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Former Chief Financial Officer Of Two SPACs Pleads Guilty To Fraud Scheme



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IT'S OVER

Trump's Spell Over GOP Breaks With McCarthy Meltdown

The ex-president has endorsed the congressman for the Speaker role. But that hasn't been enough to sway the skeptics.



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Key Factors Behind Pakistan's Worsening Economic Crisis

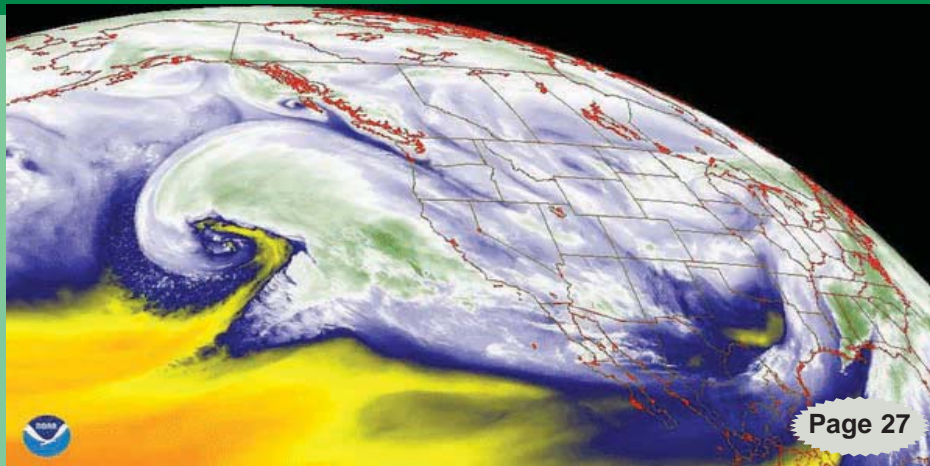
Pakistan is facing an acute financial crisis as its government rushes to tackle the situation with drastic measures. But what are the factors that have pushed the country towards an imminent economic disaster? Here is all you need to know.



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What is atmospheric river that is driving heavy rains, floods to US?

Satellites picked up the development revealing a swirling movement overhead the United States.



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Russia sends more Arctic oil to China, India at steeper discounts after sanctions

Arctic crude exports to India have steadily increased since May, with a record 6.67 million barrels loaded in November and 4.1 million barrels in December, shows data.



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Haldwani row: Over 800 hectares of railway land under encroachment across India



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Will stop Uorfi Javed's obscenity, says Maharashtra BJP women's wing chief



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Man Pleads Guilty to Bribery and Visa Fraud Conspiracies

(SAI Bureau) A Georgia man pleaded guilty today for his roles in two bribery conspiracies — one related to U.S. government reconstruction contracts in Afghanistan and one related to a U.S. Department of State visa fraud scheme.

According to court documents, Orlando Clark, 57, of Smyrna, managed reconstruction projects in Afghanistan on behalf of a U.S. company. In 2011 and 2012, Clark conspired with an analyst at a different U.S. company, who evaluated bids for U.S.-funded reconstruction contracts that were awarded by the U.S. military, to receive approximately \$400,000 in bribes from an Afghan company in return for assisting it in obtaining millions of dollars in contracts. To conceal his criminal conduct, Clark

registered fictitious companies and bank accounts in Georgia — to which he sent bribe payments via wire transfers from Afghanistan — and created invoices to make it appear as though he was involved in a car-exporting business. In reality, Clark used the bribe payments funneled through these accounts to enrich himself and purchase personal items, including two BMWs. In addition, between 2015 and 2020, Clark also received bribes to sign false letters of recommendation for visas authorized for Afghan nationals who worked as translators with U.S. forces in Afghanistan. Clark signed over 10 letters in which he falsely claimed to have supervised the applicants and in which he stated, without any factual basis, that he

had no reason to believe that they posed a threat to U.S. national security. Clark pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit bribery of a public official and conspiracy to commit visa fraud. He is scheduled to be sentenced on April 12 and faces a maximum penalty of five years in prison on each charge. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Assistant Attorney General Kenneth A. Polite, Jr. of the Justice Department's Criminal Division; U.S. Attorney Ryan K. Buchanan for the Northern District of Georgia; Inspector General John F. Sopko of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR);

Special Agent in Charge Peter Tolentino of the Economic Crimes Field Office of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS); Special Agent in Charge Stanley A. Newell of the Transnational Operations Field Office of the Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS); and Supervisory Special Agent Gregory Batman, Chief of the Criminal Investigations Division of the U.S. Department of State Diplomatic Security Service (DOS-DSS) made the announcement. SIGAR, NCIS, DCIS, and DOS-DSS are investigating the case. Trial Attorney Matt Kahn of the Criminal Division's Fraud Section and Assistant U.S. Attorney Russell Phillips for the Northern District of Georgia are prosecuting the case.

Making Every Effort To Reduce Visa Interview Appointment Time In India: US

State Department spokesperson Ned Price said the US embassy and consulates in India in particular broke their all-time record for the number of student visas issued in a single fiscal year



was committed to facilitating legitimate travel to the US while safeguarding national security. "We know that timely visa processing is essential to the US economy and to the administration's goal of family

reunification. We've made great strides in recovering from pandemic-related closures and staffing challenges, but we're still working to respond to the significant demand for visa

services," Price said. Making Every Effort To Reduce Visa Interview Appointment Time In India: US The US issued more student visas in fiscal year 2022 than in any year since 2016.

Canada grants record permanent residency permits in 2022

(SAI Bureau) Washington: The US is making every effort to reduce the waiting time for a visa interview appointment in India, a top State Department official has said, asserting that the visa processing is recovering faster than projected and is expected to reach pre-pandemic levels over the coming year. Addressing the growing concern over the backlog of visa applications from countries like India, State Department spokesperson Ned Price told reporters at his daily news conference on Wednesday that he certainly understands the frustrations of those who have to wait for a long time.

As of November 2022, the median worldwide wait time for a tourist visa (B1/B2) interview appointment was about two months, and applicants with urgent travel needs who meet certain criteria can apply for an emergency appointment, usually available within days.

"Visa processing is

recovering faster than projected and over the coming year, we expect to reach pre-pandemic processing levels," Price said.

The US issued more student visas in the fiscal year 2022 than in any year since 2016, he said, adding that its embassy and consulates in India in particular broke their all-time record for the number of student visas issued in a single fiscal year.

"We issued nearly 1,25,000 student visas. We recognise that some applicants may still face extended visa wait times, and we're making every effort to further reduce visa interview appointment wait times as quickly as possible in India and around the world, including for first-time tourist visa applicants," he said.

"I can tell you that it is a priority of the Secretary and of the Department to do everything we can to reduce that backlog and ultimately to reduce the wait times," he said.

He said the State Department

(SAI Bureau) OTTAWA, - Canada set an immigration record last year by granting more than 437,000 foreigners permanent residency, the government said on Tuesday, as it ramps up immigration to fight a tight labor market.

The government had set a target to welcome 431,645 new permanent residents in 2022, and the immigration ministry said Canada has reached that target to make it the largest annual intake of people in Canadian history. The tally for last year is about 9% higher than 2021, when Canada surpassed the previous record set in 1913, and comes as Canada seeks to bring in 1.45 million new permanent residents by 2025-end. Immigration is a key part of the solution as Canada focuses on addressing an acute labor market shortages, the ministry said. People with

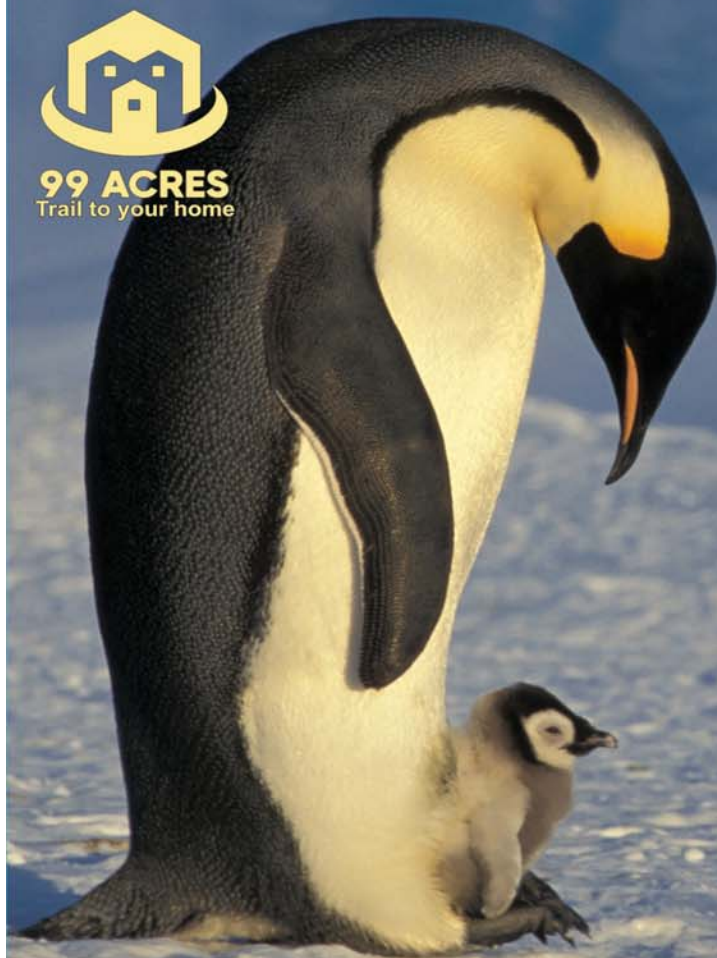
permanent residency permits can typically apply for citizenship after five years. Immigration accounts for almost 100% of Canada's labor force growth and by 2036 immigrants will represent up to 30% of Canada's population, up from 20.7% in 2011, the statement said. Prime Minister Justin

Trudeau's government has relied on immigration to boost the Canadian economy and support an aging population since coming to power in 2015. Shortage of skilled workers in industries like healthcare is acute and the



most recent official data shows there were 871,300 job vacancies in October, down from a record high of over a million open roles in Canada in May. To tackle that, Ottawa is planning targeted draws for skilled immigrants for the first time in 2023, allowing it to cherry pick applicants with the most in-demand skills for the regions of the country that most need workers. But many immigrants still struggle to find work in their chosen field, and some advocates say supports

have not grown in pace with the number of new permanent residents. Canada has also struggled to keep up with a surge in applications after COVID-19 pandemic related restrictions eased as the number of processed applications doubled to about 5.2 million in 2022 from the previous year, the ministry said.



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The cost of immigrating to the US could get more expensive. Here's what you need to know.



petitions, certifications and other requests related to citizenship and naturalization in the U.S.

USCIS explained in a Tuesday news release that the new fees would allow it to "more fully recover its operating costs, reestablish and maintain timely case processing, and prevent the accumulation of future case backlogs."

But the move, which also includes a 60-day public comment period, won't raise costs for everyone.

Officials also explained in the Tuesday news release that they want to preserve existing fee waivers for low-income individuals and vulnerable groups.

They are also seeking to add new exemptions for some humanitarian programs.

USCIS said the proposed rules would "decrease or minimally increase fees for more than one million low-income filers each year." Here's what you need to know about the potential changes.

What is Title 42 and is it ending? The US border immigration policy, explained

What fees are increasing?

Under the proposed rules, employers who apply to sponsor immigrants for permanent residency in the U.S. or a temporary work visa would pay an additional \$600 fee. That money will be

allocated to programs for asylum seekers.

Here are some of the other potential changes:

The application fee for H-1B visas, typically for highly skilled foreign workers who want to work in the United States, would increase 70% to \$780.

H-1B petitioners would also pay \$215 in pre-registration fees, which is currently \$10.

Fees for EB-5 visas, which are for people investing money in the U.S., would increase to \$11,160, up from \$3,675.

Applications to change temporary visas into permanent residency, also known as green cards, would also increase from \$1,225 to \$1,540.

(South Asian Insider Bureau) The Biden administration is proposing a fee hike for some immigration costs, including increasing certain employment-based visas, while keeping costs for other migrants the same or lower. The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services released the proposed changes on Tuesday that would adjust the costs for dozens of applications,

Why top destinations Canada, Australia & NZ got fewer Indian students in last 3 yrs, UK saw rise

Data in Parliament show UK regain popularity in last 3 yrs with opening of post-work visas being seen as advantage. In contrast, Covid & strict rules hurt other foreign destinations.

(South Asian Insider Bureau) New Delhi: The traditionally popular study-abroad destinations for Indian students — Australia, New Zealand and Canada — have seen the number of students decreasing over the last three years while the popularity of the United

Kingdom has gone up. Reasons have varied from Covid to countries getting stricter in selecting students, say experts. Data shared in the Rajya Sabha Wednesday shows that from 2019 to 2021, the overall number of students going abroad for studies came down. While in 2019-20, 5,86,337 Indian students went abroad, the numbers were low in the pandemic years — 2,59,655 in 2020-21 and 4,44,553 in 2021-22. When it comes to destination specific numbers, New Zealand saw the numbers declining, with only 64 students going there in 2021-22 as opposed to 5,321 in 2020-21 and 10,297 in 2019-20. Australia saw a similar trend when the numbers tumbled down from 73,808 in 2019-20 to 8,950 in 2021-22. Same with Canada where the numbers went down from 1,32,620 in 2019-20 to 1,02,688 in 2021-



Australia, New Zealand hit by Covid restrictions


Talking about the change in trends, experts said Australia

and New Zealand have only lost students because of their Covid-led visa restrictions and the numbers will pick up next year. For Canada, they said that it is now getting stricter with the kind of students entering there and, hence, there is a drop.


Sumeet Jain, co-founder and higher education expert at study abroad platform Yocket, said, "Australia and New Zealand just opened up their gates to students. They have lost the momentum because of the Covid restrictions. It will pick-up now as the restrictions have been eased." Talking about Canada, he said it has been "very strict with people going on student visas because a lot of them who go there do not have good profiles, and now they want to reject such profiles. Probably it does not match with what they want to do in

the future or the vision they have for their country..." About the UK numbers going up, he said, "The numbers have gone up because the UK has opened post-work visas for students. This term was the one

where they fully saw the effect post-pandemic and, hence, numbers are looking good. However, it is to be seen how this goes in the future, and if the numbers still look up."



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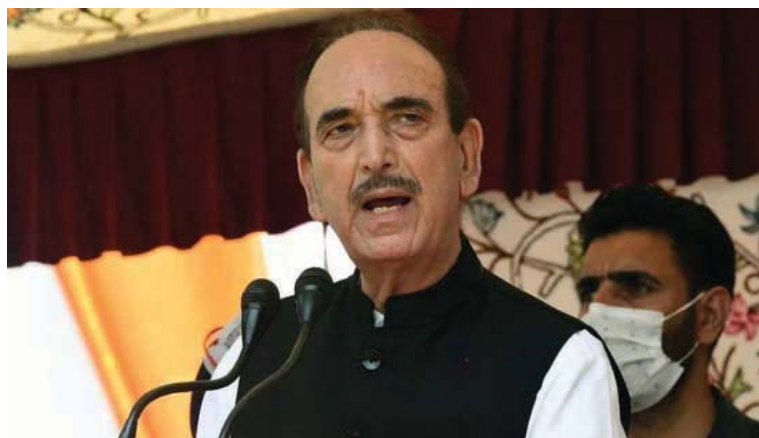


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Ghulam Nabi Azad dismisses report on him rejoining Cong, says 'shocked to see...'

Ghulam Nabi Azad, who quit the Congress in August after an explosive resignation letter, had claimed during the Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh elections that only the Grand Old Party can take on the BJP



story filed by ANI correspondent about my rejoining in congress party. Unfortunately such stories are being planted by a section of leaders in the congress party right now and are doing this just to demoralise my leaders and supporters", Azad tweeted.

"I don't have any ill will against congress party and its leadership, however I request them to tell these habitual story planters to refrain from doing so. Once again I would like to insist that this story is completely baseless!" the former Congress leader added.

Earlier in the day, a report by news agency ANI claimed that Congress leaders Akhilesh Prasad Singh, Bhupinder Singh Hooda and Ambika Soni had been assigned the responsibility to bridge the gap between Azad and the Congress. According to the said news report, efforts to bring back Azad were fuelled by his statement during the Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh elections. The veteran leader had said that only the Congress can take on the Bharatiya Janata Party. The ongoing Bharat Jodo Yatra's convenor Digvijaya Singh had

invited him to join Rahul Gandhi's march.

Azad had quit the Congress in August after shooting an explosive resignation letter. In his parting letter, he had launched an all out attack on Rahul Gandhi, calling him 'non-serious'. The 73-year-old leader had claimed that important decisions in the Congress were being taken by Rahul or worse his security guards and PAs.

After ending his decades-long association with the Congress, he announced a new outfit called 'Democratic Azad Party'.

(SAI Bureau) Former Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad on Friday rejected speculations of returning to the fold, this after a news report claimed that talks were underway between him and a section of Grand Old Party leaders. "I am shocked to see the

Non-essential construction & demolition banned in Delhi as air quality worsens

While under Stage III of GRAP, states also have the option to enforce a ban on BS III petrol and BS IV diesel vehicles, which was enforced the last time Delhi's air went in the 'severe' category, Delhi's transport department officials say a decision on this will be taken soon

(News Agency) With the air quality deteriorating ahead of the New Year, the Centre's air quality panel has directed the implementation of restrictions under the Stage III of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) in the Delhi-NCR region.

In a notification, the Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital and adjoining areas stated that the air quality has deteriorated over last few hours and Delhi's AQI has been recorded as 399 as on December 30, 2022. The panel noted that the AQI in Delhi is expected to slip into 'Severe' category due to calm

wind and stable atmospheric conditions.

The actions under the Stage III of GRAP include:

1. Strict ban on non-essential constructions and demolition activities in the entire NCR, except for projects like railway services, metro rail services including stations, airports, inter state bus terminals, national security and defence related infrastructure, hospitals and other healthcare facilities etc.
2. Intensify the frequency of mechanised or vacuum-based sweeping of roads.
3. Daily water sprinkling along

with the use of dust suppressants before peak traffic hours on roads.

4. Shutting brick kilns, stone crushers, mining and associated activities.
5. State governments in the NCR may impose restrictions on BS III petrol and BS IV diesel light motor vehicles.
6. The citizens have been urged

to assist in the effective implementation of GRAP III guidelines through steps like sharing a ride to work or using public transport, working from home if their organisation allows, avoiding usage of coal or wood for heating purposes among others. While under

Stage III of Grap, states also have the option to enforce a ban on BS III petrol and BS IV diesel vehicles, which was enforced the last time Delhi's air went in the 'severe' category, Delhi's transport department officials say a decision on this will be taken soon.

3 men held in Delhi for involvement in illegal immigration racket

(News Agency) Three men allegedly involved in an illegal immigration racket were arrested from different areas of the national capital, police said on Wednesday, adding they recovered one Indian passport and two forged visas for different countries from their possession. Deputy commissioner of police (Indira Gandhi International Airport) Ravi Kumar Singh said that the gang made forged passports, fake Visas, and other travel documents in connivance with their accomplices in Delhi and Punjab. "With these three arrests, a cheating case registered at IGI Airport, under sections 420, 468, 471 and 120B of the Indian Penal Code and Section 12 of The Passport Act, has been solved. On the intervening night of November 9 and 10, Ritender Singh (42) of Kurukshetra (Haryana) approached the immigration counter for

departure clearance to Phuket (Thailand). On scrutiny of his passport, authorities found that the original pages of his passport had been replaced with pages from somebody else's passport to hide the offloaded and deported stamps. A fake immigration stamp was also found affixed to that passport. During the investigation, Singh was arrested and during interrogation, he disclosed that there were three offloaded stamps on his passport affixed by immigration counters at various airports. As a result, he was facing problems travelling to other countries," he said. Deputy commissioner of police (Indira Gandhi International Airport) Ravi Kumar Singh said that the gang made forged passports, fake Visas, and other travel documents in connivance with their accomplices in Delhi and Punjab.

Kamal Nath makes big prediction on Rahul Gandhi for 2024 polls

The former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister is the lone leader to have come forward in favour of Rahul Gandhi's candidature as the opposition face against Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2024

(News Agency) Senior Congress leader and former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Kamal Nath on Friday declared that Rahul Gandhi will be the opposition's prime minister candidate for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, news agency PTI reported. Nath also praised the Wayanad MP for leading the grand old party's Bharat Jodo Yatra and said he is not doing politics for power but for the common people of the country. "Rahul Gandhi does not

do politics for power, but for the people of the country who make anyone sit in power," he said. The former Madhya Pradesh chief minister is the lone leader to have come forward in favour of Rahul Gandhi's candidature as the opposition face against Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2024.

Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra has covered nearly 3,000 kilometres and is currently in the national capital on a nine-day winter break. The march resumes on January 3 when it enters Ghaziabad's Loni in Uttar Pradesh.

Asked if there was any chance of Jyotiraditya Scindia's return to the party in the future, the 76-year-old Congress chief of Madhya Pradesh said

there was no place for "traitors" in the party after they betrayed the organisation. "I would not comment on any individual, but those 'traitors' who betrayed the party and broke the trust of its



workers, there is no place for them in the organisation," he said. Meanwhile, former Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad, rejected speculations of him returning to Congress, this comes after a news report claimed

that talks were underway between him and a section of grand old party leaders. Earlier in the day, a report by news agency ANI claimed that Congress leaders Akhilesh Prasad Singh, Bhupinder Singh Hooda and Ambika Soni had been assigned the responsibility to bridge the gap between Azad and the Congress. "I am shocked to see the story filed by ANI correspondent about my rejoining in congress party. Unfortunately such stories are being planted by a section of leaders in the congress party right now and are doing this just to demoralise my leaders and supporters", Azad tweeted.

Hospitals across India conduct mock Covid-19 preparedness drills amid rise in cases

Mock Covid-19 preparedness drills are underway at health centres across the country after a surge in the number of infections in India. Union health minister Mansukh Mandaviya also visited Delhi's Safdarjung Hospital to review the Covid mock drill

(SAI Bureau) Mock Covid-19 drills were conducted across a number of health facilities in several states and union territories in India on Tuesday to prepare for the rising number of infections reported in the country and globally. Mock drills were also conducted in hospitals across multiple cities including, Noida, Ahmedabad, Varanasi, Dehradun, Guwahati, Hyderabad, and Chennai, among other parts of India. India recorded a single-day rise of 157 new Covid-19 cases, while the number of active cases decreased to 3,421, according to Union Health

Ministry data on Tuesday. Union health minister Mansukh Mandaviya also visited the Safdarjung Hospital in Delhi to review the Covid mock drill. Talking about the drills, the union health minister said, "To make sure there isn't Covid surge in the country, PM Modi has asked us to be careful. The government is also preparing in case covid cases increase. Today, mock drills are conducted across Covid hospitals in the country to make sure people get proper treatment." **TAMIL NADU HEALTH MIN TAKES STOCK**

Meanwhile, Tamil Nadu Health Minister Ma Subramanian, visited the Rajiv Gandhi Government Hospital in Chennai to review the Covid mock drill taking place on Tuesday. After reviewing the drill and taking stock of the conditions and situation, Ma Subramanian said, "Almost 72,000 beds are allocated just for Covid emergencies. Medicines are stocked up for 6 months. Oxygen supplies are in stock around 60-65 metric tonnes." Talking about the multiple variants and the state



government's preparedness in identifying and treating them, the health minister further said, "The BA5 has already been found in TN. BF7 is an internal variant now. We have already tested it. So we know what it is." Touching upon whether TN was equipped to deal with the crisis, the health

minister said, "TN is fully equipped to face whatever threat the Covid poses. We have been conducting vaccination camps extensively. The first dose has been done for 96% and the second dose has reached 92%. So 90% of people are fully vaccinated and we can definitely face this."

