

## Why Is America Barreling Into a Cold War With China?

There will be huge economic consequences to a superpower decoupling: "Another serious banking failure, mortgage meltdown . . . America can't stabilize the world economy without China."



(Story Page 23 to 24)

## Iran-Saudi Arabia pact: What China-brokered peace deal means for West Asia?

An agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia on March 10 brokered by Beijing, could put China in a leading role in West Asia, a position once held by the United States of America.



(Page 27)

## Proselytisation in Punjab

How Mazhabi Sikhs and Valmiki Hindus are being 'lured' into Christianity



(SAI Bureau) Christmas is celebrated all over the world on December 25. India, too, is home to some of the oldest settlements of Christians, with Kerala having an ancient Syrian Church and following in present times. The number of Christians have increased due to increased missionary activities and proselytisation. (Contd. on page 27)

## SEBI probing Adani offshore deals for possible rule violations, say sources

The Supreme Court, in March, had asked SEBI to investigate the Adani Group for any lapses related to public shareholding, related party rules, or regulatory disclosures. SEBI suspects there were "disclosure violations" on some of the transactions, sources have said.

(SAI Bureau) India's market regulator is investigating a possible violation of 'related party' transaction rules in the Adani Group's dealings with at least three offshore entities that have links to the brother of the conglomerate's founder, two people said. The three entities allegedly entered into several investment transactions with unlisted units of the ports-to-power conglomerate founded by

billionaire Gautam Adani over the last 13 years, said the sources with direct knowledge of the matter. Vinod Adani, Gautam Adani's brother, is either a beneficial owner, or director, or has links with those three offshore entities, said the two sources, adding that the regulator, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI),

(Contd. on page 26)

## Finland joins NATO in major blow to Russia over Ukraine war



(Page 26)

## World Bank lowers India's FY24 growth forecast to 6.3%

(SAI Bureau) The World Bank revised its forecast for India's economic growth in the current fiscal year and lowered it to 6.3 per cent from 6.6 per cent. The World Bank on Tuesday lowered its forecast for India's economic growth in the current fiscal year that started on

April 1 to 6.3% from 6.6% as it expects higher borrowing costs to hurt consumption. To tame inflation, India's central bank has raised interest rates by 250 basis points since May. "Rising borrowing costs and slower income growth will weigh on private consumption

growth," the World Bank said in a report. "Government consumption is projected to grow at a slower pace due to the withdrawal of pandemic-related fiscal support measures." The World Bank estimated last fiscal year's growth at 6.9%. It projected the current account deficit to narrow to 2.1% of gross domestic product for the current fiscal year from an estimated 3% in the previous year, on the back of robust service exports and a narrowing merchandise trade deficit. Spillover from recent turmoil in financial markets in the United States and Europe pose a risk to short-term investment flows to emerging markets, including India, said World Bank economist Dhruv Sharma. "But Indian banks remain well capitalised," Sharma said.

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# Indian Student at London School of Economics Claims Racism in Student Union Election



at the institution. He said these claims were not backed by evidence and he has always battled for social harmony. He said that there were some individuals who could not bear to see an Hindu-Indian leading the LSESU. Kataria was contesting for LSESU general secretary. Kataria told several news media outlets that he is the first member of his family to go to university. He also has a degree from NorthCap University and arrived in the UK last September to study for his master's. Kataria said that he received a letter from the returning officer that he was affiliated with an extremist organisation but when he questioned the officer they could not link him to any incident where he showed any intolerance or discriminatory behaviour. Kataria

said the returning officer found him guilty of breaching a two-metre rule and based on that he was disqualified from the competition on March 29. He said he was the only "brown international student" contesting and said he amassed support from Asian and African students. James Refl was announced general secretary of the LSESU later as Kataria appeal failed and disqualification upheld. "I am concerned for my safety. I come from a small village and a middle-class farming family. I never dreamt I would get judged on my Hindu faith and Indian identity," Kataria told the Times of India. He said that he feels the UK considers "Indian students to be cash cows". "The LSESU's actions show an authoritarian, undemocratic,

xenophobic and biased mindset," he said, adding that he is unable to sleep and is uncomfortable walking in the campus. He also shared his ordeal with MP Bob Blackman, Indian High Commission in London and the authorities at his college and said that his fellow Indian students were also labelled "Hindu fascists" and "scumbags" by those opposed to his candidature. The students' union told the Tol that Kataria was disqualified from the election because he broke a rule that said candidates and campaigners must maintain a reasonable distance from anyone casting their vote. The university spokesperson said that the institution remains committed to a "working and learning environment".

(SAI Bureau) Karan Kataria, a 22-year-old student from Gurugram, studying master's in international law at the London School of Economics (LSE) where his detractors labelled him claims he faced racism for being Hindu and an Indian after being disqualified from elections to the students' union (LSESU). Speaking to news outlets India Today and Times of India, Kataria broke down and claimed he was subjected to a smear campaign where his detractors labelled him as islamophobic, queerphobic, transphobic and Europhobic in multiple WhatsApp groups belonging to students studying

## Indian-origin Ajay Banga poised to become World Bank chief unopposed

**The World Bank on Wednesday closed a month-long window for nominations for its next president, with no alternatives announced to 63-year-old Ajay Banga.**

(SAI Bureau) Indian-American business leader Ajay Banga is poised to become the next president of the World Bank, which has said he is the sole nominee for the post as no other candidates were nominated. The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors will interview Banga before he is formally appointed. In February, President Joe Biden announced that the US would be nominating Banga to lead the World Bank because he is "well equipped" to lead the global institution at "this critical moment in history."



The World Bank on Wednesday closed a month-long window for nominations for its next president, with no alternatives announced to 63-year-old Banga. Banga is the only application received for the position of president of the World Bank, the financial institution said on Thursday. "The Board received one nomination and would like to announce that Mr Ajay Banga, a US national, will be considered for the position," the bank said. "In accordance with established procedures, the Board of Executive Directors will conduct a formal interview with the candidate in Washington D.C., and expect to conclude the Presidential selection in due course," said a statement issued by the bank.

The bank has not announced the timing of the interview. The former Mastercard Inc. chief, Banga currently serves as Vice Chairman at General Atlantic. A new leader

of the World Bank is expected to be chosen by early May. "Over the next few months, you will see the World Bank undergo an important transition. We expect that Ajay Banga – President Biden's nominee – will be elected President of the World Bank," US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen told lawmakers at a Congressional hearing on Wednesday. "He will be charged with accelerating our progress to evolve the institution to better address 21st-century challenges. This evolution will help the Bank deliver on its vital poverty alleviation and

development goals," Yellen said. If confirmed, Banga would become the first-ever Indian-American and Sikh-American to head either of the two top international financial institutions: the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Banga is expected to replace the current World Bank president David Malpass, who will step down in June, nearly a year before his term is scheduled to expire. Malpass faced strong criticism over the bank's commitment to climate action and over his personal views on climate change. Last week, reports emerged that China sounded doubtful about backing Banga, saying it is "open" to supporting "other potential candidates" based on merit. Banga, however, received overwhelming support from major countries across the world, including India. Following Banga's nomination, he has travelled to several countries for support.

## US court ends uncertainty over work permit for H-1B spouses

(News Agency) In major relief for thousands of Indian techies, a US court has dismissed a lawsuit that sought to deny work authorisation to spouses of H-1B visa holders in queue for Green Card, ending the uncertainty that has dogged them for years.

100,000 H-4 EAD holders now, mostly women. The US has been granting EADs to H-4 spouses of H-1B visa holders whose applications have been accepted for Green Card since 2015, under a rule introduced by then President Barack Obama. The objective was

to make it financially worthwhile for H-1 holders waiting for Green Card, which takes many years for applicants from India. The rule, technically issued by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), was challenged by Save Jobs USA, an



A district court of Washington ruled on Wednesday that the work authorisation is in compliance with the Immigration and Naturalisation Act and supported by "decades of Executive-branch practice, and both explicit and implicit congressional ratification of that practice".

The United States had granted more than 59,000 work authorisations - called Employment Authorisation Documents (EADs) and Form I-765 - in 2021, including both initial and renewal to holders of H-4 visas that are granted to spouses of H-1B visa holders who are mostly from India. There are more than

organisation of workers of a California company laid off because their jobs had been outsourced - also in 2015 - to two companies from India, Infosys and Tata Consultancy, which were staffed almost entirely at the time with Indian IT workers on H-1B visas. The rule was defended by the DGS, joined by intervenors Immigration Voice and an impacted Indian-descent H-1B spouse, and friend-of-court filings from more than 40 companies and organisations. Save Jobs USA had argued, chiefly, that the "rule lacks statutory authorization, violates the non-delegation doctrine, and is arbitrary and capricious".



# UK minister says Pakistani men raping English girls, sparks outrage



**British Home Secretary Suella Braverman said British Pakistani men are members of grooming gangs who are involved in “pursuing, raping, drugging and harming vulnerable English girls”. Her comments regarding the representation of British Pakistani men in grooming gangs have triggered controversy.**

(SAI Bureau) British Home Secretary Suella Braverman unveiled new plans to end child sexual abuse, after a number of reports into grooming gangs exploiting young girls. She said British Pakistani men are members of grooming gangs who are involved in “pursuing, raping, drugging

and harming vulnerable English girls”. Her comments regarding the representation of British Pakistani men in grooming gangs have triggered controversy. Braverman on Sunday announced plans for a wide-ranging consultation on dealing with the issue, though the government is launching an immediate focus on mandatory reporting, Daily Express reported. She didn't refrain from highlighting British Pakistani perpetrators, saying political correctness has prevented those in authority from acting. The British Home Secretary believed the professionals who had duties of care towards young girls do not care and turn a “blind eye” towards abuse “out of political correctness, out of a fear of

being called racist, out of fear of being called bigoted”. New rules would mean any professions working on child safeguarding would have to report and take action when they come into possession of information that may raise concerns about the safety of young people.

Braverman was interviewed by Sky News, in which she asserted that vulnerable white English girls, often in care or difficult circumstances, were being targeted and sexually exploited by gangs of British Pakistani men involved in child abuse rings or networks, reported TRT World. “There have been several reports since about the predominance of certain ethnic

groups - and I say, British Pakistani males - who hold cultural values totally at odds with British values, who see women in a demeaned and illegitimate way and who pursue an outdated and frankly heinous approach in terms of the way they behave,” said the Home Secretary while talking to Sky presenter Sophy Ridge. The Tory MP was criticised and accused of stoking racial tensions and perpetuating harmful stereotypes. Her comments were condemned by many including Robina Qureshi, CEO of the refugee charity Positive Action in Housing (PAiH). Qureshi asked the Home secretary to apologise for her “gross misrepresentation” of the British Pakistani community and defined her language as “unacceptable”.

## USA vs Canada: Choosing the right destination for higher education

(SAI Bureau) In today's day and age, more than 23 Lakh+ students from India study abroad every year. We have become one of the main focuses for education abroad. Studying in a country abroad is one of the most rewarding and enriching experiences. It also brings about a change in the skill sets that one requires to perform well professionally. While deciding the factors to consider between countries, there are a number of factors to consider. Some of them are:

Cost v/s ROI

Ranking of the university

Location and climate of the region

Scholarship and financial aid

Let's discuss two of the most important countries in high demand for overseas education, USA v/s Canada.

While there are no particular betterment in terms of the parameter to say that there is a right or a wrong in choosing a country, it is imperative for us to understand our demand based on a few basic parameters:

Flexibility in choosing courses in bachelors programmes

The education system followed at the universities in USA allows you to choose your own courses, as long as you fulfill certain core requirements. This gives you a tailored education to your specific interests and career goals. In contrast, the Canadian higher education system tends to be more structured, with a set curriculum for each program. While this provides a solid foundation in

the chosen field, it may limit the ability of students to explore other areas of interest.

Ease in obtaining Visa for studying in US and Canada countries

Obtaining a student visa for studying in the United States or Canada can be a lengthy and complicated process.

Both countries require proof of acceptance from a recognized institution, evidence of

financial support, and proof of language proficiency. However, the United States has recently

introduced stricter visa policies, which can make it more difficult



for international students to obtain a visa. In contrast, the Canadian visa process tends to be more

straightforward, with a focus on attracting international students to the country.

Job prospects after getting Bachelors Degree

While the job prospects for both the countries remain similar, however, USA has a particular proclivity towards STEM and management. In addition to that, the United States tends to have a larger job market overall, with more opportunities in fields such

as finance, entertainment, and technology. Additionally, the United States is home to many prestigious

universities and research institutions, which can provide valuable networking opportunities and access to top employers.

Cost of higher education in Canada and US

The cost of higher education in the United States and Canada varies depending on the institution, program, and location. In general, tuition fees in the United States tend to be higher than in Canada, with private universities and out-of-state public universities being the most expensive.

## Pearson Test of English: Everything you need to know

(SAI Bureau) London-headquartered Pearson — known for its educational and testing services — conducts the Pearson Test of English (PTE) to evaluate the reading, writing, listening and speaking skills of non-native English speakers looking to study, work or migrate abroad. The AI-powered English language test is accepted by many universities and governments across the world.

In an interaction with ET Digital, the President of English Language Learning at Pearson, Giovanni Giovannelli, explains the importance of the test and how students should prepare for it. Edited excerpts from the interaction:

The computer-based English language test is required for student and migration applications to the UK, Australia and New Zealand. It is considered the fastest and a flexible way to prove English language proficiency.

**Which universities accept PTE?**

The PTE Academic score is accepted by all Australian, New Zealand and Irish uni-

versities, 99 per cent of UK universities, and more than 90 per cent of the universities in Canada. The test can open the doors to 3,000+ universities, colleges and professional bodies globally, says Giovannelli.

