has an effect on our health.

Just as important as eating well is getting a good night's sleep. The majority of us choose to take medications rather than alter our lifestyles to address our problems.

Numerous things we do have an adverse effect on how well we sleep, which unwittingly has an effect on our health. We can dramatically improve our quality of life by altering our sleeping habits.

Priyanka Salot, Co-founder of The Sleep Company share five behaviours that make it difficult to fall asleep:

Use of screens before bed: We all enjoy using our phones, laptops, and computers in the hours before night, but have you ever questioned why doing so is bad for your health? This is so that the screen's light won't interfere with our bodies' normal sleep cycle. This explains why so many individuals struggle to fall asleep after using their laptops or watching television right before bed. So, in order to get a good night's sleep, it is advised that you restrict screen

time before bed. In fact, relaxing activities that can aid in getting ready for bed include reading a book or keeping a journal.



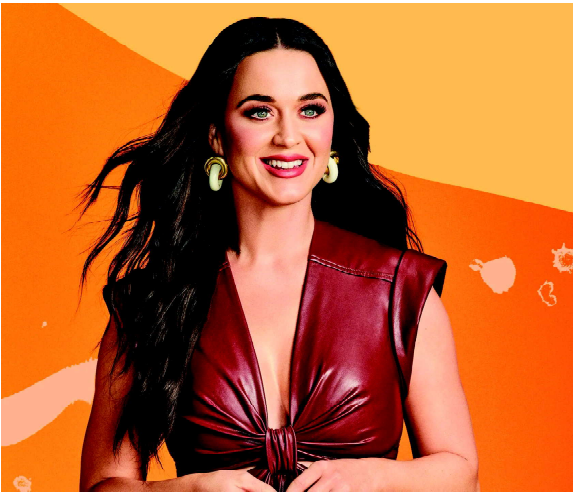
Working out just before going to bed: Exercise is necessary, but it's not a good idea to work out hard right before bed. Over time, it lowers the quantity and quality of sleep as well as depletes the body's energy stores. Try stretching or yoga before night instead of working out because these activities are less demanding

on your energies and are less rigorous.

Mattress type: It's critical to avoid placing strain on our muscles and joints at the end of the day. It can be difficult to sleep on a mattress or pillow made of foam. Many people roll and toss in their sleep as a result of mattress pain. Avoiding a memory foam or standard mattress in favour of a SmartGRID Mattress may be a wise decision if you experience sleep interruptions or are

perpetually exhausted. The SmartGRID Mattress, in contrast to other mattresses, keeps our body cool while we sleep, preventing night sweats, and it also conforms to our body shape, minimising back pain. **High caffeine consumption around dinner and bedtime:** While many of us might not be aware of it, coffee

use may be keeping us from falling asleep. While it does provide us with the stamina to stay awake, it also causes our minds to race and could make us uneasy. Because of this, consuming coffee right before bed or right after dinner is like working against our will, making it harder to fall asleep. **Ambience:** The impact of light and noise on sleep: Ambience is an important factor in a good night's sleep. People rightly associate bright light as the key hindrance to sleep, but fail to understand that noise is also a major concern. It is extremely difficult to fall asleep when someone is talking loudly in the next room or outside our window. As a result, creating a quiet and supportive bedroom is an important aspect of sleep hygiene. We must not underestimate the importance of adequate sleep for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Like in every other situation, a little effort goes a long way and will have a significant impact on one's quality of sleep.



Katy Perry to perform at King Charles' coronation concert

Singer Katy Perry is expected to be temporarily replaced on American Idol by a 'big-time' star. The 38-year-old singer and her American Idol co-star Lionel Richie are both scheduled to perform at King Charles' coronation concert, and Luke Bryan has told fans to expect some big-name replacements on the show. Katy and Lionel will both perform at the much-anticipated concert on the grounds of Windsor Castle. And Katy recently revealed that she's 'so grateful' to have been invited to sing at the upcoming event. The pop star is already an ambassador for one of the monarch's charities, and she's now looking forward to the

concert. Speaking about her invite, Katy said, "I am so grateful to get the honour because actually I am an ambassador for the British Asian Trust, which primarily focuses on ending child trafficking, which is a huge issue of our time and it just aligned with all my values."

Meanwhile, Orlando Bloom thinks it's 'cool'. The 46-year-old actor, who has Daisy, two, with the popstar, said, "My girl's gonna be singing, that's fun. I'm not gonna make it there, sadly, but she's representing, which is cool. She does those big, historical things. It's wonderful. She sang for the president too. She does that."

Kiara Advani raises temperature in blue swimwear

Kiara Advani says her Sunday was 'well spent' Before heading for another shooting schedule, actor Kiara Advani took some time for herself and enjoyed swimming in the pool. Kiara took to her Instagram story and dropped a video of herself swimming in a blue swimsuit and she looked stunning in that look.