Punjab Police busts terror sub-module operating from Philippines, 3 arrested

(SAI Bureau) The Punjab Police, in further investigation of the Sirhali Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG) attack case, busted a sub-module of Canada-based terrorist Lakhbir Landa. Three of its operatives have been arrested and a loaded RPG along with a Rocket Launcher was recovered from their possession today. The sub-module was being handled by Yadwinder

Singh from the Philippines on Landa's instructions. Punjab's Director General of Police (DGP) Gaurav Yadav identified the arrested accused as Kulbir Singh, Hira Singh, and Davinder Singh. They are all residents of Chambal village in Tarn Taran. The police have also charged Yadwinder Singh, he added. "With the recovery of a ready-to-use fresh RPG, the

Punjab Police have successfully thwarted another possible terrorist attack to disturb the peace and harmony of the state," said the DGP. The development comes days after the arrest of seven, including two juveniles in conflict with the law, who carried out the terror attack at the Sirhali police station building in Tarn Taran around 11.18 pm on December 9. In an intelligence-

led operation, the Tarn Taran Police laid a nakabandi at the Billianwala Bridge and arrested two bike-borne persons - Kulbir Singh and Hira Singh - in connection with the Sirhali RPG attack. Divulging more details, the SSP of Tarn Taran Gurmeet Singh Chauhan said that during interrogation, the accused revealed that they had provided one loaded RPG on the day of the attack on the instructions of Yadwinder Singh, who is currently residing in Manila. Yadwinder had also sent a tutorial video on how to launch an RPG to train the juveniles who fired the RPG, he

said. During further questioning, the accused disclosed that they, along with another accused, Davinder Singh, had concealed another RPG on the instructions of Yadwinder Singh, the SSP said, adding that the RPG along with a launcher was recovered from a pinpointed location on the banks of the river Beas in the Keedian village in Tarn Taran. He said that the teams of the police also arrested accused Davinder Singh, who disclosed that they were hatching a conspiracy to carry out another terror attack in the state on the instructions of Yadwinder Singh and Landa.

Mortuary staff has no answer to why Sushant Rajput's family didn't question cause of death
Sushant Singh Rajput was found hanging in his apartment in Mumbai's suburban Banda on June 14, 2020

(SAI Bureau) A former mortuary servant of the Cooper hospital where late actor Sushant Singh Rajput's autopsy was done has raised doubts about the actor's cause of death. Roop Shah, when questioned about why family members of Rajput did not raise any questions about who was one of the first responders after his death, Shah did not have any answer. Shah claims Rajput was punched in his eye and the marks on his neck were not from hanging and that he could have been strangulated. When asked about the doctors who performed the autopsy, Shah did not remember names and said that doctors were wearing COVID kits and

so he couldn't identify them. Shah claims that Rajput's bones were broken and they were not visible from outside. But he had seen those. When asked why Sushant's family, which also includes his sisters and brother in law who is an IPS officer, did not notice this, Shah did not have an answer. Even when told that the family had never raised any doubts about the cause of death, Shah said the family might not have known and he was experienced, as he had been seeing many bodies in all those years of work. Shah, when asked why he had been silent for over two and half years, did not answer clearly and hinted that he did not believe the government then.



Chhattisgarh social media star, 22, allegedly dies by suicide at home
Her family took her body down and informed the police.



(SAI Bureau) A 22-year-old social media sensation from Chhattisgarh has allegedly died by suicide. She was found hanging on the terrace of her house. Her family took her body down and informed the police. The police soon reached the spot and sent the body to the district hospital for an autopsy. More will be known after the autopsy report comes in, the police said.

Pakistani boat carrying arms, drugs seized along Gujarat coast, 10 arrested

The Indian Coast Guard apprehended a Pakistani boat attempting to venture into Indian waters with arms, ammunition and approximately 40kg of drugs worth Rs 300 crore

(SAI Bureau) The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) apprehended a Pakistani boat along the Gujarat coast that was attempting to venture into Indian waters with arms, ammunition and approximately 40kg of drugs worth Rs 300 crore. Ten people aboard the Pakistani boat have been arrested.

The Indian Coast Guard received intelligence input from the Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS), Gujarat, based on which, during the intervening night of December 25 and 26, the ICG strategically deployed its fast patrol class of ship ICGS Arinjay to patrol the area close to the notional International Maritime Border Line (IMBL). During the early hours of Monday, the ICG observed a Pakistani fishing boat 'Al Soheli' moving



suspiciously in Indian waters.

When the Indian Coast Guard started questioning those aboard the Pakistani boat, the boat started evasive

manoeuvring and did not stop even when

the Indian Coast Guard fired warning shots. 'Arinjay', the ship of the Indian Coast Guard, intercepted the Pakistani

boat. The Indian Coast Guards boarded the Pakistani boat and found the crew behaving in a suspicious manner. The ICG searched the boat and found arms, ammunition and approximately 40 kgs of narcotics worth Rs 300 crores. The officials seized the boat and arrested the crew, all of whom are being brought to the coastal town of Okha in Gujarat for further investigation. This is the seventh joint operation by the Indian Coast Guard and ATS, Gujarat in the last 18 months and first crackdown, wherein arms and ammunitions, along with drugs, were being smuggled into the country. During this period, a total 346kg of heroine worth Rs 1,930 crores have been seized and 44 Pakistani nationals and seven people from Iran have been arrested.

Two Russian men's deaths at Odisha hotel spark mystery, speculation

Vladimir Bidenov died due to a stroke and was cremated. His friend, Pavel Antov, was said to be depressed after Vladimir's death and he too died on December 25, the police said. However, mystery surrounds the deaths of the two Russian men

(SAI Bureau) Mystery surrounds the deaths of two Russian men who died at a hotel in Odisha's Rayagada within a span of few days under different circumstances. Vladimir Bidenov died of stroke, while Pavel Antov was found lying in a pool of blood outside the hotel on Saturday.

Speculation is rife about the death of Pavel Antov who, according to several media reports, was fiercely critical of Russian President Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine. Antov, who was reportedly a former lawmaker in Russia, is believed to have died after falling from the third floor of the hotel, two days after his fellow traveller was found dead there.

There is speculation that Antov's death was a possible "hit-job". Several Russians, especially businessmen, critical of Vladimir Putin have died in similar ways in Russia in the past. However, the Russian embassy has reportedly said that the Odisha Police haven't yet found any criminal link in the hotel deaths of two of its citizens. Pavel Antov, a businessman belonging to a pro-Putin party in Russia, was in Odisha to celebrate his 65th birthday.

Vladimir Bidenov, Pavel's co-traveller, was found dead at the same hotel on December 22. He was found lying unconscious in his room on the first floor of the hotel with a few empty wine bottles around him, PTI reported. "We don't know if he [Pavel Anthom] committed suicide or fell from the third floor," Bijaya Kumar Swain, the



hotel receptionist, was quoted as saying by news agency ANI.

As per police, Vladimir Bidenov died due to a stroke and was cremated. His friend, Pavel Antonov, was depressed after Vladimir's death and he too died on December 25, the police said. The police are investigating Pavel's death from all angles, including the possibility that he has fallen from the terrace accidentally.

Two other members of the group were asked to stay back and coordinate with the investigation.

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ਕੀ ਸੱਚਮੁੱਚ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਨੂੰ ਅਮਰੀਕਾ ਵਿਚ ਕੀਤਾ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ ਗ੍ਰਿਫਤਾਰ ?

ਭਾਰਤੀ ਮੀਡੀਆ ਨੇ ਕੀਤੀ ਪੁਸ਼ਟੀ ਪਰ ਅਮਰੀਕੀ ਮੀਡੀਆ ਨੇ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਦੇ ਮਾਮਲੇ ਵਿਚ ਬਿਲਕੁਲ ਚੁੱਪ ਕਿਉਂ ?

ਸਿੱਧੂ ਮੁਸੇਵਾਲਾ ਕਤਲ ਕਾਂਡ ਤੋਂ ਬਾਅਦ ਸੁਰਖੀਆਂ ਵਿਚ ਆਇਆ ਸੀ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ

Gurdial Singh

ਨਿਯੁਕਤ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਵਿੱਚ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਦੇ ਮਸ਼ਹੂਰ ਸਿੱਖ ਸਿੱਧੂ ਮੁਸੇਵਾਲਾ ਦੇ ਕਤਲ ਦੇ ਮੁੱਖ ਸ਼ਰਫ਼ੀ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਨੂੰ ਅਮਰੀਕੀ ਪੁਲਿਸ ਨੇ ਗ੍ਰਿਫਤਾਰ ਕਰ ਲਿਆ ਹੈ, ਇਸ ਗੱਲ ਦੀ ਪੁਸ਼ਟੀ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਦੇ ਮੁੱਖ ਮੰਤਰੀ ਭਗਵੰਤ ਮਾਨ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਵੀ ਕਰ ਦਿੱਤੀ ਗਈ ਹੈ। ਪਰ ਕੀ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਨੂੰ ਸੱਚਮੁੱਚ ਗ੍ਰਿਫਤਾਰ ਕਰ ਲਿਆ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ। ਇਸ ਬਾਰੇ ਹਾਲੇ ਤੱਕ ਅਧਿਕਾਰਤ ਤੌਰ 'ਤੇ ਅਮਰੀਕਾ ਦੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਵੀ ਸਾਚ ਦੱਸੇ ਸੀ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਪੁਸ਼ਟੀ ਨਹੀਂ ਕੀਤੀ ਗਈ ਹੈ। ਜੇਕਰ ਇਸ ਵਾਕੇ ਵਿਚ ਵੱਖ ਵੱਖ ਰੂਪਾਂ ਤੋਂ ਨਜ਼ਰ ਮਾਰੀ ਜਾਵੇ ਤਾਂ ਇਸ ਗੱਲ 'ਤੇ ਸ਼ੱਕ ਵੀ ਕੀਤੀ ਜਾ ਸਕਦੀ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਸੱਚਮੁੱਚੀ ਸਿੱਧੂ ਮੁਸੇਵਾਲਾ ਦੇ ਕਤਲ ਦੇ ਮਾਮਲੇ ਵਿਚ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਨੂੰ ਅਮਰੀਕਾ ਦੀ ਪੁਲਿਸ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਗ੍ਰਿਫਤਾਰ ਕੀਤਾ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ। ਇਸ ਸਬੰਧੀ ਜਦੋਂ ਸਾਹ ਪੁੱਤੀਨੀ ਨੇ ਅਮਰੀਕਾ ਦੇ ਸਾਚ ਦੱਸੇ ਸੀ ਤਾਂ ਉਸੇ ਸਮੇਂ ਹੀ ਅਮਰੀਕਾ ਦੇ ਰਾਸ਼ਟਰਪਤੀ ਟਰੰਪ ਨੂੰ ਉਸੇ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਦੀ ਗ੍ਰਿਫਤਾਰੀ ਬਾਰੇ ਕਿਸੇ ਵੀ ਤਰ੍ਹਾਂ ਦੀ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਨਹੀਂ ਸੀ। ਇਸੇ ਮੌਕੇ 'ਤੇ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਨੇ ਅਮਰੀਕਾ ਵਿਚ ਅਮਰੀਕੀ ਦੀਆਂ ਸਾਰੀਆਂ ਸਾਚ ਦੱਸੇ ਸੀਆਂ ਦਾ ਵਿਕਾਰਡ ਆਈਨਸਟਾਈਨ ਪਿਆ ਹੈ।

ਪੁਲਿਸ ਰਿਕਾਰਡ 'ਚ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਬਾਰੇ ਕੀ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਹੈ

ਇਹ ਰਿਪੋਰਟ ਪੁਲਿਸ ਦੇ ਸੋਨੀਅਰ ਅਧਿਕਾਰੀਆਂ, ਸਿੱਧੂ ਮੁਸੇਵਾਲਾ ਕੇਸ ਵਿੱਚ ਦਾਇਰ ਚਾਰਜਸ਼ੀਟ ਅਤੇ ਬਰਾੜ ਦੇ ਨਾਂ 'ਤੇ ਜਾਰੀ ਫੋਡ ਕਾਰਡ ਨੂੰ ਦੇਖ ਕੇ ਆਪਣਾ ਹੈ। ਬੀਬੀਸੀ ਸੁਤਰਤਰੂਪ ਵਿੱਚ ਇਸ ਦੀ ਪੁਸ਼ਟੀ ਨਹੀਂ ਕਰਦਾ। ਭਾਵੇਂ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ (ਅਸਲੀ ਨਾਂ ਸਤਿੰਦਰਜੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ) ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਗਾਇਕ ਸਿੱਧੂ ਮੁਸੇਵਾਲਾ ਦੇ ਕਤਲ ਤੋਂ ਬਾਅਦ ਸੁਰਖੀਆਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਆਇਆ ਸੀ। ਜਦੋਂ ਮੁਸੇਵਾਲਾ ਦਾ ਕਤਲ ਹੋਇਆ ਤਾਂ ਉਸ ਦੇ ਕੁਝ ਦੋਸਤਾਂ ਨੇ ਸੋਲਸ ਮੀਡੀਆ ਉੱਤੇ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਨਾਂ ਦੇ ਸ਼ਖਸ ਨੂੰ ਕਤਲਕਾਂਡ ਨੂੰ ਅੱਜਮ ਦੇਣ ਦੀ ਜਾਂਚ ਕੀਤੀ ਸੀ। ਪੰਜਾਬ ਪੁਲਿਸ ਦੇ ਸੁਰੱਖਾ ਮੁਰਾਬਿਕ ਬਰਾੜ ਨੇ ਲਗਭਗ 10 ਸਾਲ ਪਹਿਲਾਂ ਅਮਰੀਕਾ ਦੀ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਵਿੱਚ ਪੈਰ ਪਾਇਆ। ਪੰਜਾਬ ਅਤੇ ਚੰਡੀਗੜ੍ਹ ਪੁਲਿਸ ਦੀਆਂ ਨਜ਼ਰਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਮਾਸ ਤੌਰ 'ਤੇ ਅਕਤੂਬਰ 2020 ਵਿੱਚ ਆਇਆ। ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਦੇ ਰਿਸ਼ਤੇਦਾਰ ਗੁਰਦੀਲ ਬਰਾੜ ਦਾ ਚੰਡੀਗੜ੍ਹ ਵਿੱਚ ਕਬਿਰ ਤੌਰ 'ਤੇ ਬੀਬੀਸੀ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਕਤਲ ਕਰ ਦਿੱਤਾ ਗਿਆ ਸੀ। ਗੁਰਦੀਲ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਯੂਨੀਵਰਸਿਟੀ ਦੇ ਵਿਦਿਆਰਥੀ ਸੰਗਠਨ ਸਿੱਧੂ ਦਾ ਸਾਥਕ ਸੁਧਾ ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨ ਸੀ। ਸਿੱਧੂ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਯੂਨੀਵਰਸਿਟੀ ਦਾ ਵਿਦਿਆਰਥੀ ਸੰਗਠਨ ਹੈ ਜਿਸ ਦੇ ਨਾਲ ਸਿੱਧੂ ਮੁਸੇਵਾਲਾ ਕਤਲ ਦੇ ਇੱਕ ਹੋਰ ਮੁਸ਼ਕਲ ਲਾਹੌਸ ਬਿਨੇਲੀ ਦੀ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਪੁਲਿਸ ਦੇ ਮੁਰਾਬਕ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਨੇ ਰਿਸ਼ਤੇਦਾਰੀ ਵਿੱਚ ਲੱਗਦੇ ਹੋਰ ਗੁਰਦੀਲ ਬਰਾੜ ਦੇ ਕਤਲ ਦਾ ਬਦਲਾ ਲੈਣ ਦਾ ਫੈਸਲਾ ਕੀਤਾ। ਪੁਲਿਸ ਮੁਰਾਬਕ ਗੁਰਦੀਲ ਬਰਾੜ ਦੇ ਕਤਲ ਮਾਮਲੇ ਵਿੱਚ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਨੂੰ ਗੁਰਦੀਲ ਸਿੰਘ ਬਰਾੜ ਨੂੰ ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨ ਗੁਰਦੀਲ ਸਿੰਘ ਬਰਾੜ ਨੂੰ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਲਾਹੌਸ ਬਿਨੇਲੀ ਨਾਲ ਮਿਲ ਕੇ ਸਾਥੀ ਲੈ ਰਹੇ ਸਨ।

18 ਦਸੰਬਰ, 2021 ਨੂੰ ਗੁਰਦੀਲ ਸਿੰਘ ਬਰਾੜ ਨੂੰ ਅਪਣੇ ਬਿਅੰਨ ਦੌਰਾਨ ਲਾਸ ਆਂਜਲੇਸ ਵਿੱਚ ਗ੍ਰਿਫਤਾਰ ਕੀਤਾ ਗਿਆ ਸੀ ਕਿਉਂਕਿ ਉਸ ਨੂੰ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਦੀ ਪੁਸ਼ਟੀ ਮਿਲ ਗਈ ਸੀ। ਪੁਲਿਸ ਰਿਕਾਰਡ ਮੁਤਾਬਕ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਵਿੱਚ ਗੋਲਡੀ ਬਰਾੜ ਦਾ ਇਹ

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Veer Bal Diwas-an unprecedented move taking a broader look at Sikh history

Till as late as 2014, the martyrdom of the Guru's Prince Sons, as Sahibzadey translates into English, was an occasion mostly observed in gurdwaras.



(SAI Bureau) It's not that the state moves every day to recognize historical high points that are largely confined to individual minority communities.

The BJP, as a party espousing Hindutva, may have its own ideological reasons to co-opt icons from Punjab, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Karnataka, Rajasthan and so forth.

FROM

BALLADS TO ANIMATED STORYTELLING

But when the Indian state officially appreciates Chaar Sahibzadey with none other than the Prime Minister of the country himself paying tribute to the four sons of Guru Gobind Singh, the move transcends routine electoral politics. The history of Chaar Sahibzadey that culminates in the first decade of the 1700s embodies a larger history of a revolution that has to be seen with a clear vision.

Till as late as 2014, the martyrdom of the Guru's Prince Sons, as Sahibzadey translates into English, was an occasion mostly observed in

gurdwaras and in traditional Sikh ballads and storytelling.

A 3D-animation under the Baweja Movies banner which came that year hooked a larger audience to the momentous episode that unfolded in 1704 in Punjab. For non-Sikhs or non-Punjabis, the movie with all its classic

storytelling was still a drive-by history.

HISTORY DRAWS STATE POWER

Fast forward to 2021: the Modi government announces Veer Bal Diwas in honour of the sublime sacrifice of Baba Ajit Singh, Baba Jujhar Singh, Baba Zorawar Singh and Baba Fateh Singh.

The first commemoration takes place on December 26 at a stadium in the national capital with the full involvement of central and state governments.

The Indian state spanned the arch of the Sahibzadey's life and passing, and with that, the revolution that preceded and followed in Punjab, to the national level.

A range of events, including school quiz competitions and digital exhibitions at train stations, gas pumps and airports have been organized under state patronage.

"On the one hand, there were heights of terror and religious fanaticism, on the other, there was the pinnacle of spirituality and kindness to see God in every human being," Prime Minister Narendra Modi noted in his speech. Any country with such a glorious history, he continued, must be full of self-confidence and self-respect. But concocted narratives have instead created a sense of inferiority, he said.

feriority, he said.

BROADER LOOK AT HISTORY

A 38-page PDF titled Veer Bal Diwas issued by the central government contained facts as they were.

The siege of Anandpur Sahib by hostile forces, Guru Gobind Singh leaving his majestic fort, a fierce battle at Sirsa with enemy troops, the Guru getting separated from his family at the swollen river in a punishing December winter -- the weeks that led to the martyrdom of the Guru's elder teen sons on the battlefield and the bricking alive of his younger sons less than 10 years in age at Sirhind in Mughal custody have all been explained with art in short crisp sentences.

But what's noteworthy is that the BJP government's PDF does give a broader view of history -- collaborators from within and the emergence of support from outside the ranks go side by side.

A caption under an illustration reads how a cook named Gangu took the younger Prince Sons and the Guru's elderly mother to his home.

A non-Muslim, he then steals their gold coins and turns into a Mughal spy. Art depicts him informing the Mughal kotwal (officer) about the whereabouts of the Guru's family. The same PDF gives due recognition to the Nawab of Malerkotla,

Sher Mohammad Khan, who raised his voice in support of the two Sahibzadey and appealed for mercy.

Diwan Todar Mal Jain of Sirhind, a trader who paid a fortune to get a piece of land for the cremation of Baba Zorawar Singh, Baba Fateh Singh and Mata Gujri (also called Mata Gujar Kaur), finds a respectful mention in the history document.

And then there's a poignant reference to Bhai Moti Ram Mehra, whose family was crushed alive because he served milk to the Guru's sons and mother in Sirhind.

INCLUSIVITY, BEYOND NARROW INTERPRETATION, MATTERS

Inclusive history like this promotes critical thinking. When encouraged at the state level, it gives out the big picture that helps the citizenry relate it to current events. It tackles realities that for every despot like Aurangzeb and his tyrant governor Wazir Khan, there stands a Sher Mohammad Khan for a pushback. If there are collaborators like Gangu, the Moti Ram Mehra's would still stand beside righteousness no matter what. "There is a need to get free from the narrow interpretation of the past in order to move forward," Prime Minister Modi said in his address.



Why Maharashtra wants to join states that have laws against 'Love Jihad'



The Maharashtra government has announced that it would study bills and Acts of other states related to 'Love Jihad' to bring similar legislation. What's behind it?

(NewsAgency) The Maharashtra government has announced that it would study bills and laws of other states related to 'Love Jihad' and take an appropriate decision.

"Such cases are happening all across the country. Some states have made stringent laws to curb such cases; hence, Maharashtra is also ready to enact the law on similar lines to ensure long-term protection to women," Maharashtra Deputy Prime Minister Devendra Fadnis, who also holds the law and judiciary portfolio, said on December 20. The government will take a final call soon. Fadnis also pointed out that in the recent past, there have been 40-odd morchas at various places in the state demanding a 'Love Jihad' law. His comments came on a day rightwing activists beat up a youth who was accused of love jihad in the Indore district of Madhya Pradesh.

WHAT IS 'LOVE JIHAD'?

In 'Love Jihad', Muslim men are believed to target predominantly Hindu but also Christian women for conversion by means such as seduction, feigning love, deception, kidnapping, and marriage. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has been probing several cases, especially from Kerala. Some also see it as an Islamophobic conspiracy theory developed by proponents of Hindutva. They say the use of the term is more to target a particular community and appeal to the rightwing constituency for electoral gains. After Shraddha Walkar's brutal murder by her live-in partner Aaftab Poonawala, who chopped her body into pieces, social media

was abuzz with the term.

When Chandy flagged conversions

It was in 2009 that it drew bigger attention when Kerala Catholic Bishops Council reported that up to 4,500 girls in Kerala had been targeted in 'Love Jihad', while Hindu Janajagruiti Samiti claimed that 30,000 girls had been converted to Islam in Karnataka alone. On June 25, 2012, then Kerala Chief Minister Oommen Chandy of the Congress informed the state legislature that 2,667 young

women had been converted to Islam in the state since 2006, of which 2,195 were Hindus and 492 Christians.

Even though Chandy said there was no evidence for forced conversions in the state and the fears about love jihad were baseless, his statement sparked a debate on the sensitive subject.

Many Hindu and Christian groups demanded an investigation into the "phenomenon". It was also alleged that the Popular Front of India, banned in September this year, and Campus Front were behind the spurt in 'Love Jihad' cases.

In September 2009, rightwing group Shri Ram Sena put up posters warning against love jihad in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. In December 2011, Mallika Prasad of the BJP stirred a hornet's nest in Karnataka legislative assembly

when she said that 84 girls had been reported missing in Dakshina Kannada district from June to November of that year, of whom only 69 had been traced. After her statement, the Karnataka government decided to launch a probe into 'Love Jihad'.

LAW IN UP

In 2019, the Uttar Pradesh State Law Commission submitted a report before the Chief Minister saying forced religious conversions or conversions through

On September 19 this year, the first conviction in UP under the ordinance was carried out when the Amroha district court sentenced 25-year-old Mohammad Afzal to five years in prison and imposed a fine of Rs 40,000 on him.