**Which countries accept PTE for visa and university applications?**

The test is accepted in migration applications to the UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Giovannelli says they were recently approved by the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada for the economic class immigration pathway.

**Where are these tests conducted?**

Pearson has more than 350 test centers in 117 countries. There are 44 centers in India. The test can be booked on a short notice, with frequent tests taking place throughout the year.

**What is considered a good PTE score?**

A score between 70 and 90 is considered good. It grades your English ability against the Global Scale of English — a standardised scale to measure English proficiency.

**What score is required to get into a good university?**

Each institution chooses how to set its scores. Typically, a test taker will need to get a score of 36–50 for admission to a foundation course; a score of 51–60 for an undergraduate course and a score of 57–67 to get into a postgraduate course.

**How should a person prepare for the PTE?**

Candidates should take several mock tests to assess the gaps in their learning and then fill that. They should have clarity on which colleges they want to get into and aim to get the score required by that institute.

**What is the duration of the test?**

The test is for two hours. It is divided into four parts — reading, writing, speaking and listening. The results are declared in 24 hours. An individual appearing for this test needs to take it in one sitting. But the test can be taken multiple times.

**Is there a test for the corporate segment?**

The company is developing the Pearson English Skills Certificate, a mid-stakes English exam to complement the PTE. It will be launched in 2023.



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# Sikkim Avalanche: 7 Killed in Nathula, 12 Injured; MHA Takes Stock of Situation, Search Op Resumes

(News Agency)- At least seven tourists were killed and 12 others injured in a major avalanche in Sikkim's Nathula area on Tuesday. As many as 20 people have been rescued so far and the search operation has resumed today.

"By 3 PM, 14 persons were rescued and taken to nearby Army medical facility. However, seven persons succumbed. The other seven persons were administered first aid and returned to Gangtok," Indian Army said.

The District Magistrate of Gangtok informed that rescue operations have been called off and there is no more requirement of the NDRF. He said that twelve injured are undergoing treatment.

"Distressed by the avalanche in Sikkim. Condolences to those who have lost their loved ones. I hope the injured recover soon. Rescue ops are underway and all possible assistance is being



provided to those affected," PMO tweeted quoting the PM. Expressing condolences, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said that his ministry is closely monitoring the situation.

"My sincerest condolences to the families of those who have lost their lives in the tragic avalanche in Sikkim. We are closely monitoring the situation and the teams of NDRF will reach the affected area soon. I pray for the speedy recovery of those injured," Shah

tweeted. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh expressed condolences over the incident. "Saddened by the loss of precious lives due to an avalanche in East Sikkim. Search and Rescue Ops are being carried out by the Indian Army, SDRF and other agencies. My deepest condolences to the bereaved families. Praying for the speedy recovery of the injured," he tweeted. "Rescue and clearance operations are still on," a senior

police official here said. Teams of Sikkim Police and Indian Army are involved in the rescue operations. Border Roads Organisation (BRO) also launched a rescue operation in the area. As many as 22 tourists have been rescued till now including six from deep valley and shifted to near by hospitals.

The avalanche occurred around 11:10 am near the 15th milestone on Jawaharlal Nehru Marg. Meanwhile, the road has

been opened for traffic by the BRO.

Nathula Pass is situated on the border with China and is a major tourist destination because of its scenic beauty. Some 350 people and 80 vehicles, which were stranded on the road because of the snow blocking the road from Nathu La, were also brought back, officials said.

**POLITICIANS EXPRESS CONDOLENCES**

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge also expressed grief and said he has utmost faith in the rescue teams involved in saving lives.

West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee said she is deeply pained by the tragic incident in Sikkim. "I offer my sincerest condolences to the bereaved families and pray for the speedy recovery of those who were injured. Praying for the safety and security of all," she said in a tweet.



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# 'Masks Must Be Made Mandatory in Public Places'

Covid Task Force Member Suneela Garg on Rising Positivity Rate, Cases in India

(News Agency)-Over the past few one week, India has been reporting a steep rise in Covid cases, which prompted some states to bring back mask mandates while some had to conduct drills to be ready for any exigency.

CNN-News18 spoke to Delhi Covid Task Force member and Lancet Commission member Dr Suneela Garg on the present 12% positivity rate in Delhi and the fact that Covid cases are rising across the country.

Explaining the issue, Garg said: "XBB 1.15 & XBB 1.16 are sub variants of Omicron. They are highly transmissible but not severe. This sub variant infection, however, has rare chances of hospitalisation. In some cases, one affected with the variant get well in 3 to four days.

The task force member also stressed on the use of masks

Masks. "Using of Mask is advisable at the moment but I feel in crowded places, it should be made mandatory." She also mentioned that children below 12 years of age don't need vaccine



at the moment. "We have enough international and national data to support this. The vulnerable age group comprising elderly and people with comorbidity get affected the most. Dr Garg also added that precaution should be increased. "Only 27% population have taken the precautionary dose. More people should get inoculated

with precaution dose as our vaccine immunity and natural immunity are slowly waning."

India Cases

India logged 3,038 new coronavirus cases, while the active cases increased to 21,179, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Tuesday.

The death toll climbed to 5,30,901 with nine deaths. While two deaths each were reported from Delhi and Punjab, one each was reported by Jammu and Kashmir, Maharashtra

and Uttarakhand in a span of 24 hours and two reconciled by Kerala, the data updated at 8 am stated. The Covid case tally was recorded at 4.47 crore (4,47,29,284) The active cases now comprise 0.05 per cent of the total infections and the national COVID-19 recovery rate was recorded at 98.76 per cent, the ministry said.

## Punjab: Insta 'Influencer' Held Over Extortion, Blackmail Complaint by Ludhiana-based Bizman



(News Agency)-Punjab Police has arrested an Instagram "influencer" over a complaint by a man who alleged that she has links with gangsters and was constantly threatening him to demand extortion.

Police sources said that the woman, who has 131k followers on Instagram and over three accounts on the platform, had been extorting money from people after sending them follow requests and her videos. The woman faces multiple blackmailing cases, police said. A Ludhiana-based businessman had filed a complaint with the police alleging that a woman has been

calling him from different numbers for a long time, threatening and blackmailing him and demanding money.

"She used to trap influential people and blackmail them. It has also come to the fore in the investigation that many more people are involved in this, who shall be nabbed soon," sources said.

The woman, who cops believe is a resident of Sangrur, is often seen in luxury cars and has been active on social media for the past two years. According to police, Jasneet is currently residing in a rented accommodation in Mohali's Sector 88.

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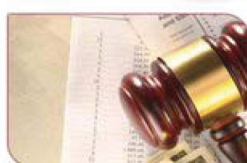
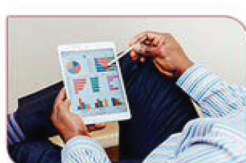
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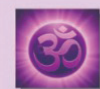


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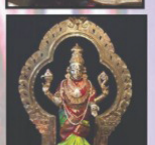
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## Punjab: ASI Kills Self After Gunning Down Wife, Son, Pet Dog in Gurdaspur

(News Agency)- An ASI Bhopinder Singh, who was said to be posted in Amritsar, allegedly killed his wife Baljit Kaur (40) and son Lovepreet Singh (19) with his service weapon at around 10 am in Bhumbli village in Gurdaspur district, a police official said.

After killing his family members, the Singh even shot his pet dog, police said.



Before fleeing, the ASI allegedly abducted the woman, a neighbour, who was said to be present there at the time of the incident. Singh took the woman to a house in Batala, 35 km away from his village in Gurdaspur. Police then

officer had even abducted a woman at gunpoint while fleeing to Batala, they said, adding that though police managed to rescue her, the cop allegedly shot himself at a house in Batala.

It is yet to be ascertained what prompted the ASI to kill his wife and son, the police officials said, adding that they were investigating the matter.

launched an operation to free the hostage.

Batala Senior Superintendent of Police Ashwini Gotyal said they were successful in getting the woman released. Police had also asked the ASI to surrender, she said.

Police broke into the room of the house after hearing gunshots and found that Singh had shot himself.

## PM Addresses Conference on Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, Pushes for 'Modern Technologies With Local Insight'

(News Agency)-Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday addressed an international conference on Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, organised by Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI). During his speech, he highlighted natural disasters and how they can be best managed.

"Friends, each nation faces disasters of different kinds. Society must evolve local knowledge related to infrastructure, that can withstand disasters. While modernising infrastructure, such knowledge needs to be used intelligently. Modern technologies with local insights can be great for resilience," he said.

Talking about the importance of CDRI as a platform for disaster management, PM Modi said, "In just four years, over 40 countries have become a part of CDRI. This conference has become very important as global north and global south, small and large countries are coming together on it."

"As we discuss infrastructure, some priorities have to be remembered. The theme this year is delivering resilience and inclusive infrastructure. Infrastructure must leave none behind and serve people even during times of crisis. Further, a holistic view of infrastructure is needed. Social and digital infrastructure as important as transport infrastructure," he said.

Modi said infrastructure is not merely about returns but also about reach and resilience.

Infrastructure should leave none behind and should serve people, including in times of crisis, he added,

stressing on having a holistic view of infrastructure. Social and digital infrastructure is as important as transport infrastructure, he said.

Recent disasters are a reminder of the scale of challenges facing the world, he said while noting the incidents of heat wave which had hit India and Europe, cyclones and also recent earthquake in Turkiye and Syria.





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# Chhattisgarh: Newly Married Man, His Brother Killed as Home Theatre Gifted in Wedding Explodes; Cops Suspect Explosive Planted in Device

(News Agency)- A newly married man and his elder brother were killed and four others injured after a home theatre music system they had received as a wedding gift exploded in their house in Chhattisgarh's Kabirdham district, police on Tuesday said, adding that prima facie it seems an explosive was planted in the electronic device.

The incident took place on Monday in Chamari village under Rengakhar police station limits when Hemendra Merawi (22), who got married last week, was trying to switch on the music system, Kabirdham Superintendent of Police (SP) Lal Umed Singh told PTI. The impact of the explosion led to the collapse of walls and roof of the room where the music



system was kept, according to police.

As per preliminary information, Merawi got married to a woman from Anjana village located under adjoining Jhalmala police station area on March 30, the SP said.

The next day, the woman went

back to her paternal home from the place of her in-laws as per rituals. Both Rengakhar and Jhalmala police station areas fall in a Naxal-affected belt along the border of Chhattisgarh-Madhya Pradesh, around 200 km away from capital Raipur.

On Monday, Merawi and the

other family members were unwrapping the wedding presents inside a room in his house,

Additional Superintendent of Police Manisha Thakur said.

As Merawi switched on the music system after connecting its wire to an electric board, an explosion occurred. Merawi died on the spot, she said.

His brother Rajkumar (30) and four others, including a one-and-a-half year boy, suffered injuries and they were shifted to the district hospital in Kawardha, Thakur said.

Merawi's brother succumbed during treatment. The others are undergoing treatment in the hospital, the police official said. Forensic teams from Durg and Raipur districts were roped in for a probe into the incident and

prima facie, it was found that an explosive was placed inside the music system, Singh said. "A renowned brand name was printed on the cover of the music system, but it seems to be a copy of the original brand. We are trying to ascertain who had gifted the device and from where it was purchased," the SP said. Further probe is on into the incident, he added.

Durgesh Rawte, station house officer of Rengakhar police station, said during inspection of the room, no other inflammable item was found which could have triggered the explosion.

The music system was the only equipment which exploded in the room, he said, adding the cause of the explosion will be known after the investigation.

## Few Cracks Found on Surface of Gateway of India in Mumbai, Says Culture Minister



(News Agency)- Few cracks were found on the surface of the Gateway of India in Mumbai during an inspection but the overall structure was found to be in a "good state of preservation", Parliament was informed on Monday.

Union Minister for Culture G Kishan Reddy said this in a written response to a query in Lok Sabha.

He was asked whether a recent structural audit of the Gateway of India has revealed cracks along the facade.

"The Gateway of India, Mumbai, is not a centrally-protected monument. It is under the protection of Department of

Archaeology and Museums, Government of Maharashtra.

Few cracks were found on the surface during the inspection. Overall structure was found to be in a good state of preservation," he said.

In response to a query on whether any report has been submitted to the Union government in this regard and if so, what are the findings of the said report, the minister said, "No report has been submitted to Union government in this regard." On whether the government has received a restoration proposal from the State Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Reddy said the

"government of India has not received any such proposal" The Department of Archaeology and Museums has prepared a detailed site management plan and "an estimate for conservation and repairs to Gateway of India amounting to Rs 8,98,29,574", he said, adding, the Department of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, government of Maharashtra has approved the same on March 10.

The Gateway of India was built to commemorate the arrival of British monarch King George V in December 1911. The construction of the structure was completed in 1924.

## Three Arrested For Smuggling Rare Red Boa Snakes in UP



(News Agency)- Three persons have been arrested for allegedly trying to smuggle two red sand boa snakes for sale from Pune to Moradabad.