The film billed as an action drama with current-day politics, features an ensemble cast, with Kiara playing the female protagonist. The upcoming project is jointly produced by Dil Raju and Shirish Garu under the banner of Sri Venkateswara Creations for a Pan-India release.

'Game Changer' will release in three languages - Telugu, Tamil and Hindi. Apart from Ram Charan and Kiara Advani, the film also stars SJ Suryah, Jayaram, Anjali, and Srikanth. The film is slated to release this year. Apart from this, Kiara recently wrapped shooting for her upcoming movie 'SatyaPrem Ki Katha'. Helmed by Sameer Vidhwans, and produced by Sajid Nadiadwala, the film is all set to hit the theatres on June 29, 2023. In the film, Kartik will be seen romancing Kiara Advani. The film marks the actor's second collaboration after the blockbuster 'Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2', which was released in 2022.



Priyanka Chopra wears diamond necklace worth over Rs 204 crore at Met Gala

At 2023 Met Gala, Indian star Priyanka Chopra Jonas wore a necklace featuring 11.16-carat blue diamond, which is said to be the largest blue diamond in a Bulgari piece. The necklace is said to go to auction at Sotheby's Luxury Week in Geneva on May 12. The pre-sale estimate is over \$25 million (over Rs 204 crore), according to International Gemological Institute. Priyanka and her husband, American singer Nick Jonas, opted for the colour black for their appearance. The theme was "Karl Lagerfeld: A Line of Beauty," and the dress code was "in honour of Karl". The legendary German designer was the creative mind behind Chanel from 1983 till his death in 2019. Priyanka opted for a black strapless gown by Valentino, featuring a big bow at the waist and a thigh-high slit. She paired her dress with Valentino platform pumps.



A two-toned (black-and-white) long, ruffle-lined cape with a trail acted as the statement piece for the look and was an ode to the style the late German fashion designer was known for. This was the couple's first appearance at the Met Gala event together in 2017 dressed in Ralph Lauren and started dating. The duo got engaged in July 2018 and tied the knot in December that year. Priyanka and Nick then attended the gala in 2019 and 2022 as a married couple. The gala takes place at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

after welcoming their daughter Malti Marie Chopra Jonas in 2022. They first attended the

Parineeti Chopra, Raghav Chadha to get engaged on May 13 in Delhi: Reports

Parineeti Chopra and Raghav Chadha might soon be a married couple! According to reports, the duo will get engaged on May 13 in Delhi.

Looks like the wedding date for Parineeti Chopra and Raghav Chadha is near. If reports are to be believed, the rumoured couple will get engaged this month in New Delhi. Even after weeks of speculation, both Parineeti and Raghav have remained mum about their relationship status. Parineeti Chopra's dating rumours with AAP MP Raghav Chadha spread like wildfire on the internet after they were spotted together. The duo sparked relationship rumours after they were spotted together in public. They went out on a dinner date on March 22, and met again for a lunch date the next day.

PARINEETI CHOPRA, RAGHAV CHADHA TO GET ENGAGED THIS MONTH?

Both Raghav Chadha and Parineeti Chopra have kept mum about their relationship status, except for the fact that the two have studied together at the London School of Economics and have many common friends. Amid wedding rumours, Parineeti was also spotted wearing a silver band on her

ring finger.

According to reports now, AAP's Rajya Sabha MP Raghav Chadha and Parineeti Chopra are set to get engaged on May 13. The ceremony will take place in New Delhi.



PARINEETI-RAGHAV'S ROKA

IndiaToday.in exclusively learnt earlier that Parineeti and Raghav's roka is done. As per our source, their wedding might take place by the end of October this year. A source close to the couple told IndiaToday.in, "Parineeti and Raghav's roka is done. It was a family affair and they both are very happy. The

duo is likely to get married by October-end of this year. Parineeti and Raghav are in no rush and they both have work commitments that they need to take care of before getting into the wedding festivities."

What is interesting, however, is that Parineeti's cousin sister Priyanka Chopra will be in India around the same time for the Jio MAMI Film Festival. PeeCee is the chairperson of this film festival and is speculated to fly down to attend it this year. Sources indicate that Parineeti's wedding will coincide with her sister's visit to India.

WHEN PARINEETI-RAGHAV SPARKED DATING RUMOURS

Parineeti Chopra was spotted with AAP leader Raghav Chadha on March 22. The duo arrived separately at a posh restaurant in Mumbai. Both twinned in white and while Parineeti paired it with chequered pants, Raghav opted for beige linen pants. They also posed for paps. That's not all. The duo were seen together once again as they headed out after a lunch date. The two also left in the same vehicle.

Aryan Khan's directorial web debut is titled Stardom



Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan's son, Aryan Khan isn't interested in acting but has a knack for writing and direction. Aryan will make his directorial debut with an upcoming show, titled Stardom. It will be a streaming show with six episodes and will be set against the backdrop of the film industry. The series is currently in its production stage. It's being produced by Aryan's home production Red Chillies Entertainment owned by his father, who is fresh off the success of his blockbuster movie Pathaan.