It was alleged that Afzal had lied about his identity, taken a 16-year-old Hindu girl to Delhi and forced her to convert to Islam for marriage. Afzal's lawyer contested the ruling and said, "The case rests on forcible conver-

provisions, including three to 10 years of imprisonment and a fine of Rs 50,000 in cases of marriage carried out by hiding religion, misrepresentation or impersonation.

The other states that have anti-conversion laws are Gujarat, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Odisha, Uttarakhand and Karnataka.

THE LANDMARK HADIYA CASE

In 2017, the Hadiya case, investigated by the NIA, made headlines. It was alleged by the father of a Hindu woman, Akhila alias Hadiya, that a Muslim man forcibly converted her to Islam for marriage. The Kerala High Court annulled the marriage on the grounds that the bride's parents were not present, nor gave consent for the marriage. On March 8, 2018, the Supreme Court overturned the annulment of Hadiya's marriage.

In June 2018, Jharkhand High Court gave its nod for a divorce in an alleged 'Love Jihad' case in which the accused allegedly lied about his religion and forced the victim to convert to Islam after marriage.

FREEDOM OF CHOICE

Even though laws against 'Love Jihad' are being made more stringent, it is pertinent to note that more and more interfaith couples are braving the odds to tie the nuptial knot. The laws against forced conversions are fine but they shouldn't spawn a culture of fear, experts have said. If this happens, the couples will resort to conversion as an escape route. India's Special Marriage Act calls for a month's notice before inter-faith couples can get married. The couple's family can raise objections to it and stop it.

While unlawful activities need to be dealt with, it is also imperative to give adult couples the right of freedom to choose their partners and their religion.



fraudulent ways were growing. It recommended a law to check it. In 2020, the Uttar Pradesh Cabinet cleared a draft ordinance against forceful inter-faith conversions — 'Love Jihad'. The Uttar Pradesh government implemented it aggressively. The law prohibits conversion of religion through force, misrepresentation, undue influence, allurements, fraud or marriage. It also prohibits a person from abetting, convincing, and conspiring to such conversions. Marriage is declared void if it was done for the sole purpose of unlawful conversion, vice-versa or if the religious conversion did not follow the procedure in the ordinance.

Apart from punishment, it also makes such an act of conversion a non-bailable criminal offence. Offences under the law are punishable by up to 10 years of imprisonment.

sion, however, there is no evidence on record to prove that the accused was trying to forcibly convert the minor."

MADHYA PRADESH

After Uttar Pradesh, another BJP-ruled state, Madhya Pradesh, followed suit and passed a similar law. In March 2021, the Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly passed the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Bill, 2021.

Those found guilty of conversion through fraudulent means will invite a jail of up to 10 years and a fine of Rs 1 lakh. Any marriage solemnised in violation of the law is considered null and void. Those willing to convert need to apply to the district administration 60 days in advance. The religious leaders facilitating the conversion must also inform about it 60 days in advance. A jail term and fine will be slapped if this is not followed.

The law also has many other

How dog and Bihar became bad words

What Piyush Goyal said about Bihar and Mallikarjun Kharge's dog remark led to uproar in Parliament and outside. But how did Bihar and dog become words to describe all things bad?



(News Agency) Bihar MP Manoj Kumar Jha of the RJD drew Rajya Sabha Chairperson Jagdeep Dhankhar's attention to Union minister Piyush Goyal's "demeaning" remark about Bihar. Jha said when he was speaking in the House, Goyal suddenly said, "Inka bas chale toh desh ko Bihar hi bana dein (if they have their way, they will turn the country into Bihar)." Jha sought House Leader Goyal's apology to the people of Bihar and urged Dhankhar to expunge the "elitist, sneering, contemptuous and condescending" remark made on Tuesday. Tejashwi Yadav, RJD leader and Bihar's deputy chief minister, also wrote on Twitter, "Look at the insult of Bihar and Biharis and an unwise and arrogant Union minister." On Thursday, Goyal withdrew his remark, saying he didn't intend to insult the state or its people.

In his letter to Dhankhar, Jha referred to Bihar as one of the greatest Indian states. The tone is similar to what the Bihar State Textbook Publishing Corporation has taught children for decades: Bihar is a land of Buddha, Mahavir, Samrat Ashok and Nalanda University and what not. That's more like living in the past while the present reality is different. However, a part of Jha's letter needs acknowledgement. It says, "It is deeply problematic if the government singles out one state and terms it a failure." Nitish Kumar has been ruling Bihar for 17 years, many of them with the BJP that's been in power at the Centre since 2014. So, if Bihar is so bad that it can be used as the lowest common denominator, part of the blame also lies with the saffron party. But it doesn't also absolve Jha's RJD, which ruled Bihar, with Lalu Yadav, first directly and then by proxy, having ruled the state from 1990 to 2005. This period was described by many as jungle raj for caste violence, organised crime, institutionalised corruption and widespread scams, the most notorious be-

ing the fodder scam cases for which Lalu Yadav had to quit as CM and install his wife Rabri Devi on his chair before going to jail and for which he has been convicted a few times. Jha's letter to Dhankhar, though on point in part, also smacks of defensiveness, many would argue. Because Nitish Kumar's rule in Bihar since 2005 has also been marked by his alliance with his RJD on two occasions, including the current one, which began in August this year when he dumped the BJP for the second time. But how did Bihar become a tool to describe the lowest common denominator in terms of governance? Before we attempt answering, a bit of relevant dog talk.

The 'Inka bas chale toh desh ko Bihar hi bana dein' remark follows Mallikarjun Kharge's question to the BJP: Did even your dogs die for the country? The Congress president was trying to highlight the assassination of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi and their party's role in India's freedom struggle while asserting that the saffron party made no such sacrifice for the country.

The BJP's response was equally problematic. A party MLA said, "Congress people roam around like 'darbari kutte' of [former Congress president] Sonia Gandhi. So, they view others as the same." Obviously, this is not the first time that politicians have used dogs as the lowest-benchmark analogy.

In 2013, then Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi said, "If someone else is driving a car and we're sitting behind, even then if a puppy comes under the wheel, will it be painful or not? Of course, it is. If I'm a chief minister or not, I'm a human being. If something bad happens anywhere, it is natural to be sad."

Modi's remarks came in the context of the 2002 Gujarat riots and triggered outrage because many saw him drawing a hierarchical order, with puppies at the bottom but also featuring riot victims

above them. Naturally, the 'why use a puppy to show what's at the bottom' question didn't become much of an issue.

Then in 2015, Union Minister VK Singh of the BJP said when someone throws stones at a dog, the government is not responsible. This sparked a firestorm because he was responding to two Dalit children being burnt alive in Haryana.

The question is, why use the word dog in such a manner? Hasn't the dog been man's best friend? A huge number of people love dogs. Much of this love comes from their loyalty to us and their inability to not hurt us back.

The love for dogs in popular culture is so intense that few novelists and screenwriters run the risk of having protagonists who are not kind to dogs.

China Gate villain Jageera's dialogue "Mere man ko bhaya, maine kutta kaat ke khaya" can perhaps be explained in a way. After all, he was a brutal villain and, like most brutal villains, maybe he didn't love dogs.

But the angry outburst of Sholay's hero Veeru, "Basanti, in kutton ke samne mat

nachna" could be perplexing for dog lovers.

Be that as it may, the question is, why do real-life people use phrases such as kutte ka pillu (even though puppy-faced babies are described as cute and puppy videos are often viral on the Internet), gone to the dogs, and kutte ki maut? Why do we use kutta-kamina for those we hate? Why does Kuttey follow Kaminey in Bollywood?

We don't quite know. Maybe some of us simply hate dogs? But there are some historical references. In 17th-century New England, for example, dogs were believed to be used by sorceresses to carry out evil commands. And the word dog was used to attack those thought to be "bad character."

In ancient Greece, too, dog was often used in a derogatory sense to refer to someone of "bad character." Why the word bitch is used to brand women as slut—while being a stud is a matter of pride for many men—has its problematic origin in comparing a person to a dog in heat.



Rahul's warmth for Vajpayee: Acknowledging a Bharat Ratna or taking a leaf from chacha Sanjay's book?

Rahul Gandhi's move to pay homage to former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee's samadhi raises question whether he is taking a leaf out of his uncle Sanjay Gandhi's book that brought down the Morarji Desai regime in 1979, paving the way for the return of Indira Gandhi as prime minister in 1980

(By Staff Reporter) Politicians tend to be a bundle of contradictions, and Rahul Gandhi is proving to be no exception. Rahul's move to pay homage to former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's samadhi is a curious mix of realpolitik and recognition of the Bharat Ratna's moderate, inclusive brand of politics.

The big question doing the rounds at 24, Akbar Road is whether Rahul is taking a leaf out of his uncle Sanjay Gandhi's book that brought down the Morarji Desai regime in 1979, paving the way for the return of Indira Gandhi as prime minister in 1980. In June 1979, Brig Kapil Mohan of the Mohan Meakins fame and a thick buddy of Sanjay had invited maverick Raj Narain, then a close confidant of Charan Singh at the Pusa Road, New Delhi, residence. In the presence of Sanjay, a discussion over lahsun ke pakore, mushroom ke pakore and tea resulted in a plot that saw the then deputy prime minister Charan Singh, Raj Narain and others toppling Morarji Desai as prime minister. Charan Singh quickly raised the bogey of dual membership, asking for the removal of Jan Sangh-RSS members from the Desai government. The farmer leader was subsequently sworn in as prime minister with the outside support of Congress. The bonhomie between Bharatiya Lok Dal and the Congress saw their workers raising the slogan, "Charan Singh laya aisi aandhi, desh ki neta Indira Gandhi (Charan Singh heralds a new wave with national leader Indira Gandhi)", was short-lived. Sanjay and Indira, hot on heels, withdrew their support to Charan Singh's regime, giving him the dubious record of being the prime minister to leave office without ever facing Parliament.

In the context of present-day politics, there is little relevance to the 1979 situation but a section of the Congress fancies some chances in making a distinction between



Vajpayee's BJP and its current avatar. In the purely imaginary and wishful scenario of 2024, can the Congress pit one section of the BJP against another just as Morarji bhai was upstaged by Charan Singh? The very idea may border on ridicule but then, it can be argued that politics is all about taking chances that are seemingly non-existent. A lot would depend on the kind of verdict 18th Lok Sabha throws up. Any party or coalition, short of a clear majority or below 250 seats would find it difficult to stay on.

The Vajpayee legacy

In the more immediate terms, Rahul seems to be acknowledging, without reservations and repaying, Vajpayee's legacy of displaying respect for rivals, including Congress stalwarts from Jawaharlal Nehru to Sonia Gandhi. However, just for the record, Vajpayee could be unsparing in his criticism too. Vajpayee is credited to have attracted the attention of independent India's first Prime Minister when he sought a special session of Parliament in the middle of the India-China War in 1962. Jawaharlal Nehru conceded and debated the issue even though he was on the defensive. Till the end of his life, Vajpayee never hesitated in praising "Panditji", either at

home or abroad. In fact, when days after PV Narasimha Rao's death. Vajpayee, who became the foreign minister in the Morarji Desai had turned 80 the previous day, was in his hometown Gwalior to participate at a writers' meet and chose the occasion to make an impor-

tant disclosure, crediting the former prime minister as the "true father" of India's nuclear programme. Sounding a tad emotional, Vajpayee revealed that when he assumed the Prime Minister's office in 1996 (the 13-day stint), he had received a paper from his predecessor, urging him to continue the country's nuclear programme. "Rao had asked me not to make it public. But today when he is dead and gone, I wish to set the record straight," he said. In typical Vajpayee fashion, the former prime minister went on: "Rao told me that the bomb is ready. I exploded it. I did not miss the opportunity."

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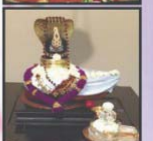
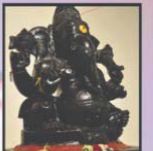
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Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh polls. Will revolving door trend change this time?

The two states, which will go to the polls along with Chhattisgarh, have seen musical chairs being played between BJP and Congress. Will the trend change in 2023 Assembly polls?



(By Staff Reporter) The poll focus has shifted to Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, where the Assembly elections are due next year. In all the three states, a kind of 'revolving door trend' has prevailed over the years. As the political developments are in a flux, will the syndrome change this time around? Let's take a closer look at what's exactly happening in these states as the poll countdown begins.

RAJASTHAN

Anti-incumbency has been a decisive factor in the state since 1998 when Congress strongman Ashok Gehlot took over from BJP's Bhairon Singh Shekhawat. In 2003, Vasundhara Raje of BJP assumed the CM's post. Congress came back to power in 2008 and Gehlot became the CM again. The musical chair between Raje and Gehlot continued. In 2013, Raje unseated him again and in 2018, Gehlot made her taste her own medicine.

This time, things are different, though. Gehlot is facing a tough fight from his fellow Congress leader Sachin Pilot. Their tussle for CM's post has been out in the open for some time now, with both at loggerheads to be at the helm. Gehlot's camp created a furore by not attending the legislature party meet where the crucial decision on CM's face was to be taken. Gehlot, who was the top contender for Congress party president and announced to contest for the position, later was forced to drop out of the race since the high-command took strong exception to his defiance. Pilot, who was the deputy CM in 2020, also hit out at Gehlot's audacity and his salvos against him have not stopped since then. However, they stood to-

gether with Rahul Gandhi as Bharat Jodo Yatra passed through the state.â••â••,

The poll heat is on. In October, Raje asked the BJP to get ready for the elections. She said, "Only 350 days are left for the CM Gehlot-led Congress government in the state." On December 18, Gehlot claimed that there is no anti-incumbency in the state and there cannot be a bigger achievement than this. A major bone of contention is the Old Pension Scheme (OPS), which the Centre has allegedly tried to stall. "The state government has the right to decide the pension. Pension is a state subject, so OPS shall continue. The Centre cannot interfere in this," Gehlot said.

And even as Congress infighting rages amid the Gehlot-Pilot rift, the BJP is also grappling with factionalism within the party. While BJP is banking on the Gehlot-Pilot fissure, it is trying to downplay the differences between Raje and Union minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat that have surfaced of late. In September, party state president Satish Poonia went on a 'padyatra' from Pokaran to Ramdevra and no other senior leader of the BJP joined him. The apparent split was played down then as well.

On its part, the Congress is trying to make the Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP) an election issue. Gehlot has asked the centre to declare ERCP a national project, while Union Jalshakti minister Gajendra Shekhawat has said, "instead of the 13 districts of Rajasthan for which they are demanding to declare ERCP as a national project, we have included them in the

priority list of the National Perspective Plan".

The cost of the ERCP project is Rs 40,000 crore, whereas, in the plan prepared by us, the cost is only Rs 21,000 crore – 22,000 crore. The scheme can be completed at half the cost and with only 10 per cent state assistance, he added.

MADHYA PRADESH

Congress leader Digvijaya Singh ruled the state from 1998 to 2003. After this, BJP's Umar Bharti and Babulal Gaur held the post for brief periods. From 2008 to 2013, Shivraj Singh Chouhan remained at the helm. Congress veteran Kamal Nath became the CM after the BJP narrowly lost the November 2018 Assembly election. But senior Congress leader Jyotiraditya Scindia rebelled against Nath and MLAs loyal to him quit, which caused a crisis in the state. The Nath government collapsed after 1 year and 97 days. Scindia joined

BJP and the BJP MLAs chose Chouhan as the CM. Since March 2020, Chouhan has been the CM. But this time, rumours are rife that the BJP may opt for a new CM face, as it did in Gujarat and won. Changing the CM could help the party ride over a possible anti-incumbency wave. Signs of a replacement became more pronounced when Chouhan was dropped from the parliamentary board recently. One camp believes that BJP will make the change for electoral benefit, while another says a Cabinet reshuffle is in the offing, but Chouhan will continue to be the CM. In May, the opposition Congress reportedly decided to roll out 'Vachan Patra' (election manifesto) not only for the state level, but also for each district based on the local issues and demands. This could be a game-changing move, as people in some pockets of the state feel that their problems have not been addressed.

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What the Kevin McCarthy Debacle Really Says About Republicans

Will Rogers famously said, "I belong to no organized political party. I'm a Democrat." He would have to dig deeper to find a gibe suitable for today's GOP. The substantive stakes in the battle over Kevin McCarthy's speakership bid, which has produced a deadlock not seen on the House floor in a hundred years, are not large. There are limits to what any Republican leader can accomplish with a five-vote majority while Democrats control the Senate and the presidency.

Henry Clay could be speaker of the House, bring great gravitas to the position — and still only muster some oversight investigations and a big spending fight or two. Marjorie Taylor Greene could be speaker of the House (at this rate, no one should count her out), use the position as a platform for juvenile trolling — and still muster some oversight investigations and a big spending fight or two. So this episode won't alter the trajectory of Washington politics or the priorities of the GOP. It is mainly important as another indication that the GOP lacks any coherent center of authority, and is a party that, to some significant extent, loathes itself. The big disaggregating trends in American life — particularly, the rise of the internet and social media — have eroded the power of party establishments. Politicians can easily establish their own fundraising bases and their own brands outside the control of party bigwigs. But, pace Will Rogers, it is the Republicans who have been most disrupted; Democrats look, in relative terms, like a well-oiled machine.

After the early Democratic nominating contests nearly destroyed Joe Biden in 2020, Democrats flocked to him as the safest and most familiar and conventional choice. Other candidates dropped out as if on cue and even Bernie Sanders — who technically isn't a Democrat — played ball. In short, the party stood on its head the old Bill Clinton adage that Democrats fall in love and Republicans fall in line.

In the House over the last few years, Nancy Pelosi had a majority as slender as Kevin McCarthy's and her own faction of recalcitrant hardliners in the form of the Squad. She had some rocky legislative moments, but she always maintained her sense of authority, and no one dared deliberately humiliate her. After the loss of the midterms, she managed an orderly transition to the next generation. House Republicans, in contrast, can barely organize themselves to take the power that they won in November. The GOP over the years has become

alienated from itself. First, George W. Bush left office on a low note, a disillusioning experience for the party that cast a pall of suspicion over anyone associated with that era. Then, the tea party brought an infusion of new blood with only an attenuated connection to the party and often a hostile attitude toward it — it was the tea party members who made Speaker John Boehner's life miserable, and its left-over rump is making would-be Speaker Kevin McCarthy's life miserable. Finally, Donald Trump blew up whatever was left of the party establishment in 2016.

Notably, Trump became the party leader by not being a party man. He was barely a Republican when he started out, and it seems likely that if he is denied the Republican nomination in 2024, he will do everything to sabotage its prospects. It's hard to think of a former president who has been less invested in his party's interests, and many Republicans are fine with that.

No one is in charge. Mitch McConnell is the closest there is to the ballast of an establishment, but he's hated by the MAGA base. Trump's bid to create his own counter-establishment faltered badly with his midterm debacle. Even the voices on the right with the biggest media megaphones haven't been able to cow the anti-McCarthy rebels.

The fact is that an anti-authority spirit pervades a portion of the party, and the authority it opposes is that of its own side.

Kevin McCarthy is not a visionary or inspirational leader, and has been around Washington a long time, but his fundamental offense for his enemies is seeking to be speaker. By the usual calculus, the absence of an obvious alternative to McCarthy would militate against opposing him. But, given the attitude of many of the rebels, this makes it an even purer exercise — an act of defiance unburdened by a substantive agenda or a different candidate. Ordinarily, threatening the leadership bid of a member of your own party is a means to an end. It is true that the anti-McCarthy faction has made procedural demands, and gotten many of them. But, at the end of the day, its opposition feels more like an end than a means.

The old GOP "obstructionism" was directed at the agenda of the other party for deep-seated ideological reasons; the new GOP obstructionism is directed at itself as it tries — and, for now, fails — to undertake the most basic act of governance. Welcome to the Will Rogers Republican Party.

India's strategic paralysis with China must end. It is time to call out Xi's border bluff

A strategic reset against China is critical to India's national security. The armed forces are capable of executing a more aggressive strategy to force a status quo favourable to India. National consensus and political direction are the need of the hour. China has not forgotten its ancient military strategist, Sun Tzu (544 -496 BC), who wrote in his treatise, The Art of War: "To win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill." And faithful to his teachings, China, since 2013, has been engaged in 'Grey Zone Warfare', coercing India's conduct in international affairs and undermining it as a competitor.

The military manifestation of this strategy is to exploit the favourable military differential and unsettled borders to trigger incidents below the threshold of war to embarrass India, belittle its military and political reputation, and create impediments in its quest to become a world power. In so doing, it has consolidated its territorial claims and denied India patrolling rights to 1,000 square kilometres of its territory through a pre-emptive offensive manoeuvre in Eastern Ladakh in April-May 2020. Having secured the 1959 Claim Line, China's focus has shifted to the Northeast. The attempt to "unilaterally change the status quo" in the Yangtze area of Arunachal Pradesh's Tawang sector on 9 December 2022 is the latest manifestation of this policy.

Decoding India's timid response

India's military response has been passive and defensive. Except for securing the tactically important Kailash Range on the night of 29/30 August 2020, albeit in its own territory, India has not undertaken any quid pro quo offensive

actions. The fear of triggering an escalation has effectively reduced our military to defend our territory with "riot police" actions without use of kinetic energy weapons, which so far, have resulted in 20 soldiers being killed in action and hundreds injured. The lack of a coherent strategy based on misplaced political and diplomatic considerations has yielded no strategic gain, but only placed our soldiers in harm's way.

Our current military strategy has miserably failed to deter China, and diplomacy has fared no better. It began with an intense engagement from 2014 to 2019, which peaked after the 2017 Doklam crisis in the guise of two informal summits. Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Chinese President Xi Jinping 18 times — three times more than all other prime ministers combined. By Chinese design or by default, diplomacy has now been reduced to tactical engagements by the militaries. The irony is hard to miss — soldiers are acting as diplomats, and diplomats are micromanaging military conduct at the tactical level.

Domestic opinion has been blinded by obfuscation, rhetoric and bombast. There has been no debate in Parliament on the border situation. It looks like the intent is to safeguard the Prime Minister's 'strong man' image and his government's ideological reputation with respect to national security, in turn protecting its electoral prospects. The threat to our national security comes from China, and the government's focus has been on Pakistan. Neo-nationalism has further compounded the problem. 69.3 per cent of Indians have been made to believe that India will defeat China in a war. The transformation of the armed forces is in disarray due to lack of political ownership and shortage of funds. Instead of giving rational advice, the military has toed the political line to cover its own lapses on the borders so.



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This was a 'manufactured panic' about Russia

Tucker Carlson says blaming Russia has become Washington's default 'political tool'

Good evening and welcome to Tucker Carlson Tonight. Here's the latest summarized. Kevin McCarthy badly wants to be the next speaker of the House, but as of tonight, he is not going to be. He doesn't have the votes. It's not a question of who's good or who's bad, who's well-intentioned, who's not. It's a question of simple electoral math, something that Kevin McCarthy is highly familiar with since he does this for a living.

At this point, as of right now, facing that mathematical reality, Kevin McCarthy has two choices. He can either step aside and let somebody else do the job, acknowledging in the process that he is not the only person in Congress capable of being speaker. Or he can try and win over the people who oppose him, as you traditionally do in elections. Oh, you've got reservations about Kevin McCarthy? You don't want to be ruled by a man who wears a Ukrainian flag lapel pin and lives

with Frank Luntz? No problem. We get it. Let us tell you how he's better than you think he is. Let us try and change your mind. Let us try to convince you. In a normal race, that's what you would do. But that is not what Kevin McCarthy's team is doing. Instead, like the left, they purport to oppose. They're using threats and fear to force people to support the candidate. Anyone who opposes Kevin McCarthy, one of his surrogates explained today, is, quote, "an enemy." A, quote, "terrorist." That's their message. In a moment, we'll tell you how that message is working.