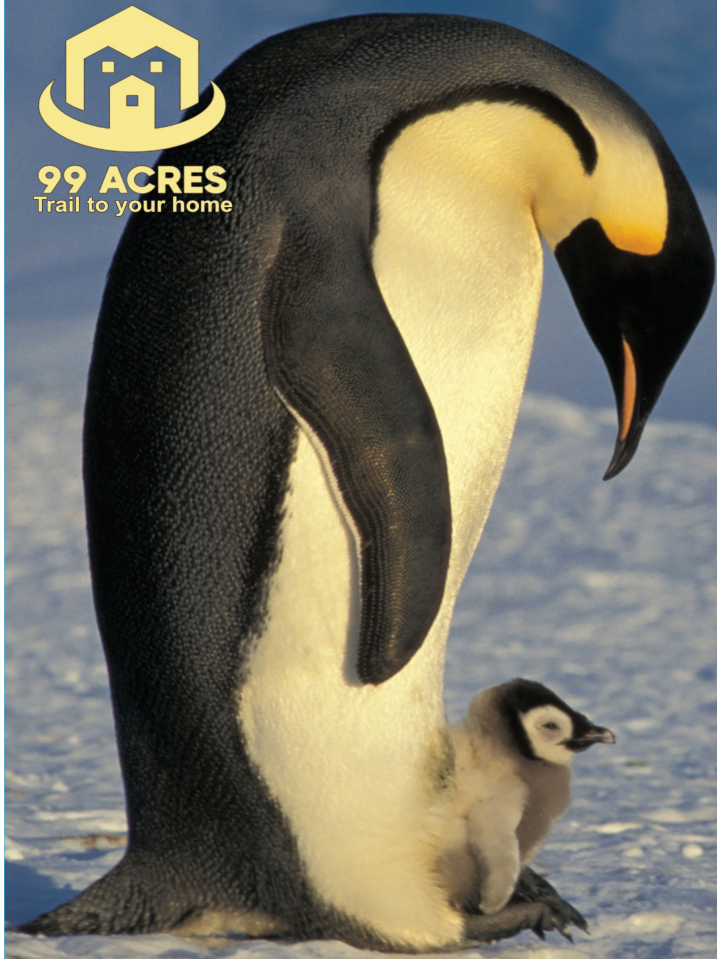
Red sand boa is a snake listed as 'near threatened' by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and is protected under the Wildlife Protection Act.

The accused have been booked under sections of the Wildlife Protection Act and sent to jail. Following a tip-off, officials of the forest division posed as customers to the accused and nabbed them during the exchange.

The three accused have been identified as Ali Mohammed, Chand Babu and Noor Hasan. Gyan Singh, sub-divisional forest officer, said, "Our staff posed as customers and made a deal with them. They were caught red-handed on the Noorpur- Seohara road under Chandpur forest range after they showed us the snakes for sale."

A medical examination of the reptiles was also conducted and they were found to be fit. Procedures have been made to release the snakes in their natural habitats on Tuesday, officials said.





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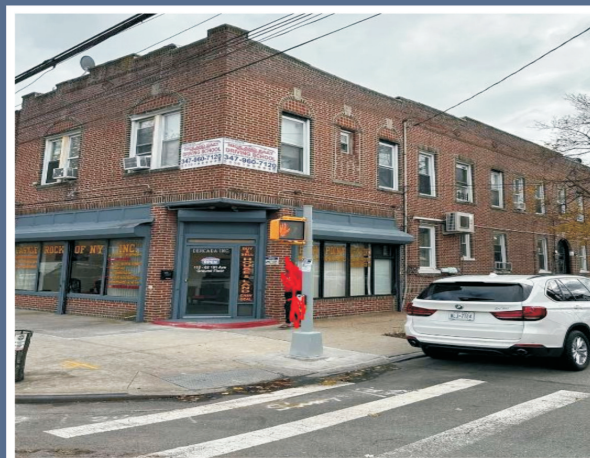
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## Sunak's grooming crackdown: blunt tools will do more harm than good

Rishi Sunak's announcement of a crackdown on sexual exploitation by grooming gangs appears to be the product of highly partisan political calculation, rather than the careful thought this problem deserves. He chose not to repeat, on Monday, the most inflammatory points made at the weekend by his home secretary, Suella Braverman. But by singling out the threat from gangs, as opposed to child sexual abuse in general, and by launching a new taskforce in Leeds - not far from where some notorious gangs operated - the government has committed to inflame the racial sensitivities surrounding this issue.

The taskforce was one of the commitments offered by Mr Sunak as part of his leadership bid. But as a crime-fighting tool, it looks weak. Specialist officers, with solid data to work with, are a good thing in any area of law enforcement. But the pledges being made to "stamp out" exploitation are unlikely to be kept. Police and courts are already overwhelmed with unmanageable workloads and staff shortages (including a lack of barristers), and struggling to cope with an explosion in online child sexual offences. The number of child sexual abuse cases resulting in a charge has fallen to 11% from 32% in seven years. Victims report being traumatised by repeated delays and postponements of court dates.

Mandatory reporting of suspected abuse was recommended by the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse (IICSA) led by Alexis Jay last year. Keir Starmer pointed out on Monday that he proposed this a decade ago. But tempting as it might be to believe that a simple law change could solve the problem, it is not true. For reports to elicit an effective response, police, social services

and the criminal justice system must be equipped to offer this. The government's response to the IICSA's other recommendations is due later this month. Unregistered staff in residential institutions, and dangers associated with unregulated placements, are among points that urgently need addressing, at a time when large numbers of children in care are being placed many miles away from the places and people they know.

In her review of events in Rotherham, where 1,400 children are thought to have been abused, Prof Jay criticised attempts to downplay the ethnic aspect of the exploitation. But to place such heavy emphasis on the dynamics of this particular episode, as ministers have opted to, is divisive and irresponsible. The number of child sexual abuse reports has risen sharply, with 103,000 offences recorded by police in England and Wales in 2021-22, while a report from the Home Office in 2020 found that group-based offenders are "most commonly white". The IICSA report referred to "soaring numbers" of victims of internet-based abuse. What is needed is an approach firmly grounded in evidence and backed up by clear messaging.

Ms Braverman's rhetoric about criminals whose attitudes are "incompatible with British values" is offensive. Stereotyping offenders can also be counter-productive, as the NSPCC pointed out. If people view sex offenders as outsiders, they are less likely to notice other forms of abuse - such as that committed by trusted figures, including family members or other adults in responsible positions. This would be ugly politics at any time. But at a time of severe economic hardship, which is already placing communities under increased stress, the government's approach to this painful issue shows it in a particularly poor light.

**The Guardian**

## China at it again

China's tendency to throw its weight around, notwithstanding its occasional attempts to play the peacemaker, is all-pervasive. The increasing frequency of its provocations indicates that Beijing swears by the old adage - nothing succeeds like excess. Its move to rename 11 places in Arunachal Pradesh, including five mountain peaks and two rivers, is aimed at riling India. The Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs has brazenly claimed that it has 'standardised' the names of these places in Arunachal, which it refers to as 'Zangnan, the southern part of Tibet'. Beijing had conducted a similar exercise in April 2017 and December 2021. Rejecting China's meddlesome action, New Delhi has asserted that 'Arunachal Pradesh is, has been and will always be an integral and inalienable part of India' and 'attempts to assign invented names will not alter this reality.' Such 'strong' statements have been issued in the past also, but they have failed to deter China from indulging in misadventures. The situation had come to a head in December last year when Indian and Chinese troops clashed along

the poorly demarcated Line of Actual Control in Arunachal's Tawang sector. It is evident that overbearing China is bent on keeping India on tenterhooks with one provocative step after another. This makes it imperative for India to expeditiously ramp up infrastructure in Arunachal. During his visit to the border state in January, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had inaugurated 28 projects, including a bridge over the Siyom river, meant for transporting tanks and artillery guns. However, it is a matter of concern that the strategically important Sela tunnel has missed a series of deadlines. Along with its aggressive moves on the ground, what makes China an unreliable neighbour is its doublespeak. Beijing has averred that it wants to strengthen ties with India and Russia, terming them 'emerging major powers with a notable influence.' Deftly blending diplomacy with opportunism, Beijing has endorsed Russian President Putin's new Foreign Policy Concept, which mentions deepening of relations with China and India as a priority for Russia. Nevertheless, a triad comprising China, India and Russia will remain a treacherous distraction as long as the Chinese persist with their duplicity.



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# Dear BJP, You Need To Take A Hard Look In The Mirror

What does an elected representative do when he is bored with the proceedings in the assembly? Hmmmm. Recently, a BJP MLA sitting in the Tripura assembly, watched pornographic videos. He wasn't the first. In 2012, three BJP MLAs in Karnataka were caught purportedly watching porn in the assembly. In the Gujarat assembly, two MLAs from the same party reportedly indulged in similar misdemeanours.

The BJP celebrates its foundation Day on April 6. Here is a motley crew of six more BJP leaders who did not do their party proud.

1. Brij Bhushan Singh: The BJP MP and president of the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) was on the radar in recent months as wrestlers protested against him, alleging intimidation and sexual exploitation. Top wrestlers of the country like Sakshi Malik, Bajrang Punia and Vinesh Phogat have alleged that he had sexually assaulted women wrestlers for years. He has been

asked to 'step aside' until a committee investigates and submits its report. The man's term ends in April, and he will



anyway not be eligible for the post since he has completed three tenures as WFI president. Matter brushed under the mat. 2. Tejasvi Surya: While on a flight from Chennai to Tiruchirapalli in December 2022, the BJP MP 'accidentally' (how sweet!) opened the aircraft's emergency exit without any authorisation. The flight was delayed by two hours. Even

though in the past, passengers have been booked for similar acts, the airline refused to name the politician in their statement

and only made other details public after a month.

3. Anurag Thakur: "Desh ke gaddaro ko, goli maaro saalon ko!"

4. Akash Vijayvargiya: A BJP MLA from Madhya Pradesh and the son of Kailash Vijayvargiya (who was also BJP's leader in-charge of Bengal), he beat up an official of the Indore Municipal Corporation in full public view

with a cricket bat. The incident was caught on camera by the media. Akash Vijayvargiya later went on record to justify his actions.

5. Ashish Mishra: Son of Union Minister Ajay Mishra has been accused of mowing down four farmers and a journalist during a farmers' protest in Lakhimpur Kheri in 2021. It has been over a year and there has been no resolution. The case goes on. He has been granted interim bail. Ajay Mishra did not step down as Union Minister. After the incident, Ajay Mishra commented during a live-streamed video that there were "dogs barking and chasing his car".

6. Pragya Thakur: This BJP MP is an accused in the 2008 Malegaon blast case that killed six and injured over 101 people. She is currently out on bail. She recently gave a speech where she asked the majority community to keep their knives sharp and attack those who affront their dignity. She has made hate speech her brand

identity.

Life has been cushy for the motley crew described in this column. On the other hand, there have been numerous instances of students, journalists, and human rights activists who have been booked under draconian laws like the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, Section 124-A of the Indian Penal Code commonly known as the sedition law, and the National Security Act. These have become prime instruments for stifling any sort of dissent against the Union government.

Are we surprised that India now ranks 77 out of 140 countries on the World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index? 94 out of 140 on adherence to fundamental rights, 111 out of 140 on civil justice, and 105 out of 140 on order and security.

On its Foundation Day, amid all the gala celebrations, the 'world's largest political party (sic)' would do well to take a long, hard look at itself in a mirror.

## Russia and China's plan is to divide and rule the West

New Delhi can see that their overreach has cemented broad western unity rather than separating Europe from the US

China and Russia are taking center stage this week as both countries look to deepen ties just as a chasm with the West, on a geopolitical and economic as well as military front, appears to be getting deeper, according to analysts. A three-day state visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Moscow this week, which began Monday, was hailed by China and Russia's presidents as the result of solid and cooperative relations between the two leaders and their respective nations, and comes after a determined drive over the last decade to strengthen diplomatic, defense and trade ties.

Ahead of the visit, President Vladimir Putin said in an article that "unlike some countries claiming hegemony and bringing discord to the global harmony, Russia and China are literally and figuratively building bridges" while his Chinese counterpart returned the favor, telling AFP he is "confident the visit will be fruitful and give new momentum to the healthy and stable development of Chinese-Russian relations."

Xi's visit to Moscow is something of a political coup for Russia given that it comes at a time when Russia has few high-powered friends left on the international stage, and little to show for

its invasion of Ukraine.

Russian forces have made little tangible progress despite a year of fighting, and a largely isolated Moscow continues to labor under the weight of international sanctions. To add insult to injury, the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Putin on Friday, alleging that he is responsible for war crimes committed in Ukraine during the war.

Nonetheless, China and Russia have long shared similar geopolitical aims, such as a desire to see what they call a "multi-polar world" and the curbing of NATO's military might, that unite them. And perhaps the most significant shared viewpoint of all is their mutual, long-standing distrust of the West.

A confluence of recent events — from the war in Ukraine to Western restrictions on semiconductor tech exports to China and, lately, a nuclear submarines deal between the U.S., U.K. and Australia that irked Beijing — has only served to bring the countries even closer together, according to analysts.

"If you look at the trajectory of China-Russia relations within the last decade, bilateral ties between the two countries have really developed tremendously," Alicja Bachulska, policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations

(ECFR) told CNBC, saying that the process of developing ties had begun back in the 1990s.

"It's basically about certain strategic interests, that are very close to both Beijing and Moscow at this point," she added. "For both Russia and China, the main interest is to weaken the U.S.-led international order, that's their primary goal, long term and short term." For both China and Russia, the war in Ukraine is both a challenge to that U.S.-led world order and a way to undermine it, analysts note.

China has held back from openly supporting Russia's war in Ukraine but it has also refused to condemn the invasion. Instead, it has echoed Moscow in criticizing the U.S. and NATO for what it sees as "fueling the fire" over Ukraine. It has also sought to carve out a niche for itself as peacemaker, calling on both sides to agree a cease-fire and come to the negotiating table for talks.

Behind the scenes, the West is concerned that Beijing could provide lethal weaponry to Russia to enable it to gain the upper hand in Ukraine, as U.S. intelligence suggested last month. Ukraine's Western allies have signaled that any move to do so would be a red line and that, should Beijing cross it, there

would be "consequences" in the form of sanctions placed on China.