A few years back, while talking to chat show host David Letterman, SRK told him that Aryan isn't interested in building a career in acting more so because he has the towering achievements of his father to match-up to but he harbours dreams of being a director or a producer. Apart from Stardom, Aryan Khan recently shot an ad film where he got to direct his father.

In Chandigarh, Diljit Dosanjh says he is committed to doing one Punjabi film a year

Singer-actor Diljit Dosanjh has made the nation proud by becoming the first Indian artiste to perform at Coachella, the world's biggest music festival held in California last weekend. And the busiest star of Punjab arrives in Chandigarh via Mumbai to promote his upcoming film Jodi with Nimrat Khaira. He shares, "My producers have themselves arrived from Canada and I have come from Coachella to tell that Jodi is finally releasing on May 5. The film was offered to me 2018, but due to Covid it got delayed." Whether the film would repeat the magic for Bollywood like Pathaan did for Bollywood, Diljit is no mood to make comparisons. But one thing he assures — despite his busy schedule, he is committed to doing one Punjabi film a year.

Jodi, a period film about the times when musical akharas were famous in Punjab, it also reminds of another project that Diljit is part of, Chamkila, a biopic by Imtiaz Ali that is in the making. While one compares, Diljit differentiates, "One is a fictional story and the other is a biopic. So not just the character's look but also the subject is different, but from the same times of course." As to whether acting was always a plan, the Udda Punjab actor says, "I was never interested in

studying, but my sister was. But when I was seven or eight years old, my teacher used to write poems and made me recite those. Soon, I became known as a kalakaar in school."

Changing times

Diljit hails technological advancements, as any artiste today is able to post content online and achieve success. "When I started in 2002, you needed people who could help you become an artiste. Punjabi artistes also woke up late to the concept of royalty. I was also amazed when a music company owner informed how he was earning royalties of Chamkila's songs. Before that I thought we release songs and when they are a hit, we earn from live performances."

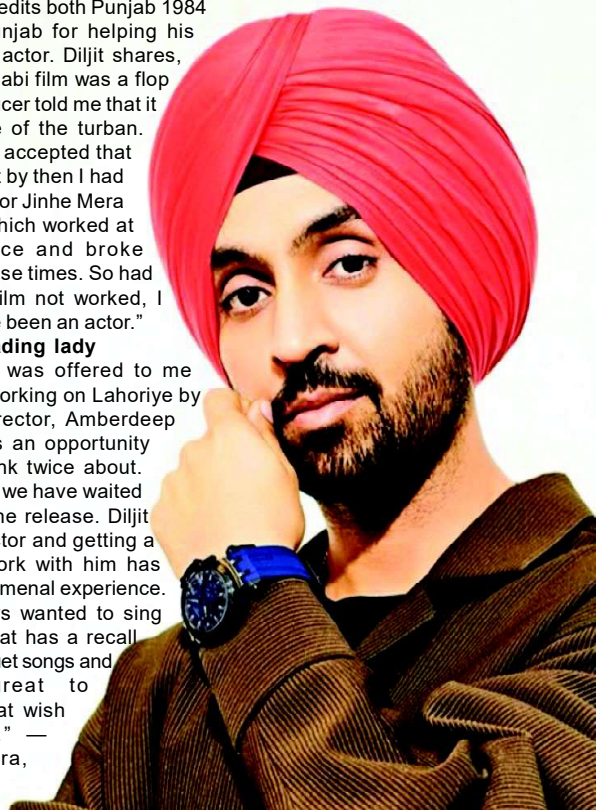
Singer or actor... Is another question that Diljit used to think a lot about earlier, but now he says, "I have stopped judging myself. I earlier used to think of myself as a singer, but then many people gave me good feedback on acting."

Diljit's dressing sense has also become one of the talking points in the fashion world and he admits to being his own stylist. When it comes to Bollywood and to be taken as a serious 'turbaned' actor, Diljit says, "It a huge accomplishment."

He credits both Punjab 1984 and Udda Punjab for helping his cause as an actor. Diljit shares, "My first Punjabi film was a flop and the producer told me that it was because of the turban. And I humbly accepted that feedback, but by then I had already shot for Jinhe Mera Dil Luteya, which worked at the box-office and broke records in those times. So had the second film not worked, I wouldn't have been an actor."

Meet the leading lady

"Jodi was offered to me when I was working on Lahoriye by the same director, Amberdeep Singh. It was an opportunity you don't think twice about. But of course we have waited for long for the release. Diljit is a senior actor and getting a chance to work with him has been a phenomenal experience. Also, I always wanted to sing something that has a recall value of old duet songs and it feels great to transform that wish into reality." — Nimrat Khaira, singer-actor





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