But first tonight, in the summer of 2016, the government transparency organization WikiLeaks released thousands of emails from the servers of the Democratic National Committee. Those documents showed conclusively that Hillary Clinton partisans had worked to rig the Democratic primary against her rival, Bernie Sanders. It was

obvious from the start that that email dump had come from an internal source, probably from a DNC staffer who was offended by the corruption of the Clinton team. But of course, the Democratic Party couldn't admit that. Too embarrassing, too revealing.

So instead, in order to cover this wrongdoing, the Clinton campaign claimed that Russia did it. The Russians hacked the servers. Remember that? Now, you may have believed it or not, but intel agencies in this country must have known at the time that it was not true. They would know, but they said nothing. And they said nothing because blaming Russia turned out to be a very useful political tool. In fact, before long, it became the default response to every perceived disaster in Washington. Hillary lost. Why? Russia! Donald Trump can't be President. Why? Russia! Hunter Biden's laptop is here. Russian! Audit aid to Ukraine? Can't.

Russia! And so on and so on. So over time, probably inevitably, the inflated threat of Russia became a pretext for everything bad, including censorship in this country. It's Russian disinformation. Shut it down. Thanks to new reporting from Matt Taibbi, who has spent weeks sifting through previously secret Twitter files, we know the federal government's intelligence and law enforcement agencies enthusiastically joined the effort to censor the political speech of American citizens illegally. It was a sophisticated effort. At one point, for example, the State Department released a report falsely claiming that thousands of Twitter accounts were controlled by foreign governments. Russia! And then, unnamed sources in the intel world leaked scary headlines about Russian disinformation running rampant on Twitter. "Twitter deleted data potentially crucial to the Russia probes," screamed Politico, ever

obedient to the intel agencies. And then the Washington Post published a piece threatening to increase regulation of Twitter's advertising because, of course, Russia. So it was a manufactured panic about Russia. But on the basis of that manufactured panic, lawmakers in Washington demanded more censorship. Oh. Too much speaking. Your opinions are a threat to our "democracy." That would be sitting United States Senator Ed Markey of Massachusetts. But almost nobody said anything because Russia. And so it accelerated. Not long after that tape was shot in November of 2020, Congressman Adam Schiff of California, who was then the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, demanded that Twitter censor any discussion about the House Intelligence Committee. Quote, "suppress any and all search results about Committee staff," a Schiff aide demanded of Twitter.

News Channels, Chasing TRPs, Ignore The Necessary

In the new year, Television Rating Points (TRPs) should be renamed by media networks. To reflect the content being churned out every evening, the abbreviation could just as easily stand for Third Rate Programming (TRP)! Controversial, cynical statements that polarize are a prime time favorite. A Chief Minister of a BJP state will try and outdo a woman MP from his party to spew communal venom. An easy way to earn points in the Modi-Shah era.

Ninety per cent of the narrative on Indian television today lingers on these contrived, divisive issues. When was the last time you saw a TV programme discussing the plight of manual scavengers risking their lives or the importance of safe drinking water for all? Sadly, the same illness affects the quality of the output in Parliament- but that's a story for another day in 2023.

Prime time news is now a cacophony of triviality, a chorus of anchors turned cheerleaders. In all this madness, there have been worthy exceptions- a credible network or two, built over decades of trust and following the rules of good old-fashioned journalism. One such gem is NDTV.

Which is why I am writing this piece here - not to garner 'Likes' or re-tweets or 'Views'. Instead, allow me to draw attention at the beginning of the new year to an issue that will - God forbid- cause national and international strife. Not oil, nor gold, nor data. This is about safe drinking water.

Safe drinking water is not only crucial to human health and well-being but

access to it is also a fundamental right protected under the ambit of the Right to Life (Article 21) in the Constitution. India has about 18 per cent of the world's total population, but only 4 per cent of the water resources. This makes us one of the most water-stressed countries in the world. Many Indians face high to extreme water stress caused by lack of availability and poor quality of available water, according to the NITI Aayog as well. On top of that, chemical pollution of water remains a health burden, whether natural in origin or anthropogenic. It affects livelihood, school attendance, standard of living, people's dignity and the environment.

More than 60 per cent households do not treat their water before drinking. According to UNICEF, only 1/4th of the total population in the country has drinking water in their households and approximately three-quarters of all illnesses in India are caused by impurities in the water supply. About 38 per cent children under the age of five are stunted, and 50 per cent of malnutrition cases are linked to diarrhoea. Around 30 diseases are a consequence of unsafe water, poor sanitation, and hygiene. According to the National Family Health Survey 5, diarrhoea was prevalent in 7.3 per cent children under five years of age.

The existing sources of data for tracking water and its safety are the Census, National Family Health Survey and Integrated Management Information System. The first two do not dwell

upon the quality and reliability of water and the third lacks data on sufficiency of water and is not standardised and comprehensive for rural areas. Delay in the Census and data gaps such as these provide a big lacunae in handling water resources to the optimal level. There is an urgent need to strengthen, standardise existing reporting and expand the scope of surveys to cover more indicators of safely managing the drinking water services. This is critical to good policy-making and planning of welfare schemes.

All individuals should be entitled to clean water and sanitation without any discrimination. Marginalised populations, including women, children, refugees are frequently disregarded by and excluded from access to supply of safe drinking water, based on their societal positioning.

Article 14(2)(h) of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) provides: "States parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development." But the burden of water collection often falls on women who have to travel long distances and stand in long queues to fetch water. This makes them lag behind in school attendance, work, childcare etc, and positions at the front of verbal, sexual and physical violence and discrimination by societies.

The denial of access to safe drinking

water in public spaces is a big manifestation of the existence of discrimination. Caste plays an important role in the same. More than 20 percent of Dalits lack access to safe drinking water and often face violence for trying to access these resources. Harmful concepts of purity and contamination govern the thinking of individuals in affected areas even after untouchability had been abolished.

The Union government controls the regulation and development of interstate rivers which are a major source of water in India. Making these channels safe for drinking needs to be prioritised. The Jal Jeevan Mission that targets providing tap water in every household too misses out on making this water safe for drinking. Such weak systems and lack of funding from the Union have hindered the reach in India. India's water sector has faced an investment gap of 21 lakh crores between 2015-2030 according to the G20 Infrastructure Outlook. Hence there is a need to make the sector more attractive for investment, along with increasing the budgetary allocation specifically for making drinking water safe so states can make a bigger difference. The issue of access to clean drinking water cannot be looked at in isolation. It is dependent on other factors of gender, class, caste, education among others. Involvement of stakeholders in the making of policies at each level is imperative in minimising the discrimination in such access.

India And China - A 2023 Tale Of Two Markets

Will the current reopening of the Chinese economy put an end to India's outperformance? That will be a question for global investors in 2023

By Andy Mukherjee

Compared with a year-and-a-half ago, when its economy had just begun to reopen after a devastating surge of the delta variant, India's stock market is unchanged in dollar terms. And yet, its weight in the MSCI Emerging Markets Index has zoomed past Taiwan and South Korea to second place, with almost the entire gain coming at the expense of the gauge's biggest constituent: China.

The world's second-largest economy has seen equities slump by two-fifths since June 2021, thanks to Beijing's isolationist Covid-19 policies, turmoil in the real-estate industry and a punishing antitrust campaign against the country's valuable tech firms. If China has been mired in a surfeit of pessimism, the opposite is true of India. Thanks to pent-up urban demand after the pandemic, stocks have held up reasonably well despite the US Federal Reserve's aggressive monetary tightening. As a result, while China's share of MSCI EM has

slid to 28 per cent, from 35 per cent in May 2021, India's has risen to 15 per cent, from 10 per cent. Will the current reopening of the Chinese economy put an end to India's outperformance? That will be a question for global investors in 2023.

If other countries' experiences are any guide, the pivot away from zero infections toward letting the virus rip through communities will be chaotic, and possibly deadly for China's elderly of whom only 40 per cent have booster shots. However, a decisive transition may help pull consumer and business sentiment away from near-record lows, shake the property market out of its slumber and accelerate auto sales. That may also prompt analysts to bump up their forecast of 4 per cent earnings growth over the next 12 months. Before the pandemic, those expectations were at 17 per cent.

In India, the pain of Covid-19 - and the gains from reopening - are both in the rearview mirror. The economy is now losing

momentum, although the market continues to be frothy. Even with some caution getting baked into estimates because of high inflation (hurting margins of local consumer firms) and a global slowdown (affecting software exporters), the consensus expectation is for earnings to rise by 18 per cent over the next 12 months. Optimism is the highest with banks. They're benefiting from higher business volumes as well as superior pricing: Elevated commodity prices have boosted demand for working-capital loans even as rising rates have shored up interest margins.

The case for some rotation away from Indian to Chinese stocks is already firming up. BNP Paribas recently downgraded India to "neutral" from "overweight" by removing the country's consumer-staples stocks from its model portfolio and pruning exposure to software exporters. "Our tactical caution on India arises from the market's sky-high relative valuations and the possibility of fund reallocations to North Asia with China's

reopening," says Manishi Raychaudhuri, BNP's head of Asia research. The consensus opinion on India's consumption-oriented stocks is probably too optimistic, while the federal government's budget - the last before the 2024 elections - could introduce additional volatility, he adds. In the longer term, India is seeking to buttress its investment appeal by emerging as an alternative to China. With President Xi Jinping's policies aggravating a rift with the West, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is pitching his country as a destination for multinationals to reduce their overexposure to Chinese supply chains. There's no guarantee that the gamble, backed by \$24 billion in subsidies for manufacturers, will work. As Arvind Subramanian, an economic adviser to the Modi administration until 2018, and Josh Felman, a former International Monetary Fund official in New Delhi, noted in a recent Foreign Affairs article: "India faces three major obstacles in its quest to

become 'the next China;' investment risks are too big, policy inwardness is too strong, and macroeconomic imbalances are too large."

Other countries may also have a claim. Vietnam, more open to trade than India, is on track to edge Britain out of this year's list of the US's seven largest goods trading partners. The Southeast Asian manufacturing powerhouse didn't even figure among the top 15 until 2019. Besides, regardless of how inviting New Delhi's policies are on paper, it's not at all certain they will be implemented impartially and not tweaked to benefit national champions - "the giant Indian conglomerates that the government has favored," according to Subramanian and Felman. Just the firms controlled by Gautam Adani, the richest Indian businessman, have accounted for a third of the 33 per cent jump, in local currency terms, since 2021 in the BSE 500, a broad index of the nation's largest companies.

(Contd on page 24)

Tales of Covid deaths out on Weibo but China playing censor-in-chief

The decision to stop publishing daily data will raise questions about Beijing's sincerity in informing its citizens, as well as the international community, about the Covid situation



Speculation about China's Covid-19 death count is rife. The country's National Health Commission estimated that the virus infects 37 million people a day. Beijing will stop sharing daily Covid data as it targets herd immunity. India and China held the 17th round of military talks on the Chinese side to resolve issues in Eastern Ladakh. A new section of the China-Russia Power of Siberia 2 gas pipeline has been launched. Chinascope brings you the last newsletter edition of 2022.

China over the week

China's National Health Commission held an internal meeting on Wednesday, which became an instant headline around the world, according to reports by Bloomberg. The health body said in internal discussions that as many as 37 million people in China might have been infected with Covid on a single day last week.

According to minutes of a health body's meeting seen by Bloomberg, as many as 248 million people—almost 18 per

cent of the population—likely contracted the virus in the first 20 days of December. But what has caught the world's attention are reports of a rising death toll linked to the new Covid surge.

"There have been so many people dying," said Zhao Yongsheng, a funeral home worker, according to the Associated Press. "They work day and night, but they can't burn them all," Zhao Yongsheng added.

Reporters working for Associated Press could witness the crematoriums southwest of Beijing city in Gaobeidian receiving a large number of ambulances.

"Over two hours at the Gaobeidian crematorium on Thursday, AP journalists observed three ambulances and two vans unload with bodies," wrote Dake Kang of the Associated Press.

Just over an hour's drive from Beijing, the hospital hallways are packed.

"At Baoding No. 2 Hospital, in

Zhuozhou, Wednesday, patients thronged the hallway of the emergency ward. Patients were breathing with the help of respirators. One woman wailed after doctors told her that a loved one had died," reported Associated Press.

People are bombarding Chinese social media sites with comments like "everyone I know has it"—the 'it' meaning Covid. Now, Beijing has said only those who have died directly because of respiratory failure caused by the virus will be counted as Covid related casualties.

"So limiting a diagnosis of death from Covid to someone with a Covid -positive test and respiratory failure will underestimate the true death toll associated with Covid," said the World Health Organization (WHO)'s emergencies chief, Michael Ryan.

WHO has attributed the massive surge in Covid cases to the Omicron-linked subvariant

outbreak, which had been held back because of various zero Covid policies.

Despite cases raging across Chinese cities, the Beijing government continues to bring down Covid barriers. The hashtag 'National health and medical commission will not publish daily epidemic information' started to go viral on Sunday and reached 60 million views. It was also the top trend on Chinese search engine Baidu.

The decision to stop publishing daily data will raise questions about Beijing's sincerity in informing its citizens, as well as the international community, about the Covid situation.

Finding accurate information has been difficult since the beginning of the pandemic - and remains the case. Sixth Tone, a Chinese State media platform published in English, was censored over a news story about the undercount of Covid deaths - a taboo topic.

(Contd. on page 24)

Manufacturing in India before and after Make In India

By Gajendra Singh Shekhawat

Through domestic manufacturing under Make In India policy, India has achieved a record of \$400 billion of goods exported, the next best being \$330 billion achieved in 2018-19. Moreover, the export with the 12 ASEAN countries under RCEP, with whom India has regional trade agreements has increased from \$25.13 billion in 2015-16 to \$42.32 billion in 2020-21

Today Make in India's success is well known but what has not often been discussed is the critical analysis with the UPA Government's attempts at manufacturing. The Previous Government bet on the Regional comprehensive economic partnership (RCEP), a free trade agreement with 15 member countries excluding India constitutes 30% of the global population and GDP to boost manufacturing in India while the present Government has bet on Make in India as it has pulled out of the RCEP in 2019. This article is a comparative study of both these approaches. The 14 RCEP member countries contribute to 70% of our trade deficit, thus India being clubbed

with them was a loss-making proposition citing its already weak position. Moreover, out of these 14 countries, India already has a regional trade agreement (RTA) with 13 countries, thus it had nothing new to lose by being a part of RCEP, the only country which had to gain was China, which doesn't have an FTA with India and would have gotten exclusive access to the Indian market through RCEP. The Modi-era Make in India (MI) policy focuses on increasing domestic manufacturing before entering into any agreement where it is clearly going to lose. Through domestic manufacturing under MI policy, India has achieved a record of 400 billion dollars of goods exported, the next best being 330 billion achieved in 2018-19. Moreover, the export with the 12 ASEAN countries under RCEP, with whom India has regional trade agreements has increased from \$25.13 billion in 2015-16 to \$42.32 billion in 2020-21, although India still struggles to decrease the trade deficit with them which stands at \$25 billion.

RCEP proposes lifting of tariff on 90% of all products, thus Indian market gets opened up for huge imports from RCEP

countries, while at the same time, India doesn't get any guarantee from China to respect WTO obligations wrt non-tariff barriers, which it uses against India, especially in Pharma and IT. MI focuses on creating self-sufficiency in manufacturing in sectors where China creates non-tariff barriers, for example, India reduced dependence on API from China to 24 from 48. Under the Make in India scheme, PLI Scheme for 3 verticals in Pharma worth 21,000 crores has been launched and pharma exports witnessed a growth of 103% since 2013-14, from Rs 90,415 crores in 2013-14 to Rs 1,83,422 crores in 2021-22.

In areas where India has dominance, RCEP doesn't provide any special provision for the country to grow, thus we can't leverage our own strengths while having to play according to our weaknesses. MI is a holistic scheme that understands to increase dominance in areas where it has strength, i.e., agriculture and allied products while slowly growing in areas where it has been traditionally weak, i.e., defense products. In 2009-14, Agri exports stood at 89 thousand crores, which

increased to 1.93Lakh crore between 2014-19 and in 2021-22, it rose to a record high of 3 Lakh Crore. In 2014, India's defense imports were 40 times the size of India's defense exports, this has changed under Make in India, the value of defense exports during the financial year 2021-22 has been Rs 14000 crore. In imports, compared to 2012-16, the 2017-21 period saw imports falling by 21 percent, thus Make in India has started bearing fruits in previously disadvantaged sectors.

In sectors wherein there has been a traditional deficit in certain product segments being manufactured in countries listed in RCEP, there is no such guarantee of creating shared infrastructure in importing countries aimed at reducing huge trade deficits between countries and balancing trade, thus RCEP is skewed towards dominant countries, especially in lucrative areas that require extensive technology and high skills. In MI, the Government realised that whenever trade between China and India has grown, there has been a gradual yet steady shift of lucrative, high skill tech-intensive mobile phone manufacturing towards

China. Today imports of mobile phones from China have dropped by 55 percent to \$626 million in 2021-22, from \$1.4 billion in 2020-21. On the other hand, due to MI, India will be exporting mobile phone worth 43,500 crore in 2022 which is a jump of 75% as compared to the previous year. In RCEP, there has been no mention of an auto trigger of stopping imports once an upper threshold of imports has been breached in any segment. The flooding of cheap imports without any protection to the domestic market discourages domestic manufacturers to increase their competence at least in sectors where the RCEP countries can compete. In MI, those products that don't require high training or huge increase in manufacturing competence but were being imported were identified. In toy manufacturing, China had lion's share but due to an increase in domestic manufacturing competence under MI, the import of toys in FY21-22 have reduced by 70% to \$110 million (Rs. 877.8 cr.) and export worth \$326 million, an increase of over 61% over \$202 million during FY18-19 has been achieved.

(Contd on page 25)

India, a natural Nepal pal



By KA Badarinath

Nepal is in tumult. As expected, a big chunk of China-inspired Maoists and Marxists that failed to co-exist previously have got back to rule the mountain kingdom that has seen about ten swearing-ins and outs in as many years. Maoist guerrilla Pushpa Kumar Dahal seems to have not learnt the bitter

lessons of 2017 when he aligned and broke off from the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist – Leninist) led by Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli. Thanks to an opportunistic political saga unfolding in Nepal, Dahal, who's popularly known as 'Prachanda', ditched his latest ally Nepali Congress and returned to CPN – ML for forming a government primarily

to assume Prime Ministerial position on Monday. In fact, Dahal represents the oft-quoted saying that politics is an art of possibilities played very boldly. Dahal seems to have made most of these possibilities to ascend for the third time to become Prime Minister of Nepal in the last few years. His key lieutenants, led by Deputy General Secretary from the Communist Party of Nepal – Maoist Barsha Man Pun, had headed for Beijing even as the counting of votes after November 20 elections threw up the possibility of a hung Parliament.

While the avowed reason was Pun's 'illness', his political engagements with the Communist Party of China (CPC) seem to have reportedly led to the breakup of a pre-

electoral alliance of Nepali Congress – CPC Maoist Centre. It was quickly followed by the forging of a new alliance of comrades from all shades and denominations pushed aggressively by CPC. CPN – ML leader K.P.Sharma Oli's inroads and linkages with CPC leadership also seem to have worked well in pushing the Nepali Congress into opposition space notwithstanding the latter being the single largest party with 89 members in the 275-strong Parliament. The big question in the melee is whether Dahal aka 'Prachanda' has his way to run Nepal's affairs without being a lackey to China. Dice are cast given that Beijing's proxy K.P.Sharma Oli would like to take all important political, economic and strategic calls relating to China

Hands off New Delhi policy towards Kathmandu vis-à-vis expansionist China will work wonders for Prachanda's regime.

and India. This uneasy alliance between Prachanda and Oli forged by forces in Beijing may find it difficult to find a working relationship given the bad blood that flew in the earlier government and in run-up to the campaign.

From India's perspective, Nepali Congress being out of power may be a big disappointment. But, it will have to find ways to work out a nuanced relationship with the new dispensation that's bound to assert the China way. In fact, Prachanda with his independent views that are equidistant from both China and India, may be the biggest bet.

(Contd. on page 25)

Congress wants to pin Modi down on China issue. It's holding the wrong end of the stick

For a debate in Parliament, Congress-led opposition is focusing on the status of India-China border – a historic dispute which isn't a making of the Modi government



By Sheela Bhatt

Rahul Gandhi, who is leading the Bharat Jodo Yatra, has increased the intensity of his attack on the Narendra Modi government for its handling of the border dispute with China. Congress has been accusing PM Modi for not naming and shaming China for its military-backed border diplomacy. Gandhi and his party leaders including president Mallikarjun Kharge, P. Chidambaram, Manish Tewari, Jairam Ramesh and Pawan Khera are doing their best to provoke Modi and his Cabinet colleagues to engage in the

debate, inside and outside Parliament, over India's border dispute with China. Even Congress's junior spokesperson Supriya Shrinete is telling Modi to not be scared and speak up before China – "Dariye mat, China ke saamne boliye." But the Modi government and the BJP have so far refused to take the bait.

They are cautious and cleverly diverting the China border issue because they feel they are on a strong wicket vis-à-vis Congress. A powerful BJP leader told me off the record, "The Congress is so belligerent and severe. Now,

expect the reactions too." Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar have given statements in Parliament but Congress' Jairam Ramesh has been pursuing the matter by quizzing the government over lack of certain actions.

"In the ongoing session of parliament, Nehru's memories have come alive. The Modi government is not going to allow China pe Charcha," said a senior BJP leader, adding, "Modi is not Nehru."

On 12 October 1962, Nehru had told reporters that he had directed the Indian Army 'to free our territory in the northeast frontier', which China "misinterpreted" as India declaring war against it. Nehru was drawn into the debate over the border dispute and the Chinese took advantage of it, eventually, and defeated India in the 1962 war.

No room for a debate now

Congress's energy derives from PM's remarks at the all-party

meeting on China on 19 June 2020 when Modi said, "Na koi wahan hamari seema mein ghusa aaya hai, na hi koi ghusa hua hai, na hi hamari koi post kisi dusre ke kabze mein hain (No one has intruded and nor is anyone intruding, nor has any post been captured by someone)." The remarks were carried live on television. Since then, the Congress wants to establish in Parliament that China has gained from Modi's statement, which the party says has weakened Indian position in negotiations over the serious border transgressions. The PM's office later issued a clarification on Modi's statement but it seems the Congress wants to settle scores about the China chapter of the Nehru era.

When so many diplomatic balls are in the air in the Indo-Pacific region, the government doesn't find the current time suitable to debate the border issue. In the changing world order when the Russia-Ukraine war is on, when China is witnessing new Covid threats, when India is trying to

balance Russia, China and US positions to its advantage, when the Taiwan issue is hot and under sharp global focus and when the world is struggling to emerge from post-Covid economic issues, this conservative Modi government is most unlikely to show any leniency to accommodate the Congress's demand.

More so after Rahul Gandhi's use of the term "peet rahe" (beating) for Chinese soldiers without adding that Indian soldiers stood their ground and forced them to retreat and Kharge comparing PM Modi to a "mouse", the government got the excuse to dismiss Congress's demand.

Truth is that even without Rahul's blunder, the government is too strong to let Congress set the agenda in Parliament, and would not have agreed for the debate.

"Vo zamana gaya," says a senior BJP leader when asked why can't ministers meet the Congress and other opposition leaders behind the scenes and brief them. (Contd. on page 23)

Why Devendra Fadnavis of 2022 isn't the same as in 2014

In the Maharashtra political circles, Fadnavis is seen behind the wheel but Eknath Shinde is deciding the destination

BY DK Singh

Maharashtra deputy chief minister Devendra Fadnavis had his Bharatiya Janata Party colleagues sit up in amazement and dismay last week. During an interaction with the Loksatta editorial team, he was asked about his initial reluctance to join the Eknath Shinde-led government. 'Was it because he wanted to join the Union Cabinet?' He said that he was a former chief minister and didn't want to look desperate to be in power.