Beijing has vehemently denied it is planning on supplying Russia with any military hardware. China's foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said Monday, reiterating previous comments, that the West was supplying weapons to Ukraine, not China, telling reporters that "the U.S. side should stop fueling the fires and fanning the flames ... and play a constructive role for a political solution to the crisis in Ukraine, not the other way around." China has denied it is planning to help Moscow militarily but analysts say Beijing is concerned over the war in Ukraine, noting that China views a Russian failure in Ukraine as a threat, given that it carries the risk of a potentially seismic political fallout back in Russia that in turn could harm Beijing. "The worst case scenario for Beijing now is Russia's complete failure in this war," the ECFR's Bachulska said. "If they begin to think that Russia might fail — and that in the really worst-case nightmare scenario that there [could be then] a pro-democratic government in Moscow — for China, this would be a very threatening scenario," she noted, seen as both a "direct threat to Beijing, and the stability of the CCP [Chinese Communist Party]."



# Norway's child protection services are flawed and reek of cultural imposition

What gives any 'national' agency the moral authority to completely change the course of someone's life?

**Shraddha N Pandey:**

Earlier this month, I watched the trailer of a film called Mrs Chatterjee Vs Norway, based on the true story of Sagarika Bhattacharya. The trailer itself left me with a palpating heart. I had been closely following the story of Ariha Shah, the infant who was separated from her parents by the German government when she was merely 1.5 years old over suspected sexual assault. To see a much older but equally traumatic case about which I had no inkling was confusing. Was this very common in some European nations? I subsequently ordered the book 'The Journey of a Mother', penned by Sagarika Bhattacharya in which she has detailed her account. It was a moving, factual account of her ordeal. Finally, I stepped into the theatre to watch the film inspired by Sagarika's story but I couldn't bear to finish it. The ordeal of a five-month-old baby and a toddler separated from their parents was more than I could tolerate to see. I walked out even before the interval.

I left the theatre fuming at the injustice of it all. Let's get one thing straight. Any person who chooses to live in a different country, does so in quest of a better work and life opportunity. The country allows this in order to gain a workforce so as to contribute towards nation building. What on earth in this entire transaction gives the host country a right to dictate how the family will exist within the confines of their house?

The famous English common law case - Semayne's case - states as such, "The house of everyone is to him as his castle and fortress, as well for his defense against injury and violence, as for his repose." In cases where countries blatantly interfere and judge how people belonging to other cultures raise their children, violate something more intimate than just entering their house. They come in as uninvited guests, judge their parenting and, if they deem fit, take away their child, without so much as cautioning the parents.

How can one even attempt to



define what one's progeny means to her? Reproduction is a very fundamental human impulse. Having children is what has ensured the survival of the human species. Many psychological studies have indicated that initially, when we are attracted to the opposite gender, we subconsciously explore their suitability to produce children with us. I daresay that most people who choose to have children have painstakingly planned the next 20-25 years of their life with their children as an important stakeholder.

What gives any 'national' agency the moral authority to completely change the course of someone's life? In Sagarika's case, a child belonging to a completely different culture was taken away from her parents, because according to Norwegian Child Welfare agency's limited understanding of parenting, the child's own parents were incapable as parents.

This was done following a ten-week observation on more than a dozen counts after complaints that her elder son was reticent. Along with a two-year-old son, an almost one-year-old daughter was also taken away from them. The infant daughter was still breastfeeding. This was done without any warning. The parents never even imagined that if they did not raise their children in an exact Norwegian fashion, they risked losing them!

My parenting experience is limited to only two years, but even I am well aware of the importance of breastfeeding and the reality of postpartum depression. WHO (headquartered in Europe itself) recommends six months of exclusive breastfeeding followed by 1.5 more years if

possible. I am quoting from the WHO website now: "Breast milk is the ideal food for infants. It is safe, clean and contains antibodies which help protect against many common childhood illnesses. Breast milk provides all the energy and nutrients that the infant needs for the first months of life, and it continues to provide up to half or more of a child's nutritional needs during the second half of the first year, and up to one third during the second year of life. Breastfed children perform better in intelligence tests, are less likely to be overweight or obese and less prone to diabetes later in life. Women who breastfeed also have a reduced risk of breast and ovarian cancers."

Now, imagine the scenario. A mother who is not even one year postpartum, who is a breastfeeding mom, who has been taking care of her toddler and is home practically alone, is suddenly detached from both of her children, without a warning, without a chance to improve (if she needed improvement according to the system she was in), without any system in place for her to supply pumped milk for her infant.

There is no say for the parents in the matter of how the child will be raised. The probability of postpartum depression is completely ignored and no rehabilitation for the same is provided. It is so bizarre. Why is this system that shows an utter lack of application of mind, still in place? And, there are several children separated from their parents like this?

Proximity to parents in early childhood is believed to be a very important factor that helps foster the cognitive and non-cognitive

growth of babies. Many studies have shown that the absence of parents in early childhood negatively affects children's development in physical fitness, behaviours, and academic performance.

It is not even fathomable what must have gone through the mind of a two-year-old to be plucked out of one system and inserted in another system without warning, preparation and acclimatization. If I have to take a weeklong vacation with my two-year-old, I start mentally preparing her from days in advance. And, here a toddler is separated from his parents within minutes. It's as tragic as losing your parents in a car crash.

One wonders how this 'government sanctioned abduction' could happen in a so-called first world country. But one doesn't have to look too deep in the past to find that feelings of racial and cultural superiority run deep in the mindset of the people in these places. How else would you explain the plan in 2014 of recreation of a 1914 'human zoo', part of the celebrations of 200 years of the Norwegian constitution and funded by the Government of Norway, to the tune of almost one million Norwegian Kroner.

This zoo was originally maintained in 1914, and called Kongolandsbyen, where 80 Congolese citizens lived for five months and faced the voyeuristic eyes of the citizens of Norway. Norway is one of the countries that, at one time, reaped enormous benefits from the triangular transatlantic slave trade. I was taken back to the thoughts of this zoo when I saw Rani Mukerji's character struggle with home and baby chores while

members of child welfare sat there and made notes about her in Mrs Chatterjee Vs Norway. This is what the superiority complex does. It makes one believe they are better compared to others without any reliable means of comparison.

In a scary irony, there is no indication that the foster care system is at all better at raising children than the anathematised parents' home. In fact, there are many claims that children in such systems are isolated and sometimes, even abused. In a shocking revelation in the BBC series - Our World Season 12 - in the episode called Norway's Silent Scandal, it came to light that in April 2018, a respected Norwegian child psychiatrist was convicted of downloading thousands of images of child pornography.

He had served as an expert on Norway's controversial child protection system and had taken decisions on the issue of whether children should stay with their parents. In all, there were more than two lakh images of children and more than 4,000 hours of video.

The episode shows that during his trial, the psychologist trivializes the issues of downloading the videos. Another psychologist, while defending him, states that not all those downloading such content are actually abusing children. The defending psychologist states that decisions on child custody should be taken based on evidence and not on 'moral panic'.

The cultural differences are clear as day by the views of these psychologists. Morality plays a very big role in Asian culture. One is stunned by watching this episode. By all means, we must make the world a better place for children. However, it is idiotic that some first world countries think that the best way to do this is by suddenly separating parents from children. By completely isolating children from any exposure to parents, as if they are radioactive elements or mass shooters harboring deadly weapons.



# There's Consensus in the West and China to Keep India Down — and George Soros is Agent Provocateur

Utpal Kumar

On Sunday, External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar took a potshot at the West, saying it has a “bad habit” of commenting on others. “They (Western nations) somehow think it is some kind of God-given right,” he added. Jaishankar was responding to a question on Germany and United States’ remarks on the disqualification of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi from Parliament.

Yes, there's an innate tendency in the West to interfere in the internal matters of other countries. But things aren't just as simple for India, especially in recent years. One has seen on several occasions in recent years — from the CAA and Shahin Bagh agitations to the farmers’ protests — several anti-India forces joining hands to create a scenario of utter despair and widespread chaos, on the lines of a toolkit created by Czech Communist Party theoretician Jan Kozák explaining how a small number of communists gained power in Czechoslovakia through parliamentary manoeuvres.

Explaining Kozák's modus operandi, David Horowitz and Richard Poe write in their book, *The Shadow Party*: “The trick was to exert pressure for radical change from



two directions simultaneously — from the upper levels of government and from provocateurs in the streets. Kozák called this tactic ‘pressure from above and below’. One way to exert ‘pressure from below’, as Kozák explained, was to fill the streets with rioters, strikers and protesters, thus creating the illusion of a widespread clamour for change from the grassroots. Radicals in the government would then exert ‘pressure from above’, enacting new laws on the pretext of appeasing the protesters in the street — even though the protesters (or at least their leaders) were themselves part of the plot. The majority of the people would have no idea what was going on. Squeezed from ‘above’ and ‘below’, most would sink into apathy and despair, believing they were hopelessly

outnumbered by the radicals—even though they were not. Thus could a radical minority impose its will on a moderate majority, even under a democratic, parliamentary system.” India, too, is currently facing pressure for radical change from two directions, though with a difference: While the “provocateurs in the streets”

carry Kozák's toolkit characteristics, the “pressure from above” largely comes from ‘friendly’ Western nations and their agencies. One saw a similar scenario just before the 2019 parliamentary elections. Diverse and divergent forces had then joined hands to make a regime change, though with a limited foreign participation. The same forces are active again — this time they are not just being aggressive and desperate, but also their activities are far more coordinated and purposeful.

In all this the role of the Opposition, especially the Congress, has been quite disappointing — and disturbing. The grand old party, which has been in political wilderness for the past nine years and still shows no sign of resurgence, seems to be following a scorched-earth

policy. It becomes obvious when Rahul Gandhi goes abroad and speaks at an international forum: He paints a picture of India that is dark: As a failed democracy, fraught with caste and communal conundrums, and worse, facing an existential crisis under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He willfully forgets that he is demeaning a flourishing democracy on a foreign soil. The same tendency was on display late last week when Congress leader Digvijaya Singh thanked Germany for “taking note of how the Democracy is being compromised in India through persecution of @RahulGandhi”.

For the Congress-led Opposition, seeped in dynastism, minorityism and morose statism, as well the politico-intellectual ecosystem that both sucked and sustained the Nehruvian order, 2024 is a do-or-die moment. It survived the 2019 tremor, but to expect the same in 2024 would be nothing sort of a miracle. Foreign countries and their agencies, however, have an altogether different reason for putting India on notice. Here, ironically, the interest of the West and China doesn't seem to be too divergent. China is alarmed by a new, resurgent India that doesn't mind being muscular at times.

## Mind Your Language, Mr Rahul Gandhi

Bhavdeep Kang

Former Congress MP Rahul Gandhi's contention that he did not have ‘bad intentions’ in equating the Modi surname with ‘thief’ could be true, to the extent that he may have had a single target in mind and not all the Hindus, Muslims and Parsis who bear that name. The question is why he felt free to make so potentially offensive a remark in a public forum?

The founder of Modinagar (and Lalit Modi's grandfather), Gujarmal Modi, might well have taken objection to the “why do all thieves have Modi as the common surname?” characterisation. So might the late Russi Mody, ‘the steel man of India’, or for that matter, the late thespian and filmmaker Sohrab Modi. Either this did not occur to the Congress scion, or if it did, the temptation to smear one particular Modi was so overwhelming that he ignored the unwisdom of tarring whole groups of people.

Would Gandhi have felt equally free to impugn the Yadav surname, borne by millions of people including the head of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), a party that has proved to be a loyal ally of the Congress? Imagine the response of Samajwadi Party (SP) leader Akhilesh Yadav or RJD's Tejaswi Yadav to such a remark! Indeed, if any individual were to ask themselves whether they would tolerate a similar observation vis-a-vis their surname, the answer would most likely be a resounding ‘no’!

At one point, after the Harshad Mehta, Rajendra Sethia and Jain diaries imbroglios, a common joke in metropolitan circles was that ‘a Jain’ was behind every financial scam. But no sensible individual and certainly no politician dreamed of saying so from a public platform. Yet, Gandhi had no hesitation in conflating the

Nirav Modi bank scam and the Lalit Modi-BCCI (Board of Control for Cricket in India) scandal with alleged financial mismanagement in the procurement of Rafael



fighter planes for the Indian Air Force — for which he held Prime Minister Narendra Modi singularly responsible.

The dangerous aspect of such flippant observations is that they end up creating a stereotype, which can potentially fuel social

tensions. The term Yadav, for instance, calls to mind someone from an agricultural/pastoral background, given to wrestling and other martial pursuits, uniting behind leaders with Robin Hood personas. But the media focuses on their muscular politics and the presence of Yadav-led criminal gangs in Western Uttar Pradesh which led to the ‘gunda’ trope, until a more progressive version of the party emerged.

Likewise, the Baniya community is equated with business acumen, and certain negative traits like ruthless profiteering, manipulation and morally dubious financial practices. At the same time, ‘seths’ are credited with philanthropic endeavours and public works, which mitigates the negative view. Politicians may target individual businessmen for controversial deals, but will not diss the community as a whole.

Stereotypes are often misleading. They are generalisations, often oversimplified, about a group of people or even whole nations. Germans are seen as efficient, industrious and stolid, Americans as brash, consumerist and gun-toting and the Chinese as inscrutable. Such tropes are often subject to change. The myth of the ‘Hindu rate of growth’ persisted for years; today, India is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world.

Consider the Sikhs of Punjab, long regarded as martial, hot-headed as they were hard-working and distinguished by unshakeable loyalty and integrity. For young girls in Delhi, until the 1980s, a three-wheeler or taxi driver who wore a turban spelled ‘safety’. In any sticky situation, you looked to a Sikh gentleman for protection. All that changed during the Rajiv Gandhi years and it took a decade to erase ‘Khalistan’ from the public lexicon.