But what caught his party colleagues' attention was his explanation: "I took that stand. My party first accepted it and then changed its opinion. There is no reason for me to go to the Centre. Nobody can send me there." "Nobody can send him out of Maharashtra! Can't believe he said that! In our party, you say that you will do whatever Modiji and Amitbhai decide. Devendra is showing guts," a BJP MP told me.

Some in the BJP found his remark 'insolent'. Others saw it as 'chutzpah' in a party where leaders don't start or end



a sentence without referring to 'Modi ji' or 'Amit bhai'. But Fadnavis, Modi's pick as Maharashtra chief minister in 2014, is not known to mince his words.

After grudgingly accepting the party's decision to make him deputy chief minister, he disclosed that Union Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP president J.P. Nadda had called him to join the Shinde-led government, but he accepted it only after Prime Minister Narendra

Modi called him. 'Impressed' Mohan Bhagwat

What's behind Fadnavis' latest assertion about not shifting out of Maharashtra? In public perception, he is the de facto CM and the BJP high command's point person in the Maharashtra government. In reality, Shinde is gradually taking control. It was his policy initiatives and pronouncements that triggered a fresh Karnataka-Maharashtra border row.

Fadnavis had to play along even though the move may hurt the BJP's prospects in poll-bound Karnataka. But Shinde couldn't care less. Inclusion of Karnataka's Marathi-speaking areas in Maharashtra was an issue that first catapulted Bal Thackeray as the mover and shaker of Mumbai.

In December 1968, Thackeray declared that no leader from New Delhi would be allowed in Mumbai if the Marathi-speaking areas were not ceded to Maharashtra by 26 January of the following year. When deputy prime minister Morarji Desai landed in Mumbai in 1969, Shiv Sainiks created mayhem in the city. Thackeray was arrested but the Congress government at the time had to capitulate and buy peace with him. Seventeen years later, Shinde was arrested over the same issue in Belgaum, and he spent 40 days in Bellary jail. Today, when he is locked in a battle with Uddhav for Bal Thackeray's legacy, Shinde must make the right noises over those Marathi-speaking areas in Karnataka. (Contd. on page 23)

Putin signs decree banning oil exports to EU countries that put price cap

Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Moscow would ban oil exports to the EU countries that put a price cap on Russian oil



(By Staff Reporter) Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed a decree banning oil exports to those countries in the European Union (EU) that put price cap on Russian oil. The ban will come into effect from February 1, 2023, according to the decree. The Kremlin's decree stated: "This...comes into force on February 1, 2023, and applies until July 1, 2023." However, the decree includes a clause that allows for Putin to overrule the ban in special cases. Earlier this month, Putin

had hinted that Russia could cut oil production and would not sell oil to any country that imposes the West's "stupid" price cap. His reaction came after the G-7 countries, the European Union and Australia agreed to a \$60 per barrel price cap on Russian seaborne crude oil over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine in February this year. On February 24, 2022, Putin launched a "special military operation" in Ukraine aimed at "demilitarisation and denazification".

12 more arrests over Leicester clashes post India-Pak cricket match

The British police has arrested 12 more people allegedly involved in clashes on the streets of the eastern England city of Leicester following an India-Pakistan cricket match earlier this year

(News Agency) British police investigating clashes between groups of men on the streets of the eastern England city of Leicester following an India-Pakistan cricket match earlier this year have made 12 more arrests over the course of December. Leicestershire Police said in an update this week that its investigating team is working through the evidence and has identified a number of suspects and carried out enquiries to work up to making over 47 arrests. A further 12 men were arrested in the last few weeks and one was voluntarily interviewed, with three of them being charged with offences relating to a number of disorder offences. "We've been working hard behind the scene reviewing the CCTV footage and all the hours of body-worn video from officers who were working and making IDs of those who may be involved," said Detective Chief Inspector Rob Arthur, who is leading

the force's investigating team. "This work has led us to be able to make these arrests and bring these people into custody in order to get their accounts. It's work that has taken time, due to the nature of it, and it's work we'll be continuing to carry out," he said.

Those arrested, aged between 25 and 45, are all said to be local to Leicester and have been arrested on suspicion of violent disorder or suspicion of possession of an offensive weapon in relation to the clashes that took place in September. Three of them arrested on suspicion of public order offences – Jadved Patel, 46, Zakir Umarji, 26, and Hassan Chunara, 28 – have been

charged to appear before Leicester Magistrates' Court on different dates next month.

"Identifying the number of people that



are involved is a significant investment but these arrests and charges are a step closer to bringing those responsible for the disorder to justice," said David Sandall, Deputy Chief Constable of Leicestershire Police.

It follows ongoing investigation

updates from the local police over what they termed as "serious disorder" and "significant aggression" as groups of men, believed to be largely from local Hindu and Muslim communities, clashed in the wake of the India-Pakistan Asia Cup cricket match in Dubai at the end of August. Leicestershire Police had to call in backup from other forces and repeatedly used dispersal and stop and search powers to restore calm over days of unrest, caught on some social media videos. The Indian High Commission in London issued a statement to "strongly condemn the violence perpetrated against the Indian community in Leicester and vandalism of premises and symbols of Hindu religion". Some diaspora groups and think tanks have since claimed that much of the violence was the result of "misinformation" and fake news circulating on social media.

International NGOs pull out of Afghanistan after Taliban's ban on women staff

Several foreign aid groups have pulled out of operations from Afghanistan after the Taliban ordered a ban on women staff from working.

(News Agency) Several foreign aid groups have suspended their operations in Afghanistan after the Taliban ordered all NGOs to stop their women staff from working. The order from the Taliban threatened the NGOs after it said "serious complaints" were received that women working in NGOs were not observing a proper Islamic dress code. The move was met with severe backlash from several countries and international NGOs. On Monday, at least four international non-profits issued statements highlighting the crucial nature of the role of women in providing aid to the country's needy. Save the Children, Norwegian Refugee Council, CARE International and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) have said they will wind up operations in Afghanistan. "We cannot effectively reach children, women and men

in desperate need in Afghanistan without our female staff," the first three NGOs said in a joint statement adding that without women, the NGOs would not have jointly reached millions of Afghans in need since August 2021. "Whilst we gain clarity on this announcement, we are suspending our programmes, demanding that men and women can equally continue our lifesaving assistance in Afghanistan," read the statement. "With Afghanistan in the midst of a worsening humanitarian crisis and economic collapse, humanitarian actors have been essential in saving lives in the country over the course of the past year," the IRC said in a separate statement. "None of that would have been possible without female humanitarian workers," it pointed out.

IRC's ability to deliver services rely on female staff at all levels of the organisation. "If we are not allowed to employ women,



we are not able to deliver to those in need. Therefore, the IRC is currently suspending our services in Afghanistan," it added. The non-profit also said the exclusion of women from humanitarian service delivery holds "catastrophic consequences for the Afghan people because our services

depend on women workers". The latest government policy likely to have devastating consequences for Afghans who depend on aid as the country moves on to a cold winter. The acting head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) Ramiz Alakbarov met the Taliban's acting economics minister Mohammad Hanif to urge him to reverse the decision. "Millions of Afghans need humanitarian assistance and removing barriers is vital," The Independent quoted UNAMA's statement. The Taliban, however, has dismissed concerns from the NGOs and said they do not allow anyone to "talk rubbish or make threats" regarding the decisions of its leaders under the title of humanitarian aid. Days earlier, the hardline Islamists also barred women from attending universities, prompting global outrage and protests in some Afghan cities.

Pakistan is selling its Embassy property in US. Guess the bidders

The highest bidder is a Jewish group, followed by an Indian and a Pakistani realtor

(News Agency) Pakistan got three bids for a building that once housed the defence section of the country's embassy in Washington. At almost \$6.8 million, the highest bidder is a Jewish group which wants to build a synagogue in the building, Pakistani newspaper Dawn reported quoting diplomatic sources in Washington. In the second spot is an Indian realtor with a bid of about \$5 million, followed by a bid of about \$4 million from a Pakistani realtor, the report said. Bidding for the property going to the highest bidder,

a Pakistani realtor, requesting to remain anonymous, said: "We should follow this tradition, also because it will create a lot of goodwill in an influential American community, which wants to use it as a place of worship." Earlier this month, Pakistan embassy officials told Dawn that one of the country's three diplomatic properties in Washington - a building on the

prestigious R Street NW - was up for sale.



On Monday, Pakistan's Cabinet

Committee on Privatisation asked the privatisation commission to appoint a financial adviser to lease the Roosevelt Hotel site in New York. Finance Minister Ishaq Dar chaired the meeting. Embassy officials in Washington are consulting an appraiser to assess whether the building should be sold as it is or after some renovation, the report added. "We are in no rush, and we will conclude a deal only if it benefits Pakistan," the embassy official said. The country's cabinet has approved the sale.

Winter storm kills 60 across US, over 15,000 flights cancelled; Buffalo worst hit

The severe winter storm, or the 'blizzard of the century' has claimed more than 60 lives so far across the United States, particularly in Buffalo. Thousands of flights have been cancelled amid howling winds and sub-zero temperatures

(News Agency) A relentless storm, what authorities called the 'blizzard of the century' paralysed western New York over the Christmas weekend. So far, the storm has killed 27 people in New York and at least 60 across the whole of the United States. Local officials on Monday said efforts to dig out the snow-bound region around Buffalo were on as rescue operations continued. Roadways



remained littered with cars, buses, ambulances, tow trucks and even plows buried beneath towering drifts, complicating efforts to clear snow-blanketed streets and reach stranded residents in need of medical care. Authorities deployed high-lift tractors as hospital transport.

BUFFALO WORST HIT

In New York, particularly in Buffalo, authorities said bodies were discovered inside vehicles and from under snow banks, as emergency officials

went from car to car to search for more survivors. A few of the grocery stores that had been closed for days reopened on Monday, and people trekked more than a mile (1.6 km) through the middle of otherwise impassable streets to get there. The severity of the storm, notable for a region accustomed to harsh winter weather, grew out of a combination of meteorological factors that supercharged one another. Up to 9 more inches of snow (23 centimeters) could fall in some areas of western New

York through Tuesday, the National Weather Service said. Scientists say the climate change crisis may have contributed to the intensity of the storm. That's because the atmosphere can carry more water vapor, which acts as fuel, said Mark Serreze, director of the National Snow and Ice Data Center at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

The blizzard roared across western New York on Friday and Saturday. Locals even pleaded on social media for donations of food and diapers. "It was like looking at a white wall for 14 to 18 hours straight," Poloncarz, the county official, said. New York Governor Kathy Hochul toured the aftermath in Buffalo — her hometown — on Monday, calling the blizzard "one for the ages."

OVER 15,000 FLIGHTS CANCELLED ACROSS THE US

The National Weather Service said the snow total at the Buffalo Niagara International Airport

stood at 49.2 inches (1.25 meters) at 10 am, Monday. Officials say the airport will be shut through Wednesday morning. The brutal storm, howling winds and sub-zero temperatures forced the cancellation of more than 15,000 flights across the United States in recent days. Some 3,410 domestic and international flights were cancelled on Monday as of about 3 p.m. EDT, according to the tracking site FlightAware. The site said Southwest Airlines had 2,497 cancellations — about 60 per cent of its scheduled flights and about 10 times as

many as any other major US carrier. Southwest said the weather was improving, which would "stabilize and improve our situation." Based on FlightAware data, airports all across the US were suffering from cancellations and delays, including Denver, Atlanta, Las Vegas, Seattle, Baltimore and Chicago.

BIDEN SPEAKS TO OFFICIALS, ASSURES HELP

President Joe Biden tweeted on Monday that he had spoken to Hochul on the phone and that his administration would provide resources to help the region cover the daunting expense of storm rescue and recovery. "I spoke with Governor Kathy Hochul to get an update on the extreme winter weather hitting New York. We stand ready to make sure they have the resources they need to get through this," Biden said. "My heart is with those who lost loved ones this holiday weekend. You are in my and Jill's prayers," Biden said.



El Paso	2411	Southwest	7:45	17B	Now 7:56 PM
Honolulu	3845	Southwest	1:10	18B	On Time
Houston Hobby	2403	Southwest	5:20	17B	Cancelled
Houston Hobby	2457	Southwest	2:10	17B	Now 3:59 PM
Kahului Maui	8829	Southwest	1:10	18B	On Time
Las Vegas	2403	Southwest	4:20	16	Cancelled
Las Vegas	4558	Southwest	6:40	16	Cancelled
Las Vegas	753	Southwest	5:25	17A	Cancelled
Little Rock	1278	Southwest	11:40	12B	Cancelled
Miami	1482	Southwest	11:20	12B	Cancelled
Nashville	1527	Southwest	4:10	18A	Now 6:13 PM
Nashville	1447	Southwest	5:25	17A	Cancelled
Nashville	1278	Southwest	9:15	15	Now 11:04 AM
New Orleans	1972	Southwest	1:50	12A	Now 2:33 PM
New Orleans	1436	Southwest			

Women, kids among 1,200 Afghan migrants jailed in Pakistan

(News Agency) Pakistani police in multiple raids detained at least 1,200 Afghan nationals, including women and children, who had entered the southern port city of Karachi without valid travel documents, officials said Thursday.

The arrests brought criticism from around Afghanistan after images of locked up Afghan children were circulated online. The detentions underscored the strained relations between the two South Asian neighbors.

Police and local government officials said the detainees will be deported to Afghanistan after serving their sentences or when the paperwork for their release is completed by their attorneys. Pakistani officials claim that most of the detainees wish to return home.

Although Pakistan routinely makes such arrests, multiple and apparently coordinated raids were launched beginning in October to detain Afghans staying in Karachi and elsewhere without valid documents.

Gul Din, an official at the Afghan Consulate in Karachi, said he was in contact with Pakistan



about a "quick and dignified return" of the Afghan citizens to their homeland.

Pictures of some Afghan children crammed into a cell of the central jail in Karachi went viral on social media, drawing appeals for their release along with their parents.

At least 139 Afghan women and 165 children are among those being held at a high-security jail in Karachi, according to a report released this month by Pakistan's National Commission on Human Rights. The report was based on interviews with scores of imprisoned Afghan detainees.

In the Afghan capital of Kabul, Abdul Qahar Balkhi, a spokesman for the foreign affairs ministry, said embassy officials had expressed their concerns during meetings with their Pakistani counterparts.

"The Pakistani authorities have repeatedly pledged swift release of these detainees," he told The Associated Press, saying that so far Pakistan had failed to "fully deliver on the commitment."

"We believe that such degrading treatment of Afghans in Pakistan is not in the interest of any party," Balkhi said. He said Afghans were advised not to enter Pakistan "unless absolutely

necessary and without proper documentation."

In Karachi, Murtaza Wahab, a spokesman for the Sindh provincial government, said police recently arrested only those Afghans who were residing in the province without valid documents. He said such detainees will be deported. He did not say how many Afghans were arrested for illegally residing in Sindh this year.

But Moniza Kakar, a lawyer who helps such Afghan detainees, said at least 1,400 Afghans were being held in Karachi's jails. "We are not sure exactly how many Afghans are currently being held at jails in Pakistan. So far, we have facilitated the release of hundreds of Afghans to their country," she said. Kakar said some pregnant Afghan women who fled Afghanistan to seek medical treatment and for other reasons, are among those detained in Karachi and elsewhere in Sindh province. She said one of the female Afghan detainees recently gave birth to a child in the Hyderabad jail. Kakar said dozens of Afghans were deported to Afghanistan last

month after they completed their sentences, which are usually up to two months. However, she suggested that such sentences should be only verbal and symbolic - so that the detainees can be sent back to their countries quickly.

Millions of Afghans fled to Pakistan during the 1979-1989 Soviet occupation of their country, creating one of the world's largest refugee populations. Since then, Pakistan has been hosting Afghans, urging them to register themselves with the United Nations and local authorities to avoid any risk of deportation.

According to a recently conducted U.N.-backed survey, 1.3 million registered Afghan refugees are residing in Pakistan. "Following the takeover of Afghanistan by the Afghan Taliban, there has been a drastic rise in Afghans seeking to enter Pakistan for a multitude of reasons ranging from fleeing persecution, seeking medical aid and looking for job opportunities," the report released by the National Commission on Human Rights last week said.

Pak Hindu Woman Killed, Skin Reportedly Peeled Off; India Responds

(News Agency) India on Thursday called on Pakistan to protect its minorities after the killing of a Hindu woman Daya Bheel in Sindh province.

Speaking at the weekly media briefing of the Ministry of External Affairs, spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said, "We have seen reports about it, but we don't have specific details on the case, but we have reiterated that Pakistan should protect its minorities along with their safety, security and well-being, which is their responsibility."

There is outrage in Pakistan's Sindh after a Hindu woman Daya Bheel was brutally killed.

Krishna Kumari, Senator of Pakistan Peoples Party from Tharparkar Sindh rushed to her village and confirmed the news of the brutal murder of the Hindu woman. "Daya Bheel, 40-year-old widow brutally murdered and her body was found in very bad

condition. Her head was separated from the body and the savages had removed the flesh from the whole head. Visited her village Police teams from Sinjhora and Shahpurchakar also reached," she tweeted.

"Daya Bheel, who was brutally



murdered -- her case won't be highlighted in the media, nor will Politicians in Islamabad or the Sindh government issue a statement. Will the police apprehend culprits? Will Hindus be treated as equal citizens in their motherland Sindh? tweeted The Rise News, a nonprofit news organization. Recently, the UK government this month imposed

sanctions on its Muslim cleric Mian Abdul Haq for forced conversions and marriages of girls and women from religious minorities, according to a Toronto-based think tank.

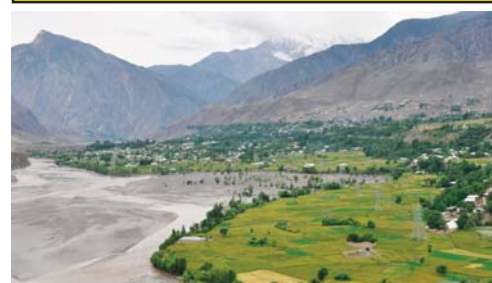
The International Forum For Rights And Security (IFFRAS)

said this latest sanction, once again highlighted the precarious situation of minorities in Pakistan. Sanction on Mian, described as a "controversial Sindhi pir" by Dawn, was part of a new wave of sanctions that targets

corrupt actors, those abusing human rights, and perpetrators of sexual violence in conflict.

According to IFFRAS, Mian Abdul Haq was a Pakistan People's Party (PPP) lawmaker between 2008 and 2013. The party expelled him after the forced conversion and marriage of Rinkle Kumari, a girl from the minority Hindu community.

Pakistan court frees convicted rapist after 'agreement' to marry his victim



earlier in December following an out-of-court settlement made by a local "jirga" - a council of elderly men who make decisions based on Sharia law.

Sharia - also known as

(News Agency) A court in Pakistan on Monday freed a convicted rapist after it was "agreed" he would marry his victim, his lawyer said, enraging rights activists who say the ruling risks normalizing sexual violence in the South Asian country.

Daulat Khan, 23, was convicted in May of raping the deaf woman, 36, in 2020 in the northeastern district of Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, according to his lawyer Amjad Ali Khan.

He was sentenced to life in prison and fined 100,000 rupees (about \$440), said the lawyer, who is not related to his client. The woman later gave birth to a child as a result of the rape, the lawyer added. On Monday, the Peshawar High Court acquitted Daulat Khan after the two were legally married

Islamic law - is an interpretation of the faith's sacred texts and traditions that varies greatly across the Muslim world.

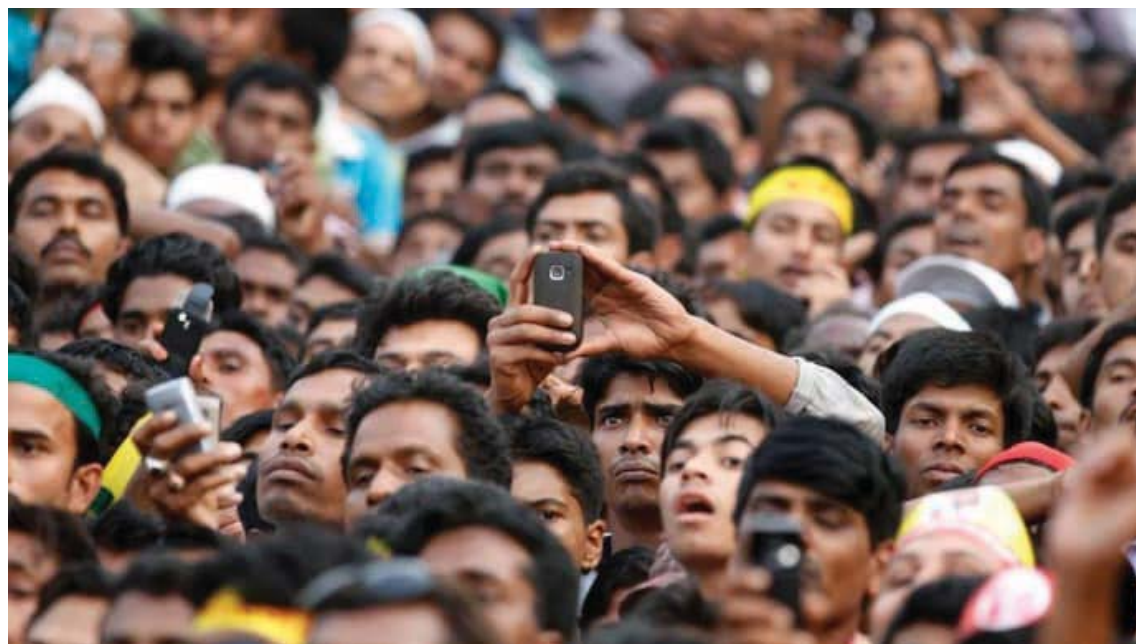
Swat is a mostly rural and conservative district, where deeply ingrained, often brutal patriarchal and misogynistic attitudes remain prevalent. In 2012, activist and Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai was shot in the head by the Pakistani Taliban in Swat for defying their orders by going to school. It is not uncommon for a jirga to settle cases in many parts of Pakistan on so-called taboo issues such as childbirth outside of marriage. Critics have long accused jirga of perpetuating a culture of victim-shaming, especially on issues of rape and sexual assault.

Vision of a smart nation: How Bangladesh is planning to become a developed country

'Digital Bangladesh' is all about upgradation of fundamentals and being a launch pad for a developed nation. The vision of Smart Bangladesh is all about taking the nation to a new height — a developed one.

(News Agency) In the run up to Bangladesh's national election in 2008, a look at the manifestoes of two political parties — Bangladesh Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) — revealed two completely different pictures.

While the BNP's manifesto revolved around "save country, save people", something never-before-told and now proven far ahead of its time came through the Awami League. A pledge of 'Digital Bangladesh', a concept completely unheard of in the youngest nation in South Asia, resonated amongst the countrymen well. On impact, the Awami League won the election with an unprecedented majority in 2008, while the BNP-Jamaat combine was decimated to a handful of seats in parliament. Before 2008, Bangladesh was a completely analog country where high internet costs and expensive talk-time for mobile users defined the ambit of digitisation. But since 2009, a silent revolution began that brought in real and measurable gains on the front of the digital landscape. Expansion of digital centers on the grassroots, people getting access to services at their fingertips, freelancers making money from outsourcing, a record rise in internet and mobile users emerged as key parameters in the process. The introduction of mobile financial services (MFS),



fuelled by a rapid rise in terms of users, grabbed global attention, while distribution of social safety net schemes through MFS bore the fruits for countrymen. At the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, successful distribution of safety schemes to affected people through MFS stands as a shining testament to the country's strength achieved over the years. During lockdowns, when schools, colleges and universities were closed, distance learning saved the day for students, thanks to the expansion of the internet. No wonder the country now even boasts of having a satellite in space -- a dream of the founding father of the nation after the country's independence, which was realised decades later through his daughter and

grandson. From the science and technology affairs sub-committee, a key affiliate body of the party, we gathered a pool of doctors and opened up a round-the-clock health helpline that provided guidance for patients calling to seek medical help.

Smart Bangladesh, next vision

With almost a year left for the next national election, the Awami League has floated a new action course before the nation and set a target to make a 'smart country'. "We are looking forward to becoming a cashless society," Sajeeb Wazed said recently before a group of young change-makers. This pledge marks the beginning of the party's next course of action, a step that would help the country's pursuit

to become a developed nation by 2041. A month ago, we organised an international conference that saw hundreds of prominent experts submitting their research papers. The focus was on the work required in all key sectors to adapt to the fourth industrial revolution. The overwhelming response from a host of global experts with a message from the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) president welcoming the initiative symbolises the relevance of our party's initiative. A top expert panel of academics analysed those papers and we would submit a set of recommendations to our party chief. 'Digital Bangladesh' is all about upgradation of fundamentals and being a launch pad for a developed nation. The vision of

Architect of 'Digital Bangladesh'

"My son Sajeeb Wazed gave me lessons on the usage of smartphone and computer," Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said, talking about her son. As his mother's Information and Communication Technology advisor, Sajeeb Wazed Joy has presided over the penetration of GenNext InfoTech into all spheres of life — from online schooling to digital monetary transactions. Bangladesh saw the best phase of its digital transformation during the Covid pandemic. The country managed to keep its economy going through a wide spectrum of digital activities, including telemedicine, virtual courts, and delivering money to poor people through mobile platforms and e-commerce. Its better growth trajectory than its bigger neighbours during the Covid pandemic owes much to this all-encompassing digitisation. A University of Texas graduate in Computer Engineering and a Harvard post-graduate in Public Administration, Sajeeb Wazed Joy has been instrumental in the country's technological advancement.

Smart Bangladesh is all about taking the nation to a new height — a developed one.

'Hungry and weak': 58 Rohingya refugees reach Indonesia after weeks at sea

Dozens of hungry and weak Rohingya Muslims were found on a beach in Indonesia's northernmost province of Aceh on Sunday after weeks at sea

(News Agency) A group of 58 Rohingya refugees at sea for more than a month landed at a fishing village in Indonesia's Aceh Besar district early on Sunday.

Villagers who saw the group on a rickety wooden boat helped them on to Indrapatra beach at Ladong, a fishing village, and then reported their arrival to authorities, said Rolly Yuiza Away, the police chief. "They look very weak from hunger and dehydration. Some of them are sick after a long and severe voyage at sea," said Away, adding that the men received food and water from villagers and others as they waited for further instructions from immigration and local officials in Aceh. At least three of the men were rushed to a health clinic for medical care, and others are also receiving various medical treatments, Away said.

The United Nations and other groups on

Friday urged countries in South Asia to rescue a boat of Rohingya refugees that has been adrift for several weeks in the Andaman Sea.

"Reports indicate those onboard have now remained at sea for a month in dire conditions with insufficient food or water, without any efforts by states in the region to help save human lives," the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) said in a statement. On Monday, the UNHCR said a separate boat with 180 Rohingya was presumed drowned, and that 2022 could end up as one of the deadliest for the community forced to flee its home in Myanmar



because of ethnic violence. Away said one of the men on the boat that reached Ladong spoke some Malay and said they had been at sea for more than a month, aiming to land in Malaysia to seek a better life and work there. More than 700,000 Rohingya have fled from Buddhist-majority Myanmar to refugee camps in Bangladesh since August 2017, when the Myanmar military launched a clearance operation in response to attacks by a rebel group. Myanmar forces have been accused of mass rapes, killings and burning of thousands of homes. Groups

of Rohingya have attempted to leave the crowded camps in Bangladesh and take hazardous sea voyages to other countries in the region. Malaysia has been a common destination for boats, as traffickers promise the refugees a better life there. But many Rohingya refugees who land in Malaysia face detention. Although Indonesia is not a signatory to the UN's 1951 Refugee Convention, the UNHCR said a 2016 presidential regulation provides a national legal framework governing the treatment of refugees on boats in distress near Indonesia and to help them disembark. These provisions have been implemented for years, most recently last month when about 219 Rohingya refugees, including 63 women and 40 children, were rescued off the coast of North Aceh district on board two rickety boats.

Myanmar to refugee camps in Bangladesh since August 2017, when the Myanmar military launched a clearance operation in response to attacks by a rebel group. Myanmar forces have been accused of mass rapes, killings and burning of thousands of homes. Groups

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'Heartless' mass layoffs hit US workers ahead of holidays

Job cuts have risen this year, even as the US economy shows no signs of a downturn for now



While many American workers are preparing for the holiday season, some are grappling with the mental and financial anguish of being suddenly laid off.

After corporations complained of labor shortages through 2021 and 2022, several companies have shed workers in mass layoffs as 2022 comes to a close.

Job cuts in the US have risen this year, with a 6% increase for the first 11 months of 2022 in comparison to last year. In 2021, 320,173 of them had been announced, though job cuts are lower in the past two years than in the previous few decades.

Driving the increase in job cuts is the tech sector, as numerous high-profile tech companies, including Facebook's Meta, Twitter and Amazon, announced mass layoffs in recent weeks. Catalent, a pharmaceutical manufacturing contractor, recently informed employees the company is going to cut about 600 jobs in Indiana, Texas and Maryland over the next several weeks, as demand for Covid-19 vaccines has dropped significantly.

"Holidays are depressing enough, especially those of us who have lost most of

their family and ones that suffer from anxiety and depression," said a laid-off worker at Catalent in Bloomington, Indiana, who requested to remain anonymous for fear of retaliation from prospective employers.

The person added: "I'm 45 and have no idea what I want to do. The people that are still working are affected by this. They have to pick up the slack and they are missing the ones they worked next to. I wish they would have waited till the first of the year. Who wants to find a job or hire right before Christmas?" Some experts see the layoffs as unnecessary. "These companies are all making money. They are doing it because other companies are doing it," said Stanford Graduate School of Business Prof Jeffrey Pfeffer on the recent trend of tech companies shedding employees.

"Layoffs often do not cut costs, as there are many instances of laid-off employees being hired back as contractors, with companies paying the contracting firm. Layoffs often do not increase stock prices, in part because layoffs can signal that a company is having difficulty. Layoffs do not increase

productivity. Layoffs do not solve what is often the underlying problem, which is often an ineffective strategy, a loss of market share or too little revenue. Layoffs are basically a bad decision," Pfeffer added. Layoffs have numerous negative effects on workers who are faced with them. A study by UK researchers found a layoff to be the 7th most stressful life experience, correlated to significant increases in developing a new health condition as well as the risk of suicide, depression and substance abuse. Other corporations have announced mass layoffs right before the holidays, claiming economic downturns have driven the cuts, even as they record profits and the economy showing no signs of a downturn. Yet, the Federal Reserve's interest rate hikes have driven concerns that a downturn could happen soon. Stellantis, which manufactures the Jeep Cherokee SUV, announced on 9 December the closure of an Illinois plant resulting in more than 1,200 workers being laid off by the end of February 2023. It cited increasing costs of production of electric vehicles.

"It came without the slightest bit of warning and absolutely no details. It wasn't even a

rumor, so it just dropped like a bomb," said Deanna Viel, a worker at the plant in Belvidere, Illinois, who was out on medical leave for knee surgery when the announcement was made. The United Auto Workers criticised the decision to shut down the plant, given the amount of government subsidies the company receives.

"We knew our future was looking bleak as we had nothing to build after the end of June but it was still a shock," she added. "It's basically ruined the holidays for us. No one is in the mood for it now."

Right before Thanksgiving, about 2,700 workers at United Furniture – a company that has facilities in Mississippi, California and North Carolina – received an email notifying them they were laid off immediately. Stephanie Watkins of Mississippi was an employee at United Furniture for about five years. She was at work at about 10:50 pm on 21 November, when the first companywide email was sent out. It said that no one should report to work on 22 November and that over-the-road drivers were to halt deliveries.

She described the manner in which workers were notified

of the closure as "heartless". "We knew then something bad was about to happen. We took it upon ourselves to stop working, clocked out, and left. Exactly one hour after the first email was the last email saying all employees were terminated," said Watkins. "I was really in shock. We tried calling our higher bosses to ask questions, and if we got any answer at all it was that they were also not aware of this kind of information." Facilities of RV corporation Tiffin Motorhomes sent layoff notices to dozens of workers at its manufacturing plants in Belmont and Burnsville, Mississippi, as well as in Red Bay, Alabama, at the beginning of the month, citing economic issues.

"Everything after hearing the word 'layoff' kind of faded out because of the struggle to come. My mind raced on what bills I could pay and which to push off further to still try to make a small Christmas happen," said a laid-off employee who worked at Tiffin Motorhomes for several years but requested to remain anonymous for fear of retaliation. "They do not value employees and a layoff three weeks before Christmas is pretty crappy."

Mass Layoffs in 2022 & 2023: What's Next for Employees?



Mass layoffs are a difficult but common occurrence in the business world that leaves many employees wondering how they'll be affected and what to do should they find themselves holding a pink slip. While the current employment market in the US is strong — with low unemployment rates and high job growth — this could all change in the near future as many businesses struggle to adapt to the changing economy. Taking all of this into account, many US companies have already begun mass layoffs this year.

What is a mass layoff?

A "mass layoff" can be defined when the following occurs:

When at least 50 employees are laid off within 30-days or less resulting in the laid-off employees equaling more than one-third of the company's workforce 500 employees are laid off within 30-days or less, no matter how large the company's workforce

This can be devastating for both the individuals affected personally and the economy as a whole.

What companies have had mass layoffs this year?

Amazon mass layoffs:

Amazon CEO Andy Jassy announced on January 4, 2023 via an internal memo, that they plan to cut 18,000 jobs worldwide centered around corporate and technology jobs, these initial layoffs are just the beginning of Amazon's overall plan to consolidate certain teams.

After announcing plans for mass layoffs in mid-November 2022, Amazon began letting employees go on November 16th. These layoffs will make up roughly 1% of its global workforce or 3% of its corporate employees.

As part of its cost-cutting strategy, Amazon is also offering a voluntary severance buy-out package to some employees who resign on their own.

Salesforce mass layoffs:

Salesforce CEO Marc Benioff announced on January 4, 2023 that the B2B software company plans to cut 7,000 jobs, approximately 10% of its workforce, over the coming weeks.

Vimeo mass layoffs:

Popular video-hosting platform Vimeo plans to lay off 11% of their employees in January, 2023. This round of layoffs is on top of the 6% laid off in July, 2022.

CEO Anjali Sud stated the staff layoffs were necessary to give the company "financial flexibility," while also noting "It is also the right thing to do to enable Vimeo to be a more focused and successful company, operating with the necessary discipline in an uncertain economic environment."

What companies had mass layoffs last year?

DoorDash mass layoffs:

On November 30th, 2022 a company spokesman for DoorDash confirmed that the company will layoff approximately 1,250 employees — representing 6% of the company's staff. CEO Tony Xu called the mass layoff "the most difficult change to DoorDash that I've had to announce in our almost 10-year history."

DoorDash's stock price is down more than 60% since January, 2022.

Meta (Facebook) mass layoffs:

On Wednesday, November 9th, 2022 after weeks of speculation, Meta announced mass layoffs for 11,000 of its employees. These cuts come after Meta shares have lost two-thirds of their value and will account for 13% of its workforce. While Zuckerberg reportedly admitted that he was accountable for getting things "wrong" at Meta, it remains to be seen if more layoffs are on the horizon.

This is the first mass layoff in Meta's 18-year history.

Twitter mass layoffs:

On Friday, November 4th, 2022 Twitter laid off 3,700 employees — nearly half of its global employees.

Twitter's mass layoff affected many departments, including the content moderation teams, sales, and advertising departments, and engineering & development divisions.

Twitter's mass layoff of nearly 50% of its workforce is the largest mass layoff of 2022 by a tech company.

Zillow mass layoffs:

Citing continued declines in the housing

market, online real estate services company, Zillow laid off 300 employees at the end of October 2022.

At roughly 5% of its overall employees, these layoffs come as a result of mounting fears of an impending recession.

Peloton mass layoffs:

After Peloton had mass layoffs back in February of 2022, resulting in 20% of its workforce being laid off, the fitness company announced yet another round of layoffs (October, 2022), laying off 500 employees who made up 12% of their current workforce.

The layoffs, first reported by The Wall Street Journal, are reported as Peloton's most recent attempt at internal restructuring as a result of the rapid drop in sales after its record growth during the at-home workout boom during the pandemic.

Snapchat mass layoffs

Snap Inc. has confirmed that the company will lay off 20% of its employee workforce, which accounts for approximately 1,300 people (September, 2022)

The layoff news was confirmed by Snap spokesman on August 31st, 2022 noting the layoffs were in an attempt to bring down costs.

The layoffs will be predominately from their content team, ending production for most of their original Snapchat long-form shows. Employee layoffs will also occur in the company's hardware division.

SoundCloud layoffs

After an eventful year of teaming up with the likes of Pandora and Splice, in early August 2022 SoundCloud CEO, Michael Weissman announced that the online music streaming community platform would be reducing its global headcount by around 20%.

Cited as part of a "significant company transformation" and a tumultuous economic landscape, SoundCloud layoffs are set to affect employees worldwide — not just here in the United States.

Netflix mass layoffs

The streaming giant's subscriber count continues to shrink and as a result, Netflix has laid off 150 workers accounting for about 2% of its workforce in June 2022.

Citing slowing revenue as the reason for slow company growth, Netflix representatives explain that these layoffs come as the result of a business need and not due to any personal performance issues of those being let go.

Carvana mass layoffs

In one of the largest mass layoffs this year, Carvana cited a recession in auto sales as the main driver in laying off 2,500 employees in November, 2022.

Reports of this mass layoff have revealed that these 2,500 Carvana employees were made aware of layoffs via Zoom.

Coinbase mass layoffs

The cryptocurrency exchange platform announced that it would be laying off 18% of its workforce in June, 2022.

CEO Brian Armstrong cited a possible recession, a need to manage costs, and growing "too quickly" during a bull market as reasons for laying off almost one-fifth of the Coinbase workforce, leading many to wonder if this is a sign of things to come for the crypto industry at large.

Compass & Redfin mass layoffs

As the housing market remains as volatile as ever and interest rates continue to rise, Compass, a real estate brokerage, announced that it would be laying off 13% of its employees in November, 2022 — this after Compass laid off 18% of its workforce in June, 2022. Redfin, another real estate brokerage feeling the effects of declining home sales, announced that it will be cutting its workforce by 8% in June, 2022.

These layoffs come as both companies have been struggling to keep up with the slowing housing market.

What other companies had mass layoffs last year? Although not technically a "mass" layoff (more than 1/3 of the company or more than 500 employees laid off in 30-days) the following companies have seen large layoffs in 2022: DocuSign layoffs this year DocuSign announced in September that it plans to cut around 9% of its workforce. Like many other major corporations making mass layoffs, DocuSign says these layoffs are a part of a major restructuring plan ahead of the expected recession.

Russia sends more Arctic oil to China, India at steeper discounts after sanctions

Singapore/New Delhi: Russia is sending more crude oil produced in the Arctic region to China and India, and at steeper discounts, after Europe slammed its doors shut on Russian supplies last month, trade sources and data show.

Arctic grades Arco, Arco/Novy Port and Varandey do not normally head East but are now finding new homes further afield after the European Union, G7 nations and Australia introduced a price cap on Russian oil in December, on top of an EU embargo on Russian crude by sea. Sellers are selling the Russian crudes at bigger discounts as they absorb higher shipping costs.

"All these Arctic crudes usually go to the EU but now they have to go elsewhere," a

Singapore-based trader said. Arctic crude exports to India have steadily increased since May, with a record 6.67 million barrels loaded in November and 4.1 million barrels in December, Refinitiv data showed. Most of the supplies were Arco and Arco/Novy Port produced at fields operated by Gazprom Neft.

Arco crude is a heavy sour grade from the Prirazlomnoye field while the better quality Novy Port grade, from the Novoportovskoye field, is a medium to light sweet crude. Last week, India imported its first Varandey crude cargo that loaded in Murmansk port in late November, according to two sources and Refinitiv data.

The 900,000-barrel cargo onboard tanker Bear Alcor that sailed via Europe, the Mediterranean and the Suez

Canal, was discharged at Cochin port in Kerala on Dec. 27 for refiner Bharat Petroleum Corp Ltd. The other two 600,000-barrel cargoes that loaded in November were discharged at Rotterdam in the Netherlands. It was not clear which companies bought these cargoes.

Russia has reasonably good volumes of other grades as well, which are being offered to Indian buyers, one of the sources at an Indian refiner said.

The gross product margins from processing grades such as Arco and Novy Port bought on a delivered basis are more than \$10 a barrel higher compared with similar quality U.S. crudes such as Mars and West Texas Intermediate, he added.

Bharat Petroleum did not

respond to a request for comments.

Major Homes

Varandey crude, produced from the Timan-Pechora oil fields operated by Lukoil, has an API gravity of around 37 degrees and contains 0.4% sulphur. Its quality is similar to ESPO Blend, a Far East grade favoured by China's independent refineries, known as teapots. Varandey crude is easy for Indian refiners to process although future purchases would depend on price levels, the second source said.

"Now India and China are their major homes," he said.

At least three oil tankers that loaded Arctic crude in Murmansk port are now heading to China, Refinitiv data showed.

One of the tankers, Nikolay

Zuyev, carrying about 780,000 barrels of crude, is expected to arrive on Jan. 18 but it still does not have a specific destination. Another two tankers – NS Bravo and Gladiator – carrying about 900,000 barrels of crude each – are expected to arrive at the Chinese eastern city of Qingdao on Feb. 3 and 15, respectively, the data showed. Refinitiv listed the grades carried by these ships as Arco crude although one Chinese trader said there could be Varandey crude onboard. It was not clear which refiners bought the cargoes.

Another trader said Arco crude had been offered to Chinese buyers at \$9 a barrel below ICE Brent on a delivered ex-ship basis, but it was unclear at what price the deals were concluded.

Haldwani row: Over 800 hectares of railway land under encroachment across India

Most encroachments are in the approaches of railway stations in Metros and other big cities in the form of slums along tracks, according to Centre

On Thursday, the Supreme Court stayed the Uttarakhand High Court order that had ordered the eviction of 50,000 people living on railway land in the state's Haldwani district.

The top court said so many people cannot be uprooted overnight and asked for a workable arrangement. The matter will be heard next on February 7.

According to affected people, the Railway served eviction notices to people living on 78 acres of land, while the disputed area was only 29 acres.

Be that as it may, Haldwani is not the only place where human habitations have come up on railway land over decades, causing frequent protests, vote-bank politics and judicial intervention.

About 814 hectares of railway land was under encroachment, the central government had said last year. Most encroachments were in the approaches of railway stations in Metros and other big cities in the form of slums along tracks, the government had said.

"Railways carry out regular surveys for identifying

encroachments and take action for their removal. If the encroachments are of temporary nature (soft encroachments) in the shape of jhuggies, jhopris and squatters, the same are removed in consultation with and the assistance of Railway Protection Force and local civil authorities," the Centre had said.

"For old encroachments, where people are not amenable to persuasion, action is taken under Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorised Occupants) Act, 1971 (PPE Act, 1971). Actual eviction of unauthorised occupants is carried out with the assistance of the state government and police," it had said, adding, "In 2017-18 and 2018-19, 16.68 hectares and 24 hectares of land was retrieved, respectively." Railway also responsible: SC About a year ago, the Supreme Court said that the railways was also responsible for ensuring there was no encroachment on its land. The court said encroachment of public land has been a "sad reality" in the country over the last 75 years.

Recent flashpoints

In November 2022, the Nogaon district administration in Assam demolished over a hundred houses on both sides of railway tracks. Officials had issued notice to over a thousand encroachers and asked them to move away. Many followed the order, and

after much hue and cry. In August 2021, the demolition of 5000 slums was planned for a Surat-Jalgaon railway project. After the Gujarat High Court order, the Railways demolished 300 slums. The Surat Municipal Corporation cut water and gutter

connections to 9,000 slum units. As of now, the Supreme Court has stayed further demolitions. In June 2020, 70 hectares of railway land was under encroachment in the stretch from Narengi to Amingaon in Assam. Even after eviction, occupants returned to the land.

Will stop Uorfi Javed's obscenity, says Maharashtra BJP women's wing chief

Maharashtra BJP leader Chitra Wagh has accused social media influencer Uorfi Javed of promoting nudity on the streets of Mumbai and vowed to put an end to it.

Chitra Wagh, president of BJP Mahila Morcha in Maharashtra, said social media influencer Uorfi Javed is taking "obscenity to the streets of Mumbai", and her party will stop her.

"We have all seen what Uorfi is doing on the streets of Mumbai. I have met with the police commissioner and asked him to take cognisance," Wagh said.



"One woman sent links of Uorfi's videos. When I opened the link, I realised this woman is promoting nudity on the streets of Mumbai," Wagh said, adding that the issue is not about religion but nudity. "This issue is not about religion. I am not opposing Uorfi because of her name or religion. I oppose the nudity of Uorfi. I am not doing politics on this, this is not the culture of Maharashtra. Those who are supporting Uorfi in the garb of freedom of speech are wrong," the BJP leader added. Earlier, the BJP women's panel had sent a notice to actress Tejaswini Pandit over the poster of a web series.

It's Over : Trump's spell over GOP breaks with McCarthy meltdown

It was the second day of chaos on the floor of the House of Representatives when Rep. Lauren Boebert (R-Colo.) took the previously unthinkable step of thumbing her nose at Donald Trump, the ex-president she otherwise venerates.

"Let's stop with the campaign smears and tactics to get people to turn against us — even having my favorite president call us and tell us to knock this off. I think it actually needs to be reversed and the [former] president needs to tell Kevin McCarthy you do not have the votes and it's time to withdraw," Boebert said. "Ooo's from Democrats could be heard from the chamber. The inability of McCarthy to secure the needed votes to be House Speaker — despite six tries at doing so — represents a unique failure on his part. But it has also called into question the extent of Trump's own power to shape the party in his image, coming at a time when some Republicans have openly soured on his current run for the presidency.

"If these 20 people are successful in exerting their will over the 200 more Republicans who want McCarthy, and deny McCarthy the speakership, then it will be a huge, huge hit against President Trump, because the people who he's supposed to have the most influence with didn't listen to him," said Rodney Davis, the outgoing Republican congressman from Illinois. The Trump-McCarthy relationship has taken several turns over the years, most often defined by loyalty from the latter toward the former. It was McCarthy who went down to Mar-a-Lago after Jan. 6 to meet with a seemingly exiled Trump and, implicitly, keep him in the fold. Trump, in turn, has offered his support to McCarthy's speaker

ambitions even as contemporaneous materials surfaced showing the congressman's frustrations with his presidency. After Republicans took back the House, Trump was in contact with members of the anti-McCarthy wing, publicly expressed his support for McCarthy, and even warned those waging battles against McCarthy that they were setting up a "doomsday scenario" in the House. He worked the phones behind the scenes in support of McCarthy.

But Trump's endorsement of McCarthy has not been enough to sway the so-called Never-Kevins, who each have their own personal issues with the California congressman and have pushed for additional demands over the course of the past few weeks, including amending the procedure for ousting a House Speaker and committee assignments. The hardliners pushing against McCarthy have included Freedom Caucus members from the most MAGA wing of the GOP, with Rep. Matt Gaetz, (R-Fla.) — no stranger to Trump's Mar-a-Lago club — helping lead the pack. They're insistent, though, that the vote against McCarthy isn't a vote against Trump. "I would suggest that of the 20 who've been voting against Kevin McCarthy, they are friends with President Trump. They like President Trump, they support President Trump. However, this is a vote of 222 members of the Republican Party," said Rep. Bob Good (R-Va.). He declined to comment on any calls with Trump but added, "I'm voting against Kevin McCarthy because it's what I believe to be right for the country." "It didn't move the needle," Gaetz said of Trump's McCarthy endorsement. Trump's defenders stress

that his endorsement alone would never have been enough to push McCarthy over the needed vote threshold. One person close to Trump said he was "playing it safe," trying deliberately not to attack anyone while recognizing that the 20 GOP lawmakers opposed to McCarthy have differing reasons for doing so.