# The History of Sikhism and How the Issue of Khalistan Was Created

The story of the Sikh community is a historically stirring and important chapter within the studies of Indian history. It tells a tale of the rise of a group of people from among the followers of Guru Nanak, a Jat Hindu religious saint, who all ultimately turned into a community of warriors under severe Islamic persecution, and finally created a kingdom of their own under the famous warrior chief Maharaja Ranjit Singh. In the context of the current disturbances created in India and abroad by a group of people who term themselves the Khalistanis (from within the Sikh community), this article will take a brief look at the history of Sikhs, its similarities with Hinduism, and explore how the problem of Khalistan was created.

## HISTORY OF SIKHS

The Sikh sect was founded by Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1538 CE) and continued by nine other Gurus, the last of whom was Guru Govind Singh (1675-1708 CE). Guru Nanak came from a Vaishnava family, living in the part of Punjab which is now in Pakistan, post-1947. He was born at a time when the Islamic invaders had already inflicted grave damage on Hindu morale through persistent and widespread temple destructions, forced conversions, and severe persecution. It was in such an atmosphere that Guru Nanak started his preaching, going back to the original philosophical teachings of Hinduism from the Vedas, Upanishads, and Dharmasastras.

Guru Nanak was actually part of a religious phenomenon that was sweeping India at that time, in response to Islamic aggression, in the form of what was later historically termed the Bhakti movement. As the Hindu kings and chiefs fought against Islamic invaders across the country, Hindu saints and philosophers started a spiritual revolution which came to be known as the Bhakti Movement. The movement, with its central theme based on the Puranas and various Dharmasastras, had few variations, wherein in some parts of India, the saints focused on the Advaita school of thought (mysticism) as found in the Upanishads and Yoga traditions. The Advaita school of thought was popular in the Northwestern parts of the Indian subcontinent, particularly so, because of the large-scale destruction of Hindu temples that these areas had witnessed and the various restrictions faced by the Hindus in their daily religious practices. It was the Advaita school of thought that

Guru Nanak propounded as his spiritual teachings, and through his various idioms and verses. His followers were referred to as Sikhs, a term derived from the Sanskrit word sishyas, meaning devoted followers or disciples. The fourth Guru, Ram Das (1574-1581 CE), excavated a tank that was later named Amritsar, and soon a temple of Hari or Harimandir was built in the middle of this tank, which became the main seat of the Sikh sect, with the sanctum housing the Adi Granth that contains compositions of Sikh Gurus, Hindu saints, and few Sufis influenced by the Advaita philosophy.

## THE ADI GRANTH

Compilation of the Adi Granth was started

also reiterates the same in his book "Why I Supported the Emergency," 2015: "The roots of Sikhism lie deep in the Bhakti form of Hinduism. Guru Nanak picked what he felt were its salient features: belief in one God who is undefinable, unborn, immortal, omniscient, all-pervading and the epitome of Truth; belief in the institution of the Guru as the guide in matters spiritual; unity of mankind without distinction of caste; rejection of idol worship and meaningless ritual; sanctity of the sangat (congregation) which was expected to break bread together at the Guru ka Langar; the gentle way of sahad to approach God while fulfilling domestic obligations;

A new breed of so-called scholars have claimed that Sikhism has very little or nothing to do with Hinduism; however in reality, of the 15020 times the name of God has appeared in the Adi Granth, Guru Nanak himself had used the word "Hari" 630 times in it, while in total, 'Hari' occurs 8,300 times in the book; while 'Rama' appears 2,533 times, along with Prabhu, Gopal Govind, and other Hindu names for the divinity. The purely Sikh term 'Wahe Guru' appears only 16 times in the book (Khushwant Singh, "Why I Supported the Emergency," 2015).

While some 19th-20th British created and later Marxist (post-independence) scholars have put forward theories that the monotheism in Sikhism is derived from Islam, nothing can be farther from the truth. In Vedic Hinduism, there is the concept of Brahman or Supreme Consciousness, the sole Being, and the Creator of all living things in this world, a clear form of monotheism. The Advaita school of thought, as found in the Upanishads, is derived from this concept of the Supreme Brahman, and it is this form of spirituality and philosophy that was adopted by Guru Nanak and the other Gurus of the Sikhs.

## SIKHS AND ISLAMIC PERSECUTION

As the sayings of Guru Nanak gained popularity bringing back many of the converted, it alarmed the Muslim religious heads, and under their guidance, Jahangir (1605-1627 CE) tortured and executed the fifth Sikh Guru, Arjan Dev in 1606, for "spreading falsehood and tempting Muslims to apostasy." Guru Arjan Dev was the first of the two Gurus martyred in the Sikh faith for refusing to change religion and accept Islam.

After the death of Guru Arjan dev, the sixth Guru, Har Govind (1606-1644 CE), decided to introduce martial combat arts in the Sikh community as a self-defence mechanism, and he formed a small army that would resist the Muslim persecution. However, Aurangzeb (1658-1707 CE), summoned the ninth Sikh Guru, Tegh Bahadur (1664-1675 A.D.) to Delhi and had him executed when he refused to accept Islam in 1675. Along with Guru Tegh Bahadur, some of his followers who had accompanied him were also tortured and killed. After this, the 10th and final Guru of the Sikhs, Govind Singh, decided that a change in Sikhism was necessary to fight Islamic oppression; a process already initiated by Guru Har Govind and completed by Govind Singh when he created the Khalsa Panth in 1699 CE.



by the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev (1581-1606 CE), and completed by the tenth Guru, Govind Singh. If one reads the Adi Granth closely, he or she will find that it is completely in sync with the philosophy and spirituality of the Vedas and Upanishads. As Ram Swarup says in his book: "There is nothing in Sikhism - its diction, its imagery, its idiom, its cosmogony, its mythology, its stories of saints and sages and heroes, its metaphysics, its ethics, its methods of meditation, its rituals - which is not derived from the scriptures of Hinduism. The ragas to which the hymns and songs of the Adi Granth were set by the Gurus are based on classical Hindu music. The parikrama (perambulation) performed by Sikhs round every Gurudwara, the dhoop (incense), deep (lamp), naivaidya (offerings) presented by the devotees inside every Sikh shrine, and the prasadam (sanctified food) distributed by Sikh priests resemble similar rites in every other Hindu place of worship. Adip in the tank attached to the Harimandir is regarded as holy by Hindus in general and Sikhs in particular as a dip in the Ganga or the Godavari." Khuswant Singh

hymn singing (kirtan); emphasis on work as a moral obligation. The Adi (first) Granth is essentially a distillation of the Vedanta in Punjabi, the Dasam (tenth) is a compilation of tales of valour of Hindu goddesses, some composed by the Guru himself, others by bards of his court." There are many more such similarities between the Adi Granth and the different Hindu texts, as in the Isa Upanishad, there is a verse that says: "It is far; It is near; It is within all this: It is outside all this." Guru Nanak says the same in the lines: "He is near; He himself is far; He himself is in the midst." A verse from the Taittiriya Upanishads, "From fear of Him, the fire burns, from fear the Sun gives heat, from fear do Indra, Wind and Death spread along" is repeated in the Adi Granth (p. 464) as, "In fear the wind blows ... in fear Dharma Raj (Death) ... in fear the Sun, in fear the moon". The hymn of creation in the Vedas (RV, 10.129) is there in Guru Nanak's Shabads, where he says: "In the beginning, there was indescribable darkness. There was neither earth nor heaven ... neither day nor night..."





# Ram Navami violence in Bengal

**From TMC to BJP and police – the ‘outsider’ is a convenient scapegoat**

The unidentifiable outsider as agent provocateur allows the Trinamool Congress to reiterate that the politics of hate and hostility have been imported into West Bengal and the BJP to distance itself from the aggressive presence of sword-wielding persons in its procession. It is easy enough to see political parties measuring their responses to harvest the hostility and distrust that went up several notches with the outbreak of communal rioting over Ram Navami “Shobha Yatras” in pockets of Howrah and Hooghly districts. The inevitable blame game over who cast the first stone, trashed a parked vehicle and then set it on fire that followed has become the officially approved formula for the Bharatiya Janata Party on the one hand and the ruling Trinamool Congress on the other, with the Congress and the Communist Party of India Marxist-led Left parties delivering tired, scripted responses.

Even as some senior leaders of the BJP insert themselves into locally organised protests in the areas where tension is running high, as the state party chief Sukanta Majumdar and his predecessor Dilip Ghosh have done, there are others in the party who are finding it difficult to explain what happened and why the violence continues. Like the

invisible and menacing foreign hand, the outbreak of communal confrontation is being attributed by politically ambivalent local residents to “outsiders”, clearly with a vested interest in igniting trouble. The narrative has gained traction with even BJP leaders talking about “unknown faces” who penetrated the peaceful shobha yatras of local Ram Bhakts chanting “Jai Shri Ram” like a “war cry”, while aggressively brandishing swords, and unverified viral video clips of guns.

The unidentifiable outsider as agent provocateur is a convenient presence for all political parties. It allows the Trinamool Congress as the dominant ruling party to reiterate that the politics of hate and hostility have been imported into West Bengal to wreck the tradition of communal harmony. It allows the BJP to distance itself from the aggressive presence of sword-wielding persons in its procession. It excuses the police for its professional failure to maintain peace and order in what has become, since 2016, a routine by various affiliates of the BJP during Ram Navami. For the state government and its embattled chief minister, Mamata Banerjee, the outsider, this time, is a problem. The probability of infiltration by outsiders ought to have been estimated by the police and there should have been some

preparedness to deal with trouble makers. If there was no such anticipation it reveals the decline in the professionalism of a police force that was reputedly adept at containing communal tensions and rapidly restoring order. As stories circulate of police personnel cowering when the stones rained down or being absent when vehicles were destroyed followed by arson, the narrative of a Trinamool Congress regime losing control over the coercive machinery of the state is picking up momentum.

The calculated communalisation of politics in West Bengal is new, but it is not unfamiliar. Howrah has been a favourite stamping ground for arms-wielding processions organised by affiliates of the Sangh Parivar. Politically conscious Bengalis were apprehensive about how the Ram Navami celebrations during Ramzan would pan out. The state government must have anticipated trouble. The question is, why then did the rioting spread to Hooghly? And that too, into the industrial belt, where maintaining communal peace is an imperative, as Hindus, Muslims and other minorities live in congested localities. Describing the spreading violence as a natural outcome of the “clash of civilisations” is as dangerously irresponsible as it is deliberately

malevolent. There is nothing natural about communal violence that continues and spreads. One outbreak on one day that is emphatically not murderous violence does not grow and sneak into other areas on its own, unless there is a will to keep the communal fire burning. By appealing to the Hindu majority to protect the Muslim minority as Mamata Banerjee did on Monday, anticipating that there would be more trouble around April 6 when Hanuman Jayanti is celebrated, is chanting an old mantra to ward off an entirely new evil. It has not worked, as pockets in Rishra in Hooghly continue to burn on Tuesday. A decade ago this would have been an adequate message from a strong chief minister to political and community leaders to maintain order and restore normalcy. It is no longer so.

The clash of competing ideologies, majoritarian Hindutva in aggressive mode versus passive secular values, playing out in pockets of Howrah and Hooghly is an indication that the 75 years of politically enforced equilibrium between communities is ending. It is cancelled by the BJP’s dogged push to establish itself as the alternative to the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal.

Also Read | Man seen carrying weapon at Ram Navami procession in Howrah arrested from Bihar

The controlled but continuing violence in Howrah and Hooghly delivers specific messages to voters in rural Bengal where panchayat elections are due soon. It can be read as an appeal for consolidation of Hindu votes by the BJP campaign that the majority is unsafe and threatened in West Bengal, more so because the Trinamool Congress is shaky about its support from Muslim voters. It can be interpreted as an appeal to tolerant Hindus to support the Trinamool Congress or face the consequences of a manufactured volatility in the social equation. It can also be understood as a caution to Bengali-speaking Muslim voters that their best interests are protected by the Trinamool Congress. Amassing votes in the panchayat elections by stirring up Hindu nationalism as a bulwark against Muslim appeasement is a cynical calculation that simplifies the causes of growing mass discontent as economic hardships multiply and fears of more crises and greater uncertainty rise. It helps the incumbent regimes, in the state and at the Centre, to temporarily dodge responsibility for failure.



# Why Congress Should Not See Opposition Unity as an Acceptance of a Rahul Gandhi-Centric Politics

After a Surat court gave him a two-year sentence for defamation, senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was disqualified from Parliament. This caused a huge uproar. Many arch-rivals of the Congress, like the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Trinamool Congress (TMC), came out to show solidarity against the disqualification. But in the first press conference after the disqualification, when Rahul Gandhi again took a dig at Veer Savarkar, the party's ally Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) slammed the Congress. This dissatisfaction is a clear sign that Congress' real problem is that its politics is all about Rahul Gandhi. And if the Congress believes that the show of Opposition solidarity is an acceptance of its Rahul-centric politics, then it will lead to more disenchantment in the Opposition camp.

## UDDHAV THACKERAY'S DISCONTENT

One of the main problems with Rahul Gandhi's politics is that he talks about Indian culture and history without much thought. It is hurtful to see that a tall Opposition leader shows zero empathy towards the feelings of the people,



communities, and sections concerning historical figures and cultures of India. For instance, the Congress party may have a different position than Shiv Sena on the issue of Savarkar, but making statements like "My name is not Savarkar, and I won't apologise" shows a desperately irresponsible politician with zero respect for the allies and even for the communities. It is not that Rahul Gandhi is unaware of the position of the Shiv Sena (UBT) on Savarkar. But he did not feel it was that important because the Congress loves to believe that Gandhis are larger than life. Uddhav Thackeray said, "I want to tell Rahul Gandhi that we walked with you in your 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' as it was

for the fight to save democracy. But I want to openly tell Rahul Gandhi that Savarkar is a god-like figure for us, and we will not tolerate his insult. We are together in the fight to save democracy. But do not make statements or take steps that will create fissures (between the Senate and the Congress)." The discontentment of Uddhav Thackeray should be an eye-opener for the Congress. It is high time for the grand old party to realise that Rahul Gandhi-centric politics will only create more such issues. A person with zero empathy for the allies cannot be the centre of the Opposition alliance because then there will be no balance.