"I know a lot of people are focusing on Trump's 'waning influence' regarding this speaker vote," said the person. "I think it would be a different story if Trump was attacking someone and they still wouldn't budge. That would signal waning influence. ... If anyone wants to suggest waning power or influence then I think they're off base because Trump hasn't gone full Trump mode."

Other GOP luminaries argued that the problem facing the party over the past few days was not Trump's influence but rather the strategic thinking of a small minority of House members. Asked about Boebert's comments, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich bluntly criticized the Colorado Republican. Did you see the margin by which she was elected?" he said. "I don't put much stock in what she says and I don't think Trump does either. Trump admires McCarthy and if the attack is from the so-called right, then it's pretty hard to explain why they're against someone Trump is supporting." "I don't think they care," Gingrich added. "I think this is all about personal attitudes and bitterness and to me it's kind of amazing to watch."

Despite such protestations, Trump's enthusiasm for McCarthy has come into question over the past 48 hours, and with it speculation about his eagerness to shape the contours of Republican politics.

Trump has not appeared in public to make the case for McCarthy; nor did he post to his site Truth Social about the failed speaker votes early evening on Tuesday when he grumbled about Republican dysfunction and attacked Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell. That same night, Trump and McCarthy talked on the phone but it wasn't until the next morning that the former president issued another Truth Social post that was then circulated around to House Republicans calling for McCarthy's speakership. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, (R-Ga.), a McCarthy ally, told reporters Trump's endorsement helped to stave off even more defectors. But other Republicans said the endorsement — in which Trump said McCarthy would be a "good" speaker and "maybe great" — demonstrated that the former president maybe wasn't fully committed to the cause. "It was a very strong message by Trump that he had to think overnight after McCarthy's three failed speaker votes to offer a tepid endorsement. McCarthy begged like a dog and got table scraps at Mar-a-Lago," said Mike Davis, a former GOP Senate aide and Trump ally. But Davis, like other allies of the ex-president, said the House floor disagreements were a reflection of distrust among some in the party of McCarthy and not a sign of Trump weakness. "Trump's already made it clear he's not enthusiastically supporting McCarthy, that he didn't give his endorsement before the three failed votes," said Davis. "Trump has stayed out of this. What has Kevin McCarthy done for Trump? McCarthy let Pelosi fill the January 6 commission with her people and they used that as a sledgehammer against Trump."

In Anjali death case, CCTV visual not the only thing blurry. TV reporting was confused too

We all know what happened to Anjali, a young woman, driving home on her two-wheeler with her friend Nidhi in the early hours of 1 January. She died in a car drive-around. The five occupants of the car were arrested.

"It was an accident," said the Delhi Police to the media on Monday morning. "(All the forensic reports) making this clear — it was accident," reiterated a Republic TV reporter, Wednesday morning.

And yet, in the four-hour period between these two statements, what did the television news channels do? Did they immediately plaster photographs of the five accused young men who, according to reports, admitted they were 'drunk' while they circled around in their car, dragging Anjali with them, for over 13 km? At least that's what Zee News claimed Wednesday.

The 'speculative journalism'

Did they identify the culprits, visit their homes, try to speak to their family, friends? Did they retrace their movements before and after the incident? Did they paint them as villains? Well, that's what they did in the Shraddha and Tunisha death cases, so it's reasonable to assume they went hammer and tongs after the alleged offenders, particularly after they made

comments like, 'Accident nahin, murder hai' (ABP News) and ask 'Another Nirbhaya?' (India TV). Did they do any of this?

No. Instead, they squarely blamed Delhi Police for its 'laparvahi'.

Even more puzzling was their focus, on Tuesday and Wednesday, in tracing events before the incident and Nidhi's behaviour besides alleged police negligence. The post mortem findings were reported but news channels were looking for something more sensational. So they obsessed over unrelated CCTV clips and tried to ram them together in their jigsaw puzzle — of course it made no sense.

Curiouser and curiouser, the identity and activities of the accused didn't interest TV reporters at all — photographs of the accused appeared only Tuesday afternoon on channels like News 18 India. Instead, throughout Monday, we were shown 'chilling' (NDTV 24x7) footage of the Baleno making a U-turn, with Anjali being pulled along.

Most of Tuesday was divided between inquiries at the Oyo hotel — where according to hotel staff, the two women "party karne aaye the" with boys (TV9 Bharatvarsh) — and the CCTV footage that revealed the victim was with her friend. The CCTV footage appeared to

have captured an altercation between the duo. That was enough for TV to ready its questionnaire: Who was Nidhi? What happened? And why did she run away? By early evening, the first interviews with Nidhi emerged — saw one on Aaj Tak. She made several claims about the accident, the party which included Anjali's supposed 'boyfriend' and an argument between them.

Feasting on fresh info

Wednesday was all about Nidhi's comments. She spoke of Anjali consuming alcohol and the timing of the accident — both at variance with the post mortem report and eyewitness accounts. Outraged news channels latched on to these and suddenly, the story became all about Nidhi.

Headlines read: 'Whisper campaign begins against Anjali?' (India Today); 'Does Nidhi's version really add up?' (Republic TV); '(Anjali's) Family questions Nidhi' (CNN New 18 India); 'Is Nidhi lying?' (New 18 India).

TV reporters tracked down the victim's neighbor, a shop assistant who helped charge her phone. Isn't it odd that Nidhi should receive such attention while the alleged culprits are ignored?

The Delhi Police came in for some serious flak and stern questioning over its tardy response and security

measures: 'The police were sleeping', said Times Now Navbharat; 'How did the PCR take so long to answer? Why didn't anyone try to stop the Baleno?' asked India Today. 'Loopholes in police investigation', 'Police are trying to play down the case', asserted Zee News.

Woman reporters retraced the Baleno's journey and fanned out across the capital's outskirts, Tuesday — they found no police patrols, no police kiosks, no police barricades. This, after the police had claimed 18,000 police personnel would be on duty 31 December night. 'Why is Delhi Police running away from questions?' demanded Republic TV.

Well, we have a few questions for news channels: What's this garbled guftagoo (conversation) you've been concocting over the last three days? What are you trying to tell us? That Delhi police is to blame? That Nidhi has a role? That the 'party' at Hotel Oyo had something to do with the accident? Who wants all the gory details in blurred CCTV footage, anyway?

And, lastly, why are you so insensitive? You ask Anjali's bereaved mother 'Did Anjali go to parties, drink?' and emblazon headlines saying, 'Anjali's brain matter missing' (CNN News 18 India).

What's wrong with you?

What is atmospheric river that is driving heavy rains, floods to US?

As the bomb cyclone slowed down in the US, high winds and torrential rains are sweeping California, renewing the threat of power outages and deadly flooding that gripped parts of San Francisco Bay and Sacramento over New Year's weekend. The condition is being driven by a phenomenon known as an atmospheric river.

Forecasters said that the incoming blast of extreme winter weather - the next in a succession of storms expected to wash over California in the coming weeks - originated from a sprawling, hurricane-force low-pressure system churning over the eastern Pacific Ocean.

Satellites picked up the development, revealing a swirling movement overhead

the United States. "A powerful hurricane-force low-pressure system located over the eastern Pacific is set to surge a plume of moisture and damaging winds into the West Coast," the US-based National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), said in a statement.

What is an Atmospheric River?

The atmospheric river, according to NOAA, is a long, narrow region in the atmosphere that is like rivers in the sky. These atmospheric rivers transport water vapor outside of the tropics that move with the weather, carrying an amount roughly equivalent to the average flow of water at the mouth of the Mississippi River. When these atmospheric rivers move inland and sweep over mountains,

the water vapour rises and cools to create heavy precipitation. This water is then deposited on the surface in the form of heavy rain and snow as it makes landfall. Scientists have said that some of these atmospheric rivers contain the largest amounts of water vapor and the strongest winds can create extreme rainfall and floods, often by stalling over watersheds vulnerable to flooding. Most of these systems are generally weak and serve as water replenishment for the surface. The atmospheric activity is currently expected to drench much of California ahead of a storm front bringing additional showers to low-lying areas and more snow to the Sierra Nevada Mountains through Thursday. The National Weather Service (NWS)

predicted widespread rainfall totals of 3 to 6 inches, with up to 3 feet of fresh snow in Sierras.

The authorities have posted high-wind warnings along the central California coast north through the Bay area and into extreme northern California and Oregon. The National Weather Service (NWS) said gale-force gusts were expected to uproot trees, shear off limbs, and knock down power lines, disrupting electricity service in many areas. Reuters reported that the recent storms have left the Sierra snowpack, a major source of California's water supplies, at well above average for this time of year, though far more will need to accumulate through winter to end the drought, experts say.

Key factors behind Pakistan's worsening economic crisis

Pakistan's economic crisis continues to worsen as the country struggles to cope with mounting debt, inflated energy import costs, dwindling forex reserves, global inflation, political instability and a sustained drop in GDP growth. For the government, it is now a race against time to prevent the nation from a complete economic collapse, which could severely impact millions of citizens. Such is the extent of the crisis that the government auctioned a Pakistani embassy property in the US a few days ago. The government is even resorting to drastic measures like ordering shopping malls, restaurants, wedding halls and markets to shut down early, hoping that it would save the nation around \$273 million or 62 billion Pakistani rupees towards energy imports.

Among other moves, all government

departments in the country have been asked to reduce electricity consumption by 30 per cent. While Pakistan's economy has been out of shape consistently for the past few years, the cash-strapped nation's financial problems further aggravated in 2022.

Cocktail of economic woes

Without an immediate bailout package, Pakistan's economic situation is unlikely to get better anytime soon. Mounting debt and rapidly dwindling forex reserves in the wake of higher global inflation are the biggest challenges for the government. Moreover, a devastating flood that hit the nation in 2022 from June to October is another factor that has worsened the economic situation in Pakistan. The flood, which affected nearly 33 million people, is believed to

have led to damages worth over \$30 billion.

In fact, the flood increased Pakistan's dependence on imported goods other than oil, while the country's exports slumped. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the country's trade deficit stood at over \$2.8 billion in December 2022 as exports declined by over 16 per cent to \$2.3 billion. A depreciating currency isn't helping the economic situation either, with the Pakistani Rupee falling nearly 30% in 2022, compared to the US dollar.

A Reuters report stated that Pakistan has to meet external financing needs to the tune of over \$30 billion up until June 2023, including energy and debt repayments – an impossible feat considering the country's sluggish GDP growth, which the World Bank has pegged at just 2 per cent.

In addition to slow growth, Pakistan is also facing skyrocketing inflation that could rise up to 23 per cent in FY23. Slower growth and rising inflation could prove to be a dangerous combination for the nation of approximately 220 million people, where getting a job is getting harder by the day. A recent video uploaded on social media showed 30,000 people showed up at a stadium in Islamabad for a constable recruitment drive to fill 1,167 vacancies.

While the Pakistan government's drastic measures to save energy costs can provide some breathing space, it is not enough to deal with the cocktail of economic woes plaguing the country at the moment. The only hope that the country has is the release of the \$1.1 billion IMF bailout tranche that has been delayed due to a pending review.

Former Chief Financial Officer Of Two SPACs Pleads Guilty To Fraud Scheme

Cooper Morgenthau Embezzled More Than \$5 Million and Caused False Statements to Be Made to Accountant and Auditor and in SEC Filings

Damian Williams, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced today that COOPER MORGENTHAU, the former chief financial officer of two special purpose acquisition companies ("SPAC-1" and "SPAC-2"), pled guilty to one count of wire fraud in connection with a scheme to embezzle more than \$5 million from the two companies. The defendant pled guilty before U.S. District Judge Paul A. Engelmayer.

U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said: "Cooper Morgenthau, the former CFO of two SPACs, has admitted that he breached the trust that he owed to his public and private investors, stealing millions of dollars from them to trade meme stocks and cryptocurrencies. This Office remains committed to

rooting out fraud in the SPAC market and to protecting Main Street investors from abuses on Wall Street."

According to the allegations in the Information and statements made in public court proceedings:

Between in or about June 2021 and in or about August 2022, MORGENTHAU, who was the CFO of SPAC-1 and SPAC-2, embezzled more than \$5 million from the two companies. SPAC-1 had recently had its initial public offering, while SPAC-2 was raising money from private investors in preparation for its anticipated IPO. MORGENTHAU used the embezzled funds to trade equities and options of so-called "meme stocks" and cryptocurrencies, losing almost all of the money that he stole. To conceal

and facilitate his embezzlement from SPAC-1, MORGENTHAU fabricated bank statements, which he provided to SPAC-1's accountant and auditor; made and caused to be made material misstatements in SPAC-1's public filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission ("SEC"); and transferred some of SPAC-2's funds to SPAC-1 to cover up the funds he had misappropriated from SPAC-1.

MORGENTHAU, 35, of Fernandina Beach, Florida, pled guilty to one count of wire fraud, which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison. As part of his guilty plea, MORGENTHAU agreed to forfeit \$5,111,335 and to pay restitution of \$5,111,335.

The statutory maximum sentence is

prescribed by Congress and provided here for informational purposes only, as any sentencing of the defendant will be determined by the judge. MORGENTHAU is scheduled to be sentenced by Judge Engelmayer on April 25, 2023.

Mr. Williams praised the outstanding work of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Mr. Williams further thanked the SEC for its assistance and cooperation in this investigation. This case is being handled by the Office's Securities and Commodities Fraud Task Force and Money Laundering and Transnational Criminal Enterprises Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Joshua A. Naftalis and Anden Chow are in charge of the prosecution.

Controversial internet personality Andrew Tate and his brother detained in Romania

He made headlines this week for a Twitter interaction with Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, who told Tate to get a life after he tweeted about his numerous cars "and their respective enormous emissions."

Controversial internet personality Andrew Tate and his brother were detained in Romania on Thursday, according to their defense lawyer.

Authorities in Romania said police served search warrants at five homes and detained four suspects, — two Britons and two Romanians — as part of an investigation into organized human trafficking and rape. They did not name any of those detained.

Romania's Directorate for In-

vestigating Organized Crime and Terrorism (DIICOT) said the four suspects had been detained for an initial 24 hours. It asked a Bucharest court on Friday for the detentions to be extended to 30 days, according to Reuters.

A lawyer for Andrew and his brother Tristan Tate confirmed to CNN that a court hearing was scheduled for Friday. He stressed that Andrew Tate was not under arrest. "He was not arrested. He was detained for 24 hours," said the lawyer, Eugen Vidineac.

The attorney did not discuss any of the allegations. DIICOT released an edited, grainy, sometimes out-of-focus video purportedly showing the raids. A man can be seen being patted down by police. It's unclear who is being detained in the video.

In a separate video aired by CNN affiliate Antena 3, officers from the crime agency can be seen escorting Andrew and Tristan Tate into police ve-

hicles.

On Friday, Andrew Tate tweeted from his verified account, "The Matrix sent their agents." DIICOT alleged that the four unnamed suspects formed an organized criminal group that stretched from Romania to Britain and the United States, for the purpose of committing the crime of human trafficking.

The authorities allege that two of the suspects misled the victims "into believing that they intended to enter into a marriage/cohabitation relationship" while transporting victims to Romania and later sexually exploiting them with physical violence and coercion.

Authorities also said one of the suspects raped a victim on two separate occasions in March 2022. At least six victims were allegedly "sexually exploited by the organized criminal group," the DIICOT statement said.

Andrew Tate, a former professional kickboxer, is known for



his viral rants online about male dominance, female submission and wealth. He openly advocates violence against women, and had previously been banned from every major social media platform until Elon Musk reinstated his Twitter account after taking over the company.

He rose in prominence earlier this year, with many adults including school teachers voicing alarm about his misogynistic ideas taking root in the minds of countless young boys. Before it was taken down, his TikTok account racked up

about 11.6 billion views. He made headlines this week for a Twitter interaction with Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, who told Tate to get a life after he tweeted about his numerous cars "and their respective enormous emissions."

There was speculation online that authorities were alerted to Tate's presence in Romania by the appearance of a particular pizza box in one of the photos he posted in his spat with Thunberg.

But, according to Reuters, a spokesperson for DIICOT said the pizza boxes did not play a role in the detentions.



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Turkey's underground city of 20,000 people

More than 85m beneath the famous fairy chimneys of Cappadocia lies a massive subterranean city that was in near-constant use for thousands of years.



Violent gusts whipped loose soil into the air as I hiked through Cappadocia's Love Valley. Pink- and yellow-hued hillsides coloured the rolling landscape scarred with deep red canyons, and chimneystack rock formations loomed in the distance. It was arid, hot, windy and devastatingly beautiful. Millennia ago, this volatile, volcanic environment naturally sculpted the spires surrounding me into their conical, mushroom-capped shapes, which now draw millions of visitors to hike or hot-air balloon in the central Turkish region.

But beneath Cappadocia's crumbling surface, a marvel of equally gargantuan proportions lay hidden away for centuries; a subterranean city that could conceal the whereabouts of up to 20,000 inhabitants for months at a time.

The ancient city of Elengubu, known today as Derinkuyu, burrows more than 85m below the Earth's surface, encompassing 18 levels of tunnels. The largest excavated underground city in the world, it was in near-constant use for thousands of years, changing hands from the Phrygians to the Persians to the Christians of the Byzantine Era. It was finally abandoned in the 1920s by the Cappadocian Greeks when they faced defeat during the Greco-Turkish war and fled abruptly en masse to Greece. Not only do its cave-like rooms stretch on for hundreds of miles, but it's thought the more than 200 small, separate underground cities that have also been discovered in the region may be connected to these tunnels, creating a massive subterranean network. According to my guide, Suleman, Derinkuyu was only "rediscovered" in 1963 by an anonymous local who kept losing his chickens. While he was renovating his home, the poultry would disappear into a small crevasse created during the remodel, never to be seen again. Upon closer

investigation and some digging, the Turk unearthed a dark passageway. It was the first of more than 600 entrances found within private homes leading to the subterranean city of Derinkuyu.

Excavation began immediately, revealing a tangled network of underground dwellings, dry food storage, cattle stables, schools, wineries and even a chapel. It was an entire civilisation tucked safely underground. The cave city was soon spelunked by thousands of Türkiye's least claustrophobic tourists and, in 1985, the region was added to the Unesco World Heritage list. The city's exact date of construction remains contested, but Anabasis, written by Xenophon of Athens circa 370 BCE, is the oldest written work that seems to reference Derinkuyu. In the book, he mentions Anatolian people, in or near the region of Cappadocia, living underground in excavated homes rather than the more popular cliffside cave-dwellings that are well known in the area.

According to Andrea De Giorgi, associate professor of classical studies at Florida State University, Cappadocia is uniquely suited to this kind of underground construction due to the lack of water in the soil and its malleable, easily mouldable rock. "The geomorphology of the region is conducive to the digging of underground spaces," he said, explaining that the local tuff rock would have been fairly easy to carve with simple tools like shovels and pickaxes. This same pyroclastic material was naturally forged into the fairy-tale chimneys and phallic spires jutting from the earth above ground. But whom to credit with Derinkuyu's creation remains a partial mystery. The groundwork for the sprawling network of subterranean caves is often attributed to the Hittites, "who may have excavated the first few levels in the

rock when they came under attack from the Phrygians around 1200 BCE", according to A Bertini, an expert in Mediterranean cave dwellings, in his essay on regional cave architecture. Adding weight to this hypothesis, Hittite artefacts were found inside Derinkuyu.

However, the bulk of the city was likely built by the Phrygians, highly skilled Iron-age architects who had the means to construct elaborate underground facilities. "The Phrygians were one of Anatolia's most prominent early empires," explained De Giorgi. "They developed across western Anatolia around the end of the first millennium BCE and had a bent for monumentalising rock formations and creating remarkable rock-cut facades. Though elusive, their kingdom spread to include most of western and central Anatolia, including the area of Derinkuyu."

Originally, Derinkuyu was likely used for the storage of goods, but its primary purpose was as a temporary haven from foreign invaders, with Cappadocia seeing a constant flux of dominant empires throughout the centuries. "The succession of empires and their impact on the landscapes of Anatolia explain the recourse to underground shelters like Derinkuyu," De Giorgi explained. "It was at the time of the [7th-Century] Islamic raids [on the predominantly Christian Byzantine Empire], however, that these dwellings were used to the fullest." While the Phrygians, Persians and Seljuks, among others, all inhabited the region and expanded upon the underground city in subsequent centuries, Derinkuyu's population swelled to its peak during the Byzantine Era, with nearly 20,000 residents living underground.

Today, you can experience the harrowing reality of life underground for just

60 Turkish lira (£2.80). As I descended into the musty, narrow tunnels, the walls blackened with soot from centuries of torch lighting, the unfamiliar sensation of claustrophobia began to set in. However, the ingenuity of the various empires that expanded upon Derinkuyu soon became apparent. Intentionally narrow, short hallways forced visitors to navigate the labyrinth of corridors and dwellings while stooped over and single file – obviously an inopportune position for intruders. Dimly lit by lamplight, half-ton circular boulders blocked doors between each of the 18 levels and were only moveable from the inside. Small, perfectly round holes in the centre of these hefty doors would have allowed residents to spear invaders while maintaining a secure perimeter.

"Life underground was probably very difficult," my guide Suleman added. "The residents relieved themselves in sealed clay jars, lived by torchlight and disposed of dead bodies in [designated] areas."

Each level of the city was carefully engineered for specific uses. Livestock was kept in stables nearest to the surface to reduce the smell and toxic gases produced by cattle, as well as provide a warm layer of living insulation for the cold months. The inner layers of the city contained dwellings, cellars, schools and meeting spaces. Identifiable by its unique barrel-vaulted ceilings, a traditional Byzantine missionary school, complete with adjacent rooms for study, is located on the second floor. According to De Giorgi, "the evidence for winemaking is grounded in the presence of cellars, vats for pressing and amphoras [tall, two-handled jars with a narrow neck]." These specialised rooms indicate that inhabitants of Derinkuyu were prepared to spend months beneath the surface.

Let's Get American Revenge

For too long, we've been consumed by our darkest impulses. It's time to rise above it.

In this season of gratitude and goodwill, we're greeted with headlines reporting revenge travel, revenge dressing, revenge impeachments and revenge of presidential proportions in the 2024 campaign of Donald Trump. But are Americans avengers?

The answer was simple once. Yes, we dreamed of revenge, cheered it at theaters and sports arenas, secretly wished it upon bosses and double-crossers. We prayed revenge would right family slights and false friends. Yet we respected the line between fantasy and action. Our society demanded it. Vengeance was considered uncivilized, unethical, an act of ugly self-destruction. We denied the need to get even. In recent years though, we've

seen a surge in vindictive behavior. Judges, journalists, politicians and their families have been targeted with violent reprisals. Online encounters trend spiteful, with TikTok and Bumble fighting the spread of revenge porn. Corporate culture plays like a mud-pit production of "Measure for Measure," starring Elon Musk. And congressional midterms are a grudge match, the next round scheduled for January, according to the headlines: "The GOP captures the House — and is ready for revenge."

If we are engaged in a "battle for the soul of the nation," as President Joseph Biden says, we are struggling with the rules of engagement. More than ever, retaliatory behavior tempts us, as we confront anti-democratic forces at home and abroad. Stung, we wonder how to best address injustice: I shouldn't seek an eye for an eye, but I can't turn the other cheek either. How did we get here, and where do we go?

When I first studied revenge 20 years ago, it was hard to find Americans willing to speak openly about settling scores. I had to travel overseas to find communities that embraced their revenge heritage, while researching my book *Revenge: A Story of Hope*. In northern Albania, I met Mark Pashko Malotaj, a retired farmer and one of six Christian members of the local Blood Feud Committee. I asked him, "How does your canon [revenge code] fit in with 'Turn the other cheek'?"