## MESSAGES FOR CONGRESS

FROM OPPOSITION PARTIES Most importantly, the Congress needs to realise that if the Opposition wants to work together, it will have to include the regional political parties. Each regional party comes from a different state and has its own culture and social history. A leader like Rahul Gandhi who doesn't understand or isn't willing to respect such differences can't be the undisputed leader of such an alliance. The fact that Rahul's disqualification brought the leaders of the Opposition together shows that the Opposition political parties are growing up. They want to make it obvious that cooperation with the Congress can only be based on certain concerns and goals. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) criticised Gandhi harshly in the Parliament and asked him to take back a supposed anti-Indian comment he made in the UK. This seemed to cause a split in the Opposition. While some political groups backed the Congress, others, like the TMC, criticised the grand old party for concentrating only on Rahul Gandhi's conflict with the BJP.

## MANY ISSUES OF OPPOSITION PARTIES

It is important to understand how

strong the Congress party is across India and how much momentum it has gained since Rahul Gandhi led the Bharat Jodo Yatra. But India's Opposition politics has changed since Narendra Modi was elected the prime minister. The AAP, for example, now dominates two significant states, Delhi and Punjab. Gujarat and Goa both have active AAP governments. The entry of AAP occurred at the expense of the Congress. Kejriwal was the first to come out in support of Rahul, but there should not be any doubt that he will approve a Rahul Gandhi-centric political narrative of the Opposition.

For example, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, who is in charge of the Bengal Congress, criticises the TMC government both inside and outside of Bengal. But at the same time, the Bengal Congress wants Banerjee's support in the Parliament. The TMC itself dismantled the Meghalaya Congress and stole its electoral support. Political parties such as AAP and TMC, or even BRS and SP, are concerned that if the Opposition's entire optics become Rahul-centric, they will be pushed to the sidelines.

# Western Frenemies Do Not Want a Strong India To Contend With

External Affairs Minister (EAM) Dr S Jaishankar called it a "bad habit" that the West had. He said that "the West thinks it has a God-given right" to comment on the internal affairs of India, and cast aspersions on its leadership. He warned that this sort of abuse of international protocol could go both ways. And he spoke, not only as a minister of the realm, but also a distinguished former diplomat. To a certain extent it already is, with the Indian media regularly calling out the Western interference, and pointing out its many shortcomings on its home turf.

It is a mote in one's own eye syndrome, to paraphrase the Bible. Multiple matters, ranging from global warming-based natural disasters, forest fires, frequent shootings at schools, racist killings by police, pogroms allowed by dissident Islamists and Khalistanis, against Hindus, or Indian Missions, render most of the Western carping about India nonsensical.

It is also an intrinsic racist bias, where problems that concern the White nations are given precedence over those of others. Why should blue-eyed and blond children



die in Ukraine, was one such proposition. Similar questions are not ever asked about the ongoing turmoil in Syria. The EAM has pointed to this as well.

Overall, this refusal to take Western bias and distortion as acceptable is a feature of current Indian foreign policy.

The EAM has also pointed to the efforts being made by Indian politicians who have lost electoral favour in India, attempting to pressurise the government by organising and lobbying ill-informed interventions from abroad. He said our Opposition should actually stop inviting comments from abroad on our internal matters.

Distortions on the revocation of Article 370 with reference to Jammu & Kashmir, which was, in the first place, a temporary provision, should have been better understood by the West. Criticism of the Indian judiciary, when it criminally convicts a politician, is tantamount to disrespect of our institutions, particularly when it is mixed

up with allegations of motivation by the government. Slurs also need to be researched properly. Perhaps the real reasons for all this go much deeper.

It is no longer China, Pakistan, Turkey and sundry others, who oppose Indian ascendancy economically, militarily and diplomatically.

Against these detractors, from whose ranks Malaysia, with its massive sales of palm oil to India, has wisely dropped out, a large number of countries have come forward to back India.

These include the 120 countries India reached out to, in addition to the ones

formally in the G20, under India's chairmanship for this year. Many are from all the nations of Africa, South America, West Asia and the Asia-Pacific.

Quite a few of these regard India as a torch-bearer and benign influence for the Global South. This more so as the United Nations General Assembly, (UNGA), has fallen into ineffectiveness, hijacked by Islamic interest groups, and China.

But even as India is a member of QUAD, BRICS, SCO, G-20, ASEAN, BIMSTEC, etc, while associating with AUKUS; a certain resentment of its rise, even amongst its Western friends, seems to be brewing alongside. Prominent friends in the West, including the United States, Canada, Britain, Germany, have taken to regularly commenting on and criticising India's internal affairs and its leaders in its media for some years now. Targets include Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, and External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar.



# Amit Shah Has Understated Congress Role in Agency Misuse: Party Exercised Quasi-Dictatorship

In a 1937 article, Rashtrapati, published in the Calcutta-based journal, *Modern Review*, Jawaharlal Nehru imputed to himself all the traits of a dictator and concluded that “we want no Caesars.” The original pronunciation of the Anglicised “Caesar” is “Kaiser,” meaning “despot,” “dictator,” etc. We all know how the world burned due to German Kaiserism, a bloody phenomenon which occurred during Nehru’s radioactive years in politics and public life. Nehru wrote this article under a pseudonym that reeks of irony: Chanakya.

Given some of the more shocking revelations from the overall Nehruvian crypt, we can conclude in hindsight that the aforementioned article is a study in classic narcissism. A vainglorious love letter he penned to himself. Here is how an excerpt reads: “Watch him again. There is a great procession and tens of thousands of persons surround his car and cheer him in an ecstasy of abandonment. He stands on the seat of the car, balancing himself rather well, straight and seemingly tall, like a god, serene and unmoved by the seething multitude. Suddenly there is that smile again, or even a merry laugh and the tension seems to break and the crowd laughs with him, not knowing what it is laughing at. He is godlike no longer but a



human being claiming kinship and comradeship with the thousands who surround him and the crowd feels happy and friendly and takes him to its heart.” “Is all this natural or the carefully thought out trickery of the public man? Perhaps it is both and long habit has become second nature now...With his seeming carelessness and insouciance, he performs on the public stage with consummate artistry. Whither is this going to lead him and the country?... These questions would be interesting in any event, for Jawaharlal is a personality which compels interest and attention... Men like Jawaharlal, with all their capacity for great and good work, are unsafe in democracy...A little twist and Jawaharlal might turn a dictator sweeping aside the paraphernalia of a slow-moving

democracy ... dictator in recent Indian history, it is Sanjay Jawaharlal cannot become a fascist. And yet he has all the makings of a dictator in him...with all his love of the crowd, intolerance of others and a certain contempt for the weak and the inefficient...”

“We have a right to expect good work from him in the future. Let us not spoil that and spoil him by too much adulation and praise. His conceit is already formidable. It must be checked. We want no Caesars.” Reading this today feels surreal. But it is also a representative essay in which we can trace the psychological origins of the decadal Nehruvian abuse of Government machinery. The abuse was merely the consequence that flowed from such a psyche. In 1937, nobody in the Congress had even dreamed that India would get freedom in just a decade. Yet, here was Nehru anonymously glorifying himself in the third person and worrying that his self-professed greatness would transform him into a dictator. To put it bluntly, it appears that Nehru had convinced himself so early that he was born to rule, and not govern. But if anybody qualifies for the title of

dictator in recent Indian history, it is Sanjay Jawaharlal. Both Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi couldn’t go the whole hog because they were constrained and were prudent enough to realise not to overstep these limits. The ex-Communist writer and intellectual, Philip Spratt — Nehru’s contemporary — has given perhaps the best assessment of Nehru as a shackled Communist dictator: “The figure in world politics who most resembles [Nehru] is [Fidel] Castro. Castro got into power on false pretences. i.e. as a liberator, not as a Communist, but within a year or so he had liquidated his opponents and built up the Communists so far that he was able to drop the mask. Nehru got into power on the same false pretences, i.e. as a liberator... and he has proceeded in the same direction, but far more cautiously. Castro succeeded Batista; Nehru succeeded Gandhi on the one hand, and the legalistic British regime on the other. The two legacies between them have cramped his Communist style. Nehru has sometimes sighed for a cadre such as Mao Tse-tung built up during the Long March. But such a cadre, while it might have enabled him to enforce Communism, would not have made it any more congenial to India...Communism remains wholly alien to this conservative, religious, individualistic, property-conscious, peasant-minded country.”

## Pakistan is Irrelevant to India’s Rise

The Pakistan economy is caught in a death spiral, coming out of which is no longer possible with the traditional tools of living on the dole from ‘friendly’ countries like China, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Even if Pakistan gets the stalled International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme, which will unlock a few billion dollars from its friends, it will merely be enough for a couple of months. What Pakistan needs to do is rethink and restructure its economy. Doing this will necessarily entail junking some of the pernicious foreign, defence and security policies that Pakistan has followed, even internalised, in relation to India. The good news for Pakistan is that some Pakistanis — a few sensible ones — have increasingly been talking of the need to reach out to India and reconnect or recouple its economy with India’s. The bad news is that there aren’t many takers for this advice in the Pakistani system and



society.

Even the ones who advocate normalising ties with India by opening up trade, commerce and investment links, harbour some rather unrealistic notions. They seem to think that it is as easy and simple as flicking on a switch. All Pakistan needs to do is offer normalisation and a desperate India will come running to clasp its hand. The template these people want Pakistan to follow is that of China

and India — the political and territorial disputes running parallel to the trade and economic relationship. The fact that there are serious strains in the India-China relationship and a growing desire to steadily reduce dependence on China and decouple India’s economy from China’s doesn’t seem to have registered with the Pakistanis. They think that they can continue political hostility, export terrorism and keep their irredentist claims over Kashmir and

at the same time enjoy a profitable economic relationship with India. Another underlying assumption, a rather heroic one, is that normalisation is as much in India’s interest as it is in Pakistan’s. In other words, it is a win-win because India cannot afford to have a failing, tottering and hostile Pakistan as that will retard India’s growth and become an obstacle in India’s rise. The Pakistanis appear to have convinced themselves that “regions prosper, not countries”. This means that by turning its back on Pakistan, India will never be able to achieve its ambitions. What the Pakistanis don’t get is that regions can indeed prosper even if some countries do not become part of a regional block. For example, in Europe, the countries that were not part of the European Union (EU) did not benefit as much as the countries that became part of the EU. Similarly, in the sub-continent, it is entirely possible that other countries might become part of a

regional block for economic cooperation and prosper, even though Pakistan is not part of the block. In any case, do the Pakistanis even consider themselves part of this region? After all, they all deny their Indian heritage, culture and roots and prefer to think of themselves as Arabs, Persians, Turks or Central Asians, and also see their country as part of one of these regions. As far as India is concerned, compared to Pakistan, there is far greater potential and positivity in building closer economic ties with other countries of the sub-continent, some of whom have already benefitted from their relationship with India. Clearly, it is a load of hogwash when Pakistanis declare that India cannot do without them. In recent months, Pakistanis have been disabused of the long-held belief that they are too dangerous to fail and that they are so important that no one will let their economy melt down.



# PM Modi Holds Talks with Bhutan King; Focus on Bilateral Ties



Minister Lotay Tshering on the Doklam tri-junction were seen by many as the Himalayan nation cosying up to Beijing though Bhutan maintained that there is no change in its stance on the border dispute. It is learnt that the talks between PM Modi and King Wangchuck were focused on ways to expand bilateral ties.

The Bhutanese King was received at the Delhi airport by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, in a special gesture reflecting the importance New Delhi has attached to the visit. On Monday evening, Jaishankar called on the visiting dignitary and said the King's vision for Bhutan's future and for strengthening the unique

partnership with India is deeply appreciated. Bhutan is a strategically important country for India and the defence and security ties between the two sides have witnessed significant expansion in the last few years.

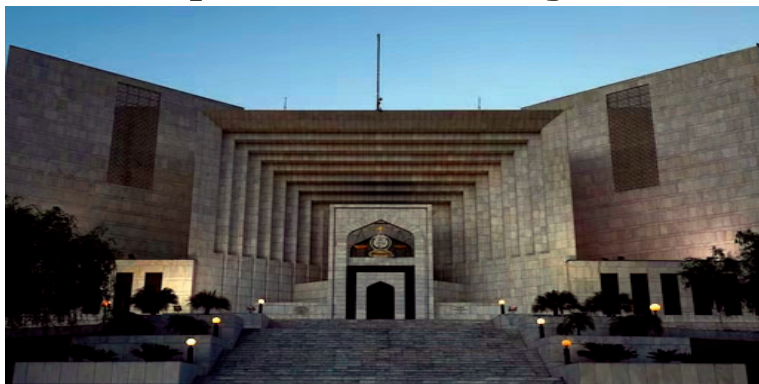
The strategic ties witnessed an upward trajectory in the last few years in the backdrop of a 73-day face-off between Indian and Chinese troops in Doklam tri-junction in 2017. The Doklam plateau is considered an important area for India's strategic interest. The standoff at Doklam tri-junction in 2017 began after China tried to extend a road in an area that Bhutan claimed belonged to it.

India had strongly opposed the construction as it

would have impacted its overall security interests. The India-China face-off was resolved following several rounds of talks. In October 2021, Bhutan and China signed an agreement on a "three-step roadmap" to expedite negotiations to resolve their festering boundary dispute. Bhutan shares an over 400-km-long border with China and the two countries have held over 24 rounds of boundary talks in a bid to resolve the dispute. In a recent interview, the Bhutanese prime minister had said that China has an equal say in resolving the border dispute in Doklam. India has consistently been Bhutan's top trading partner, and remains the leading source of investments in Bhutan.

(SAI Bureau) Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday held talks with Bhutanese King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck focusing on ways to bolster bilateral engagement in a range of areas including economic cooperation. The King began his two-day visit to India on Monday amid some concerns in New Delhi over China's attempts to expand influence over Thimphu. Certain remarks by Bhutan Prime

## Pakistan Supreme Court Declares ECP's Move to Postpone Punjab Assembly Polls Unconstitutional



**The Supreme Court of Pakistan has ruled that the Election Commission's decision to postpone Punjab Assembly polls until October 8 is unconstitutional**

(News Agency) Pakistan's Supreme Court on Tuesday ruled that the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) decision to delay elections till 2008 to the Punjab Assembly was unconstitutional.

"Constitution and law do not give [ECP] the authority to postpone the election date... Elections in Punjab and KP should be transparent, impartial and as per the law," the verdict said. The court ruled that

the ECP's order was unconstitutional and that it had no powers to postpone the election dates. The elections in Punjab will now be held on May 14, as originally planned. The verdict was announced by a three-member bench, headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan Umar Ata Bandial, with Justices Munib Akhtar and Ijazul Ahsan in Court Room 1 with heavy security deployed outside. The top court said the decision to postpone the Punjab and KP elections is null and void while restoring the original election schedule. The court verdict said the last date for submitting appeals against the returning officer's decision is April 10 and said the poll tribunal will make its decision on the appeal on April 17. It said the federal government should

provide PKR 21 billion in funds by April 10 to the ECP. The bench directed the election commission to revert to its prior election timetable, asserting that the ECP could not exceed the 90-day legal limit.

The court pointed out that 13 days were lost due to the ECP's decision and ordered the caretaker government in the Punjab province to help the election commission. "The Punjab government should give a security plan to the Election Commission," the verdict said. The ECP was told to notify the court if the government refused to comply. The apex court's ruling on March 1 mandated that the election for the Punjab Assembly must take place within 90 days, in accordance with the date announced by Pakistan President Arif Alvi, following the dissolution of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab province assemblies.

The court directed the government to allocate PKR10 billion for Punjab's election expenses before April 10 and asked the ECP to report on it.

## Afghan Taliban raid kills 6 members of Islamic State group



in Balkh, the operation late Monday targeted an IS hideout in Nahri Shahi district and six members of the militant group were killed. The Taliban swept across Afghanistan in August 2021, seizing power as U.S. and NATO forces were withdrew after 20 years of war.

The international community has not recognized the Taliban government, wary of the harsh measures they have imposed since their takeover — including restricting rights and freedoms, especially for women and minorities. In March, a member of the Islamic State group carried out a suicide bombing that killed three people, including Daud Muzmal, the Taliban's appointed governor for Balkh. Muzmal is one of the most senior Taliban officials to have been killed since they took power in mid-August 2021.

(News Agency) ISLAMABAD — An overnight raid by Taliban forces in Afghanistan's northern Balkh province killed six members of the extremist Islamic State group, a Taliban spokesman said Tuesday.

The regional affiliate of the IS group — known as the Islamic State in Khorasan Province — has been the key rival of the Taliban since their takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021. The militant group has increased its attacks, targeting both Taliban patrols and members of Afghanistan's Shiite minority. According to Mohammad Asif Waziri, a spokesman for the police chief



# Fire races through clothing market in Bangladesh capital

(News Agency) — Firefighters were working to get under control a massive fire that burned through a popular clothing market

after it began. Anwarul Islam, another fire service official, said they didn't know how the fire originated. Many shop owners in

Bangabazar Market burst into tears; they had been hoping for good business ahead of Islam's largest festival Eid-al Fitr later this month. "I have two shops here. Everything is gone," said Mohammed Mohsin as he sobbed. "All my capital has been invested here. Why does God punish me this way?" Many merchants tried to save some of their belongings but



and spread to other small markets and buildings in Bangladesh's capital Tuesday. No casualties have been reported so far. The fire started at Bangabazar Market in Dhaka at 6:10 a.m. and firefighters from 47 units were working to douse the blaze, fire service official Rafi Al Faruk told The Associated Press by phone. It continued to rage six hours

failed as the fire spread quickly. Fires are common in commercial places in Bangladesh because of lax monitoring and lack of fire safety arrangements. But the country's garment industry, which has had devastating fires in the past, has improved significantly over the last decade.

## Taliban order bars Afghan women from working with UN

(News Agency) "Our colleagues on the ground at the UN mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) received word of an order by the de facto authorities that bans female national staff members of the UN from working," Stéphane Dujarric, spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General, told reporters at UN

Headquarters during the regular daily briefing. "We are still looking into how this



development would affect our operations in the country," he said. "We expect to have more meetings with the de facto authorities tomorrow in Kabul, on which we are trying to seek some clarity." Following Afghanistan's fall to the Taliban in August 2021, the UN remained committed to stay and deliver, while calling for unified support for the country's people. Despite relatively constructive initial engagements with Taliban authorities, decisions over the last year by the fundamentalist leadership have included bans on women accessing higher education, working for NGOs, and accessing many public spaces. Answering questions from reporters, Mr. Dujarric said an official communication coming from the Taliban leadership, had indicated that the order would apply to the whole country.



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# Who Is Todd Blanche, Former Federal Prosecutor who Joined Trump's Legal Team

(News Agency) Former US president Donald Trump added a new lawyer to his defence team, Todd Blanche, a day before he is expected to surrender to face charges stemming from the hush-money payment he made to several women, including adult film star Stormy Daniels, before the 2016 US Presidential Elections, the New York Times said in a report.

The New York Times said Blanche will join Susan Necheles and Joseph Tacopina and is a former federal prosecutor who has handled several white-collar cases.

Necheles and Tacopina have represented Trump in the probe ordered by the Manhattan district attorney Alvin Bragg's office which led to the indictment. The indictment will be unsealed when Trump will be arraigned.

The former president denied wrongdoing and will plead not guilty in front of Judge Juan Merchan. Blanche is known for being an aggressive but measured advocate and the New York Times said he has ties with the former president's legal team. Boris Epshteyn, a top Trump adviser,



suggested the former president hire Blanche, the New York Times said, citing people familiar with the developments. The 48-year-old lawyer represented Trump's campaign committee chief Paul Manafort. Manafort was indicted on charges of mortgage fraud and other state felonies in 2019. He received pardon from Trump in 2018 despite being charged earlier.

The New York Times said Blanche also previously offered legal services to Igor Fruman,

a Soviet-born former associate of Rudy Giuliani's who pleaded guilty in 2021 and was sentenced to over a year in prison "on a count of soliciting a political contribution from a foreign donor".

He earlier worked for the law firm Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft. "Todd is an excellent lawyer, and I am thrilled that he has joined the team," his new team member Necheles was quoted as saying by the New York Times.

On Monday, Necheles said, "Todd is an excellent lawyer, and I am thrilled that he has joined the team."

Blanche worked for almost ten years as an assistant US attorney at the Southern District of New York, overseeing white-collar and violent crimes. He earned his law degree while working full-time as a paralegal at the office.

Necheles and Tacopina, who have represented high-profile clients, have ties to Trump. Necheles represented Trump's business in a trial last year that resulted in conviction, and the same judge, Juan Merchan, is expected to oversee Trump's criminal case.

## Train Crash in Netherlands Kills 1, Leaves 19 Seriously Injured



(News Agency) One person died and 19 others were seriously injured early Tuesday when a high-speed passenger train slammed into construction equipment and derailed, emergency services told news agency AFP.

"One person has died and at least 30 people have been injured. Eleven people are being housed in homes of local residents, while the seriously injured are taken to hospital," Hollands Midden emergency services was quoted as saying by the AFP.

The crash took place near the village of Voorschoten, between The Hague and Amsterdam.

The accident happened at

around 3:30 am (local time). The double-decker intercity train slammed onto a construction crane and other materials on the tracks at Voorschoten, about eight kilometres from the Hague.

Images shared by Dutch media showed the front carriage derailed and ploughing into a nearby field. The second carrier landed on its side. One carriage caught fire while the third carriage remained upright, AFP said, citing Dutch news agency ANP.

It was earlier reported that the train collided with another train but later local officials said that the train collided with a construction crane. A freight

train was present on spot but was not involved in the crash. Dutch Railways (NS) said in a tweet that trains between Leiden city and parts of The Hague were cancelled due to the collision.

Close to 60 people were on board when the collision occurred. Ambulance services, trauma helicopter and other emergency services were rushed to the scene en masse and those injured were taken to the hospital. "We heard a loud bang and suddenly the lights went out. We couldn't initially get out of the train because there was no electricity," an unidentified witness told the local Omroep

West television news.

## Saudi Arabia Carries Out Rare Execution during Holy Month of Ramadan

(News Agency) Saudi Arabia has executed a man during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which a rights group said on Monday had not occurred in years.

The execution took place on March 28 - five days into the fasting month - in the Medina region which includes Islam's second holiest city, the official Saudi Press Agency has reported.

It said the man put to death, a

most prolific executioners.

Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Islam.

ESOHR said the Ramadan case brought to 17 the number of death sentences carried out this year.

Saudi Arabia executed 147 people in 2022 - more than double the 2021 figure of 69, according to AFP tallies.

Last year also saw the resumption of executions for drug crimes, ending a

moratorium that lasted for almost three years.

More than 1,000 death sentences have been carried out since King Salman assumed power in 2015, according to a report published



Saudi national, had been convicted of murder. He stabbed the victim and set him on fire, the report said.

"Saudi Arabia executed a citizen during Ramadan," said the Berlin-based European Saudi Organisation for Human Rights (ESOHR) in a statement.

Citing Saudi interior ministry capital punishment data, the group said "no sentence has been implemented during the holy month" since 2009 in the kingdom, one of the world's

earlier this year by British-based Reprieve and ESOHR.

The kingdom has often carried out death sentences by beheading. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, said in an interview with The Atlantic magazine that the kingdom "got rid of" the death penalty

except for cases of murder or when someone "threatens the lives of many people", according to a transcript published by state media in March 2022.



# Pak SC to Deliver Verdict on Poll Delay: Govt Says Won't Accept 'Hasty' Decision, Imran Shares Two Choices

(News Agency) The Supreme Court of Pakistan's three-member bench, comprising Chief Justice of Pakistan Umar Ata Bandial, Justice Ijazul Ahsan, and Justice Munib Akhtar will deliver the verdict on a Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) petition against a delay in Punjab Assembly elections on Tuesday after a three-member bench reserved the ruling.

The Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) decided to postpone polls to the Punjab Assembly until October 8, 2023 earlier last month. The bench heard all parties, including the government, the PTI and the ECP, but did not hear the counsels of the coalition parties on Monday.

"We will not accept if a decision is made in haste on such a sensitive and important issue. We have tried our best to maintain the institution's sanctity," Law minister Azam Nazeer Tarar said during the National Assembly session on Monday.

Tarar said a decision made in haste on such a sensitive and important



issue will not be accepted and criticised the judiciary for giving "a dictator nine years instead of three months".

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif-led government also urged Pakistan President Dr. Arif Alvi to immediately sign the Supreme Court Practice and Procedure Act, 2023 and help Pakistan end the constitutional and political crisis.

Foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari warned that Pakistan faces the risk of being pushed into an "emergency-like situation" or

"martial law" due to the ongoing constitutional crisis.

He said if the Supreme Court does not constitute a larger bench to hear the PTI's petition against the ECP's decision to postpone

polls to the Punjab Assembly the nation could be pushed to the brink, calling for a larger bench to prevent a constitutional crisis that could lead to an emergency or martial law. Former prime minister Imran Khan said Pakistan is at a turning point in its constitutional history and it has two choices, either become junta-governed Myanmar or follow the footsteps of Turkey, referring to the military coup that was thwarted in 2016 and allowed democracy to prevail. "Today we stand at a

crossroads in our constitutional history where we can either become Turkey or become another Myanmar. Each one of us has to choose whether to stand with the constitution, rule of law and democracy like the Justice Movement or side with the corrupt mafia, the law of the jungle and fascism," Imran Khan said in a tweet.

The postponement of the Punjab Assembly elections is now the most pressing issue in Pakistan, despite the economic crisis, with the opposition accusing the ECP of overstepping its mandate and violating the Constitution.

The PTI has called for fresh elections, arguing that the ECP's decision to postpone the elections was unconstitutional and a violation of the rights of the people of Punjab. The ECP has defended its decision, saying it was taken in the interest of public safety and to ensure free and fair elections and since the situation is restive in Pakistan's northwestern provinces, it cannot hold elections at this point.

## Suspect in cafe attack that killed Russian blogger is jailed

(News Agency) A woman suspected of involvement in a bombing that killed a Russian military blogger at a St. Petersburg cafe should stay in custody for two months pending an investigation, a court in Moscow

Russia's second-largest city. Russian authorities described the bombing as an act of terrorism and blamed Ukrainian intelligence agencies for orchestrating it. Police arrested 26-year-old St.



ruled Tuesday.

The blogger, Vladlen Tatarsky, 40, was an ardent supporter of the war in Ukraine and filed regular reports on the fighting from the front lines. He was killed Sunday as he led a discussion at a riverside cafe in the historic heart of St. Petersburg,

Petersburg resident Darya Trepova, who was seen on video moments before the blast presenting Tatarsky with a statuette that is believed to have contained explosives.