Mark laughed: "In Albania, we have a saying, 'Don't hit my



cheek because I'll kill you."

In the cobblestone alleys of Sicily, cradle of la vendetta, even the clergy acknowledged rough justice. Padre Ennio Pintacuda, told me, "If you don't take revenge, you're like a woman!"

In Iran, vengeance rites were so mainstream, the justice system incorporated them. In the holy city of Qom, Grand Ayatollah Adbdul Karim Musavi Ardebili, Chief Justice of Iran's Supreme Court, told me about a case in which a man had thrown acid in the face of his beautiful wife. She took him to court.

"I want his eyes," the woman said, rejecting her husband's \$7,000 offer in blood money. "I want to blind him as he blinded me."

Under the judge's supervision, she felt for her husband's face, her fingers striking the air like a piano player. Relatives guided her wrists, helping her find her husband's eye sockets. She used a metal spoon to dig.

"The husband was happy," the Grand Ayatollah explained to me, winking. The wife poked out only one eye. "He got a discount." Although these examples were extreme, they revealed a theme: Beyond U.S. shores, revenge was acceptable, at times respectable. It wasn't a moral choice but self-preservation, a sacred duty, or animus dressed up as honor. Yet when I came home and shared these stories with American friends, they furrowed their brows. Revenge was for others.

That is, until recently. The cultural shift began two

decades ago, the sunny morning that our country was sucker-punched. Dec. 7, 1941, may be a date that lives in infamy, but Sept. 11, 2001, prevails as a date of humiliation. While Pearl Harbor was damaged by the military might of the Japanese empire, the World Trade Center was devastated by 19 guys with box cutters. That moment of revealed weakness was more than painful for our nation; it was shameful.

For those seeking an education in revenge, shame is the first lesson. It is the first of four conditions — shame, memory, jungle, simplicity — that incubate revenge, that altered our domestic environment over the last 20 years, and that changed the way Americans behave. Shame, or the loss of honor, triggers revenge, sometimes more than the actual offense. In certain tribal societies, shame is the only lawful motive for homicide. In old Europe, when men duelled, they often fired one shot. Even if both survived, striking back eased public embarrassment. Since the U.S. was blindsided on 9/11, presidents of every temperament — from George W. Bush's displaced punishment of Iraq, to Barack Obama's record number of drone strike assassinations, to Trump's Muslim ban — have struggled to erase the national humiliation. The mad-as-hell swagger extended to the general population because, if we're being honest, we too were mortified. Add to that a growing focus on the past,

where Americans learned their second lesson in revenge: memory. While shame ignites vengeance, memory keeps it burning. In southern Greece, women sang bloody lullabies to the sons of murder victims so they would remember and avenge. In Ireland, the bardic tradition kept sectarian memories simmering since the 1690 Battle of the Boyne.

As citizens of the New World though, Americans distinguished themselves by looking forward. We benefited from a kind of adaptive amnesia, setting aside destructive grudges. Whether we were unjustly fired, cheated on, or ripped off, Americans were schooled to view the past as an economist might — sunk costs. Our focus was on material progress, and on optimizing the future. As the ecumenical American clergyman Douglas Horton once said, "While seeking revenge, dig two graves — one for yourself." The self-defeating nature of revenge rendered it unproductive — economically, socially and politically — and therefore, distinctly un-American.

As I wrote, tongue in cheek, in my book: "The opposite of revenge isn't forgiveness. It's shopping. It's being busy with the practical, shallow, now." Americans were good at the practical-shallow-now. Then our model crashed. The socio-economic shocks starting in 2008 eliminated jobs, homes, savings, and for millions, a future. With nowhere to go, people began trolling the past.

For some, like the "Jews will not replace us" crowd at Charlottesville, they yearned for the bygone era of white, male power.

Others looked back at U.S. history in justifiable horror, calling for a long overdue racial and ethnic reckoning. There was no moral equivalency, no grounds for comparison, yet all were energized by memories. Rather than forgive and forget, folks retaliated and remembered. Historic characters poked through the layers of time in the form of statues, raising buried hatchets of class and color. Who deserved to be torn down? Who will be offended? Americans now track a running score of insults. No one wants to be the last slandered or attacked, because in this environment if you aren't a predator, you become prey.

Which leads to the third lesson in revenge: the law of the jungle. In the jungle, the roles are clear. There are aggressors and victims. No animal can hope for a mediating agent to swoop in and order a predator to retreat. The same is true for humans living in conditions of chaos. Disputes resolve themselves according to the Darwinian rhythms of jungle justice.

"In my world, if I'm helpless I'm dead," an Israeli gangster named Smitt once told me, sitting on a curb in Jerusalem. Smitt's crew wore Adidas sneakers because they had the quietest treads to prowl the homes they robbed.

"Revenge is the law of the outlaws," Smitt said.

For people like Smitt, whose criminal gang relied on street justice, score-settling is about survival, not hate. Although most Americans have yet to descend into such lawlessness, we are increasingly doubtful of the institutions and individuals that guarantee fair play. We've lost confidence that the government, international agencies and other societal referees, can enforce order in multiple domains, including elections, social media, pandemics, immigration, cyber and climate. As public trust erodes, private justice emerges.

While these three elements of revenge explain motive, there's no execution without the fourth: simplicity.

Sebi orders attachment of bank, demat accounts of Sahara group firm, Subrata Roy, others

Sebi asked all banks, depositories and mutual funds not to allow any debit from accounts of Sahara India Real Estate Corp, Subrata Roy, Ashok Roy Choudhary, Dubey and Bharrgava.

(SAI Bureau) Sebi on Monday ordered the attachment of bank and demat accounts of Sahara Group firm, its chief Subrata Roy and others to recover Rs 6.42 crore for violating regulatory norms in the issuance of optionally fully convertible debentures (OFCDs). The recovery proceedings against five entities — Sahara India Real Estate Corporation (now known as Sahara Commodity Services Corporation), Subrata Roy, Ashok Roy Choudhary, Ravi Shanker Dubey and Vandana Bharrgava — for Rs 6.42 crore, includes interest, all costs, charges and expenses, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said in the attachment order. In its notice, Sebi asked all banks, depositories and mutual funds not to allow any debit from accounts of



Sahara India Real Estate Corp, Subrata Roy, Ashok Roy Choudhary, Dubey and Bharrgava. However, credits have been permitted. Further, the market watchdog has

directed all banks to attach all accounts, including lockers, of the defaulters. The regulator, in its order in June, levied a fine totalling Rs 6 crore on Sahara India Real Estate Corporation, Investment Corporation during 2008-09. They raised money through the public issue of securities by issuing OFCDs without following the various procedures intended to protect the interest of the investors, in respect of public issues, prescribed under the norms, as per Sebi order. According to Sebi, the subscription towards the OFCDs was solicited by the two companies from the general public throughout the country, without adequately informing them about the risks involved in the instruments. The issuance was allegedly done in contravention of the provisions of the Sebi's ICDR (Issue of Capital and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations and PFUTP (Prohibition of Fraudulent and Unfair Trade Practices).

Venugopal Dhoot, Chanda Kochhar, her husband in CBI custody till Dec 28 in loan fraud case



(SAI Bureau) Chanda Kochhar, Deepak Kochhar and Venugopal Dhoot were arrested for alleged cheating and irregularities in loans sanctioned by the ICICI Bank to Videocon Group companies. A special CBI court in Mumbai on Monday extended the custody of former ICICI Bank CEO and MD Chanda Kochhar, her husband Deepak Kochhar, and Videocon group founder Venugopal Dhoot till December 28 in connection with a loan fraud case. A Limosine, the prosecutor representing the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), sought three days' custody. He submitted before the court that while Chanda Kochhar was heading the bank, as many as six loans were sanctioned which are under the scanner. "There is wrongful loss to ICICI bank of Rs 1,730 crores between 2009 and

2011... we are seeking further custody for three more days." When judge A S Sayyad asked on which grounds the CBI was seeking extension of custody, Limosine said, "Dhoot is the chairman of Videocon and was arrested this morning at 10.30am... He was not cooperating. He was being summoned but he did not appear and this morning, when he came, he was arrested. We need to confront Dhoot with Kochhars." During the hearing, Section 409 of the IPC was added in the case against the accused for criminal breach of trust by a public servant or by a banker, merchant or agent. Investigating officer Nitesh Kumar told the court, "We called all three accused as we wanted to confront them face to face... On Thursday, Dhoot appeared but

Kochhars did not. Again on December 23, Dhoot was called but he did not appear while Kochhars came. When the Kochhars were arrested, Dhoot was called again but he still did not come on December 25. So when he came today, he was arrested." While the Kochhars were arrested on Friday night, Venugopal Dhoot was arrested on Monday. The three accused have been arrested for alleged cheating and irregularities in loans sanctioned by ICICI Bank during Kochhar's tenure to

Videocon Group of town and came and went to CBI office. He has crossed 70 years of age and there are no chances of him fleeing. The passport is already surrendered. Just for confronting and recording statement, arrest should not have been made. I am wondering what made them arrest him...", said Laddha. Advocate Vikram Chaudhri, appearing for Deepak Kochhar, argued that three judicial authorities have gone through the issue and "have concluded that the case is bereft of any merit."

World economy is headed for a recession in 2023: Experts

According to the Centre for Economics and Business Research, the world economy is headed for a recession in 2023

(SAI Bureau) The world is headed for a result of the rises in interest rates in response to higher inflation. "The battle against inflation is not won yet. We expect central bankers to stick to their guns in 2023 despite the economic costs. The cost of bringing inflation down to more comfortable levels is a poorer growth outlook for a number of years to come," the report added.



Economics and Business Research (CEBR), reported Bloomberg. The research revealed that the world faces a recession in 2023. Fresh borrowing costs aimed at tackling inflation cause a number of economies to contract. The British consultancy, in its yearly World Economic League Table, said that the world economy surpassed \$100 trillion for the first time in 2022 but will stall in 2023 as policy makers continue their fight against soaring prices. According to director and head of Forecasting at CEBR, Kay Daniel Neufeld, "It's likely that the world economy will face recession next year as a

The findings of the research are gloomier than the recent forecast from the International Monetary Fund. That institution warned in October that more than a third of the world economy will contract and there is a 25% chance of global GDP growing by less than 2% in 2023, which it defines as a global recession, Bloomberg reported.

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Kim Kardashian shared a family picture of the Kardashians and the Jenners on Instagram on Monday. But internet users are convinced the portrait is "photoshopped."

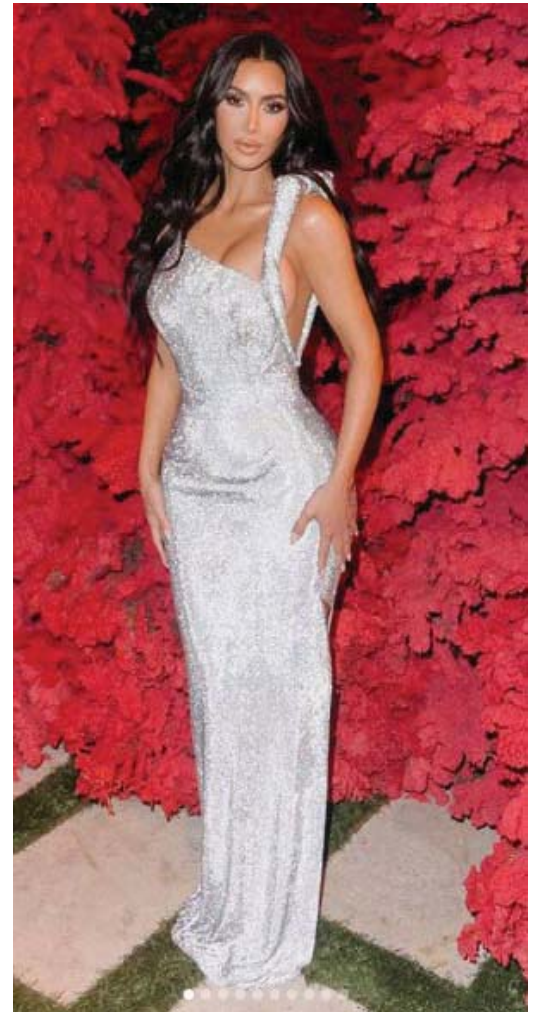
The Kardashians are no strangers to trolling or negative publicity. They often take the internet by storm with their fashion looks, family pictures and the drama that unfolds in their scandalous reality show.



(SAI Bureau) But nothing says more opulent than their parties. For Christmas, the Kardashian-Jenner family had a red and silver-themed bash for which red Christmas trees were installed as part of the ambience along with a ceiling of large red balloons. Though the grand party was all about bringing together a family festive spirit, what the internet couldn't stop talking about was the portrait of the Kardashian-Jenner sisters that Kim posted on Instagram on Monday.

In fact, even the large spread of gingerbread houses on the table with colourful candies had gone unnoticed. "It looks so photoshopped," wrote one Instagram user. The picture in question is the first image in the carousel that features Khloe Kardashian, Kim Kardashian, Kris Jenner, Kourtney Kardashian, Kylie Jenner and Kendall Jenner. ' While Khloe, Kris and Kendall dressed up in red, Kim wore a silver coset-like gown, Kourtney a white

dress and Kylie a black and beige lace dress. An Instagram user pointed out their eyes looking in different directions, which added to their suspicions of the picture being morphed to fit the entire clan together. "Why do their faces all looked photoshopped in the picture like none of them were actually there," a person wrote. A nother one asked, "Did they just take everyone's favorite picture and paste it all together?" Trolling the Kardashians, a person



hilariously wrote, "Y'all forgot to take a pic all together huh?" Meanwhile, Kim Kardashian is co-parenting her four kids - North, Saint, Chicago and Psalm - with Kanye West after their separation last year.

Kate Middleton felt 'betrayed' by Prince Harry over Netflix docu-series: Report

As per a report, Kate Middleton reacted to Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's docu-series. She reportedly feels hurt and betrayed by Prince Harry.

(SAI Bureau) Meghan Markle and Prince Harry's Netflix docu-series has created a storm on the internet. Titled Harry & Meghan, the six-episode web show features the Royal couple talking about their lives in the West after stepping down from their Royal duties in 2020. While the internet is divided over the series, Kate Middleton is reportedly upset. "Kate feels hurt and betrayed that Harry would do this to her, too, especially as



the pair used to be so close," a source explained to Us Weekly on Thursday. The source also revealed Prince Williams is not planning on giving his side of the story. "William isn't planning to give his side of the story or openly retaliate. He's remaining dignified and is getting on with the job," the source added. Sharing that Prince William is disappointed with Harry for "portraying him and the family in a cynical

light." Harry claimed, in the docu-series, that William had been complicit in negative stories appearing about the couple in the media and blamed the press for Meghan having a miscarriage. Harry alleged that his department from England had created a "wedge" between him and his brother. He also referred to a 2020 report about the siblings feuding, claiming he had not agreed to release a joint statement "squashing the story

about [Prince William] bullying" him and Meghan out of the family. "William and Kate's aides have briefed them on the show, but don't expect the couple to sit down in their cottage with a bowl of popcorn to tune in themselves," the insider further said. Prince Harry and Meghan Markle left the UK in 2020 after announcing that they have stepped down from their duties as Royal members. The couple has two kids - Archie and Lilibet.

Who is Salt Bae and why is he trending

Nusret Gokce, also known as Salt Bae, has been banned from attending the US Open Cup Final 2023. Here's all you need to know about the Turkish chef

(SAI Bureau) Turkish chef Nusret Gokce, popularly known as Salt Bae, recently took over headlines for his stint on the field with Argentinian players following the FIFA World Cup win. Salt Bae left the internet fuming after he grabbed the coveted FIFA trophy and then tried to get a selfie clicked with Lionel Messi, who was noticeably irritated in a viral clip. Due to the uproar over his antics, the chef has now been banned from attending the US Open Cup final. Salt Bae, a famous restaurateur, posted a video of him meeting and interacting with Messi on Instagram. However, his followers



were quick to point out that the clip was captured in 2018. Born in 1983 in Erzurum, Nusret, the man behind his nickname Salt Bae, is a Turkish butcher, chef and entrepreneur who rose to fame because of his peculiar way of sprinkling salt on a steak. He belonged to a Kurdish family - his father named Faik was a mineworker and his mother was named Fatma, as per a report by The Sun. His upbringing was poles apart from his current luxurious lifestyle. In sixth grade, Nusret was forced to leave school and work as a butcher's apprentice in Istanbul due to his family's financial struggles.

Neeraj Pandey reflects on Khakee The Bihar Chapter's success, shares Season 2 update

In an exclusive chat with IndiaToday.in, Neeraj Pandey shares that response to Khakee: The Bihar Chapter was overwhelming. He shared an update on the next chapter as well

(SAI Bureau) Neeraj Pandey had a successful 2022 with Khakee: The Bihar Chapter. The Netflix original show made it to the top 10 non-English language series watched globally as well. Khakee: The Bihar Chapter featured an ensemble cast that includes Karan Tacker, Avinash Tiwary, Nikita Dutta, Jatin Sarna, among others. Neeraj Pandey along with his partner Shital Bhatia produced the Netflix show under their production house, Friday Filmworks. In an exclusive chat, the producer duo reflects on the year 2022 and how Khakee's success motivated them to further the chapter. They also shared an update on the next chapter of the show.

Do you feel relieved about the response to Khakee: The Bihar Chapter?

Neeraj: We feel blessed and relieved that the show met the expectations of the audiences all over. If I have to sample, one of the comments that we have been receiving [since the release of Khakee] is from officials who want to get in touch and share their



stories. I feel them reaching out to us is a testimony that they feel it's worth their time. So, in that sense, it is overwhelming.

Shital: One of the responses that we've got for Khakee is from the people of Bihar that we recreated that world authentically. A lot of effort had gone into doing that.

It is after we work on a story at hand and look at the material, and at the merits that it offers. It's only when you have something very tangible in hand, that's when you try and explore the possibility of taking it to the next



level. But, it always starts with the merit that it carries.

A common thread with Friday Filmworks is that most of the stories deal with realism. Does that genre appeal to both of you over anything else?

No, I don't think that any one particular genre excites us. We have worked across genres but, like you mentioned, the reality of a story is a big attraction for us. We talk about stories which are rooted in our world and have a sense of realism to it. Having said that, we don't see any harm in

choosing science-fiction as well.

Khakee was mounted on a huge scale. With OTT, do you face any challenges with budgets?

As far as OTT is concerned, the usual conversation is 'this is the script, this is the amount of money it'll require.' And then, after reviewing, that's the amount of money that you get from a platform. So, it's true for films that budgets fail many-a-times. But, as far as OTT goes, it is very clear from the beginning that this is what is required to mount a certain project.

On a parting note, Khakee's next chapter is the most-awaited. Has work begun on it?

That was always the vision of the show that we would take it to places and other states. We are going to start writing very soon, which takes generally about eight to nine months, from the scripting to the casting. After that, we will figure out when to start work on that. A lot will also depend on when Netflix is looking at showcasing it. So, hopefully, we'll make an announcement to that effect very soon.



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Pakistani film The Legend of Maula Jatt, starring Fawad Khan, to release in India on Dec 30

After shattering box office records in Pakistan, Fawad Khan and Mahira Khan-starrer The Legend of Maula Jatt, is all set to release in India. Directed by Bilal Lashari, the film will open in Indian cinemas on December 30

(SAI Bureau) Pakistani film The Legend of Maula Jatt, starring Fawad Khan and Mahira Khan, is likely to be released on the big screen in India this Friday, an INOX official said. This will perhaps be the first film from Pakistan in over a decade to get a theatrical release here.

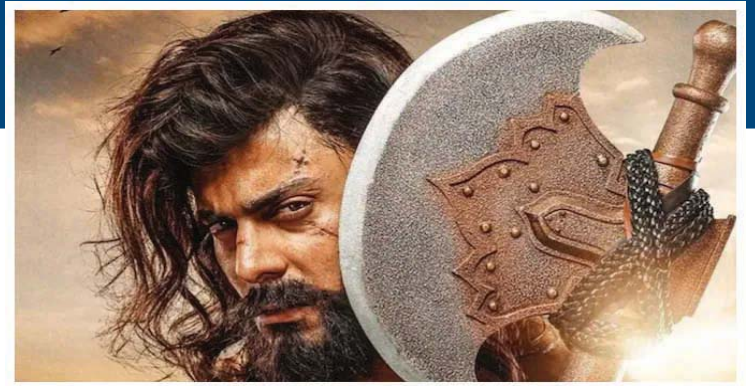
"It will be played in Punjab and a few theatres in Delhi in INOX where there are Punjabi speaking people," Rajender Singh Jyala, chief programming officer, INOX Leisure Ltd, told PTI.

Multiplex chain PVR Cinemas had shared a release announcement on its official Instagram page but deleted it soon after.

"Presenting the official poster of #TheLegendofMaulaJatt! Coming to PVR this Friday," the post read. The action drama, which has become the highest-grossing Pakistani film of all time amassing \$10 million, was released in Pakistan on October 13.

Directed by Bilal Lashari, The Legend of Maula Jatt is an adaptation of the 1979 cult classic Maula Jatt and producers have said it is neither a remake nor a sequel. The movie stars Mahira and Fawad, who are familiar to Indian audiences through their popular Pakistani drama Humsafar and Bollywood. Fawad, who was most recently

seen in the superhero series Ms Marvel, has featured in Khoobsurat, Kapoor & Sons, and Ae Dil Hai Mushkil while Mahira appeared in Shah Rukh Khan-starrer Raees. The last Pakistani film to get a theatrical release in India was Bol starring Mahira in 2011. Before that was Ramchand Pakistani starring Nandita Das and Rashid Farooqi in 2008. Khuda Kay Liye, which included Fawad in the ensemble cast alongside Naseeruddin Shah, released in 2007. Pakistani films, however, have been screened at festivals in India. In November this year, the Dharamshala International Film Festival screened



Saim Sadiq's Joyland, which is Pakistan's official entry in the international film category at the 95th Academy Awards. Khuda Kay Liye was the first ever Pakistani film to be included in the official selection of the International Film Festival of India (IFFI). The Legend of Maula Jatt started production in January 2017 and concluded in June 2019. The film's release kept getting de-

layed due to copyright related issues and the COVID-19 pandemic. Pakistani actors stopped being cast in Indian productions following the 2016 terror attack in Uri in which 19 Indian Army personnel were martyred. The decision came amid demands by various political outfits to ban Pakistani artistes from Indian films and from performing here.

Uorfi Javed serves breakfast as she goes topless for new video

Uorfi Javed has hit the headlines again for her new video. The actress went topless while serving breakfast

(SAI Bureau) Uorfi Javed continues to make headlines like never before. After rising to fame with Bigg Boss OTT, the actress has been in the news for her sartorial choices. Uorfi is known to pull off any given outfit with confidence. Each time she steps out in public or posts a picture on social media, the actress leaves everyone stunned. She has often been trolled for her bold outfits. And the actress has once again grabbed the headlines for her new video. In the clip, the Uorfi can be seen posing topless.



UORFI JAVED GOES TOPLESS, WATCH

A while ago, Uorfi Javed shared a new video on her Instagram handle. In the clip, the actress can be seen hiding her modesty with pancakes in one hand, and an orange juice in another hand. While posting the video on her of-

UORFI JAVED ON DATEBAAZI

Meanwhile, Uorfi Javed recently made a guest appearance on Datebaazi, a dating reality show. The show is hosted by TV star Rithvik Dhanjani. On the show, Uorfi was asked to reveal her weirdest fantasy. And she managed to leave everyone surprised with her answer.

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- *A wave of layoffs has swept across American businesses in 2022.
- *The cuts stem from slower business growth, paired with rising labor costs.
- *The layoffs span across industries, from mortgage lending to digital-payment processing.

*** Goldman Sachs plans to cut thousands of workers. Here are the other major US companies that have made cuts in 2022, from Amazon to Twitter.8u7**



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