The Interior Ministry released a video in which Trepova told a police officer that she brought the bust to

the cafe. When asked who gave it to her, she said she would explain later. The circumstances under which Trepova spoke were unclear, including whether she was under duress.

The National Anti-Terrorist Committee, which coordinates counterterrorism operations, said the bombing was "planned by Ukrainian special services." It said Trepova was an "active supporter" of imprisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny. Last year, she was arrested and spent 10 days in custody after taking part in an anti-war rally. Ukrainian authorities did not directly respond to the accusation, but President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in reference to the attack that he doesn't think about events in Russia, and his top adviser described the bombing as part of Russia's internal turmoil.

While Trepova was arrested in St. Petersburg, her case was sent to Moscow, where the country's top investigative agencies are headquartered, an apparent reflection of its high priority. In a closed-door hearing, Moscow's Basmany District

Court ordered Trepova to remain in custody until June 2 pending the investigation. Russian law suggests a life sentence for terrorism-related crimes, but life terms aren't handed down to women, who instead face sentences of up to 20 years in prison.

The bombing injured 40 other people, 25 of whom have been hospitalized. It was the latest attack inside Russia on a high-profile pro-war figure. Last year, a nationalist TV commentator was assassinated when a bomb exploded in her SUV outside Moscow.

Tatarsky was the pen name of Maxim Fomin, who had accumulated more than 560,000 followers on his Telegram messaging app channel. Tatarsky, who joined separatists in eastern Ukraine after a Moscow-backed insurgency erupted there in 2014, fought on the front lines for years before turning to blogging.

Military bloggers have become increasingly visible in Russia, supporting the war but occasionally exposing flaws in military strategy while the Kremlin has shut down independent media outlets and muzzled any criticism of the war.



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# 5 Ways the U.S.-China Cold War Will Be Different From the Last One

Guardrails and statesmanship will be even more important this time around. 2022 was arguably the most turbulent and transformative year in international politics since the revolutions of 1989. It was turbulent because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the crisis over Taiwan, but it was transformative in the way the United States acknowledged China as a superpower rival. In the U.S. National Security Strategy issued in October, the Biden administration not only identified China as its most important security challenge, but also declared unequivocally that the post-Cold War era is over. If the United States' unipolar power position was the defining feature of the post-Cold War era, the shift to a U.S.-Chinese bipolar power structure will shape a new world order. Ultimately, decisions on war and peace will be made by individual leaders. But to better understand how the new bipolar era might unfold, we must look at its structure: the balance of power, the new system's origin, and the geographic setting. The U.S.-Chinese rivalry is unique in many ways, and its nature provides us with salient information on the new world order, its stability, and the role that might be played by statesmanship.

In terms of balance of power, the U.S.-China rivalry resembles the Cold War, another antagonism between two superpowers. This is why former Obama administration Asia-Pacific advisor Evan Medeiros called the November meeting between U.S. President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Bali, Indonesia, "the first superpower summit of the Cold War Version 2.0." This has raised concerns, particularly in Europe, about the reemergence of competing blocs, and among developing countries about being stuck in the proverbial middle.

But the new U.S.-China bipolarity is a structural fact and can't just be wished away. It is the result of several decades of Chinese economic and military growth that has closed the gap to the United States. What's more, a bipolar power structure

is generally considered to be more stable than a multipolar one—so leaders such as German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who has spoken out in favor of a multipolar order, should be careful what they wish for. The U.S.-Soviet rivalry, despite its arms races and



tense episodes, was characterized by a high degree of stability and the absence of direct armed conflict between the two superpowers. That's why historian John Lewis Gaddis called the Cold War era the "long peace."

That said, all bipolar systems may not be equally stable. There are good reasons to believe that the structure of the U.S.-China bipolar rivalry will make the new era less stable than the Cold War. And when structural stability is weaker, the need for statesmanship and guardrails to manage the system is stronger. In particular, there are five structural factors that will make the new bipolar era less stable than the Cold War.

First, the U.S.-China rivalry is marked by an unstable power transition dynamic. Historical evidence shows that there is a real danger of major war when a rising power threatens to overtake a declining hegemon—think of the rising German Empire striving for its "place in the sun" in the years leading up to World War I. The Cold War did not have this dynamic: Both the United States and the Soviet Union emerged as superpowers from the ashes of World War II, and were peer competitors in military terms from the start. The current situation is different, with China gradually catching up to the United States. Moreover, through its economic might, China's potential as a

superpower is greater than the Soviet Union's ever was. In addition, because the Chinese military is still inferior at this point, there is less room for statesmanship to negotiate arms control agreements; China is unwilling to put a cap on military development that would

lock its inferior status in place. Recent statements have suggested China may already have surpassed the United States in number of nuclear warheads on its intercontinental ballistic missiles. But in terms of total nuclear inventory—including warheads deployed on intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and strategic bombers, as well as inactive nuclear warheads—China's nuclear stockpile is still relatively small compared to that of the United States.

Second, in contrast to the Cold War, the main theater of the U.S.-Chinese military rivalry is naval, which is inherently less stable and at greater risk of a limited war. The Cold War's main focus on the European land theater allowed the strategy of massive retaliation to emerge, strongly deterring any attempts to cross the fixed line dividing Europe. The use of military force by the two superpowers in Asian waters is less likely to pose an existential threat to either state or risk a nuclear war. China might use nuclear weapons if invaded, but it is much less likely that Chinese leaders will risk all-out war with the United States if some of their ships are destroyed. This increases the risk of a limited war in Asian waters, as the chances of massive escalation are lower than they were in Europe. But even a limited war at sea between two superpowers could

have devastating consequences for regional stability and the global economy.

Third, Taiwan is another source of instability in the new bipolar order. The closest equivalent during the Cold War was the divided city of Berlin, where several tense stand-offs between the superpowers took place. Taiwan represents the greatest risk of a great power war in the era of U.S.-Chinese rivalry, with uncertain escalation dynamics in terms of both geographic spread and weapons use.

Fourth, new warfighting domains in space and the cyber realm provide Washington and Beijing with additional avenues for coercion and disruption. Cyberattacks may range from sabotage, theft, and espionage to a so-called digital Pearl Harbor: a large and sophisticated surprise cyberattack in order to shape the environment in advance of a military conflict or to delay or deter the rival's response. There is a real risk of inadvertent escalation due to cyber capabilities in a future Sino-U.S. crisis. A similar dynamic is possible also within the space domain, with preemptive strikes on or by satellites leading to an uncertain escalation ladder. Fifth, contrary to the theory that interdependence reduces the risk of war, the high level of economic and technological interdependence between the United States and China is potentially more conflict prone than the relative autarky of the two blocs during the Cold War. Indeed, the historian Gaddis pointed to the lack of interdependence between the two superpowers as an important factor enhancing the stability of the Cold War rivalry, mainly because not depending on a potentially hostile rival increased a superpower's sense of security. China's high level of interdependence with the world economy is the very reason why some observers prefer to use labels other than "cold war" when describing the U.S.-China bipolar system—suggesting terms such as competitive coexistence, cold coexistence, or conflictual coexistence. But the level of interdependence in the U.S.-China rivalry leaves more room for economic warfare

than was the case during the Cold War; in a bipolar power structure, the two superpowers view mutual interdependence as vulnerability and thus seek to reduce it.

This decoupling process, which is now underway, will create friction: between the two superpowers, among the United States and its allies, and within the international economic order. For instance, the U.S.-Chinese technology war is already leading to a new kind of conflict, with China hitting back at U.S. chip sanctions by launching a World Trade Organization dispute. U.S.-Chinese economic warfare and decoupling will challenge the international economic order in new ways. In addition, concerns voiced by Scholz and French President Emmanuel Macron about a new cold war illustrate U.S. allies' reservations about decoupling. The steady march of globalization over more than three decades and the currently high level of interdependence between China and the United States are deceiving us. They lure us into believing that great power rivalry in the 21st century is relatively stable and easily managed. However, the five structural dimensions outlined above—a dynamic power transition, an inherently less stable naval rivalry, Taiwan as a hotspot, new space and cyber technologies, and the risks associated with economic interdependence—suggest that the structure of the U.S.-China rivalry may actually be more fragile than that of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry. If we remain aware of these five sources of systemic weakness, the two superpowers can to some extent compensate by establishing guardrails.

Developing guardrails will not be an easy task. Arms control will be difficult to achieve in the near future, since China is still catching up militarily. With regard to Taiwan, both Beijing and Washington have practiced strategic ambiguity for decades. Wise and sound statesmanship will be needed on both sides to develop and continually adjust the rules of the new bipolar game. Just like the Cold War, the U.S.-China rivalry and the respective strategies of both superpowers will only evolve over time.



# Make no mistake, China's cold war against the West is heating up

What may well prove to be America's most colossal intelligence failure in recent history was observed by the entire world last week, slow motion, and in real time.

China's high-altitude surveillance balloon, equipped with sophisticated antennas and other collection and transmission features, was permitted to continue "purposefully maneuvering" and loitering over America's most sensitive nuclear and missile assets for almost a week — all in plain sight of a U.S. administration that consciously allowed it to happen. China may have acquired a greater quantity of critical intelligence during that period than it has gained from the combined work of multiple high-level human spies in recent years. House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul (R-Texas) said that, at a minimum, the overflight "did a lot of damage" to U.S. national security: "Going over those sites ... would cause great damage."

China's communist government officials and military planners no doubt are digesting the feast of sensitive information they easily gleaned about the location and functions of America's "family jewels."

The date when the balloon was launched from China has not been disclosed, if it is even known by the U.S. intelligence community, but at some point when the craft was over the Pacific Ocean, its existence and its course toward the North American continent were discovered and then continuously observed.

Yet, it was allowed to enter U.S. territorial airspace somewhere over Alaska's Aleutian Islands on Jan. 28 and then was tracked as it traversed Alaska and Canada, the other partner country in the North American Aerospace Defense Command. The balloon re-entered U.S. airspace over Montana, where it was spotted and publicized by civilian photographers. Only then was its presence confirmed by the U.S. government, which offered changing rationales for failing to stop its passage.

At first, officials said destroying it in flight might endanger people or property on the ground, even though there had been ample opportunity to do so over U.S. territorial waters in the Pacific or over unpopulated or sparsely-populated areas of Alaska, Canada or Montana. Any potentially endangered people on the ground could have been warned to take temporary shelter as they would

for a tornado or hurricane.

To make matters worse, officials asserted that ground safety was the paramount concern because the balloon evinced "no hostile act or intent" toward the United States. At a Defense Appropriations Subcommittee hearing, Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) expressed the incredulity of others at the government's claim: "Why wouldn't a foreign military surveillance aircraft violating U.S. airspace inherently be considered to have a hostile intent?" A second rationale for restraint was that allowing the balloon to continue flying enabled the U.S. government to observe its operation and ascertain what it was trying to observe and collect. The obvious answer to such seemingly naive speculation was that the balloon hovering over critically important strategic sites was seeking to scoop up everything it could get. Administration spokesman John Kirby has confirmed the administration knew what the spy balloon was looking at — but we let it fly anyway. The nature and purpose of three other recent objects (one over Canada) was not clear but, in an "abundance of caution," we shot them down because of a possible threat to civil aviation.

The existence of so many hostile objects in U.S. airspace indicates the issue is broader than the fecklessness of the Biden administration. The Pentagon stated that retrospective examination of data revealed it had failed to detect three earlier balloons that either approached or entered U.S. airspace during the Trump administration and another under Biden. Gen. Glen VanHerck, head of the Northern Command, said, "[A]dditional means of collection ... made us aware of those balloons. ... We did not detect those threats and that's a domain awareness gap that we have to figure out." The administration has disclosed that the Chinese government has flown its fleet of spy balloons "over more than 40 countries across five continents." Beijing clearly is confident of its ability to operate balloon flights that evade U.S. detection, paving the way for further intelligence adventures. It is a disturbing state of affairs at a time when China is expanding its formidable nuclear weapons arsenal and intercontinental ballistic missile capability. Another lesson for U.S.-China relations that should have been learned long ago is the

futility of expecting that improved military-to-military relations — during which we sometimes treat the Chinese to close-up observation of our systems and capabilities — will create trust and enhance communications between our governments in a crisis situation. Adm. Joseph Preuher, when he was commander of the Pacific Command, recounted to an Atlantic Council meeting in 1999 how he cultivated good relations with his Chinese counterparts so that "if the balloon ever went up" and a crisis erupted, he could pick up the phone and talk with his contacts to ameliorate the situation.

Two years later, Preuher was serving as ambassador to China and the proverbial balloon did go up when a reckless Chinese fighter pilot collided with a slow-moving U.S. reconnaissance plane over international waters near Hainan Island. The pilot was killed, the damaged U.S. plane had to make an emergency landing on Hainan, and the furious Chinese government captured and held the crew and plane for over a week until it extracted two humiliating apologies from Washington.

## U.S. stresses need for 'Cold War'-era crisis mechanisms with China

Efforts to build a floor under U.S.-China relations have yet to be successful and coming months will determine if it is possible to reestablish constructive diplomacy with Beijing, a top White House official said on Thursday, stressing the need for "Cold War"-era hotlines and other crisis mechanisms.

Speaking at a time of heightened tensions with China over a U.S. stopover by Taiwan's president, U.S. Indo-Pacific coordinator Kurt Campbell said Washington had made clear to Beijing it was ready to have another call between President Joe Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping. "We're prepared and, from our perspective, we want to keep lines of communication open and it is our intention to keep those lines open," he said at an event hosted by the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) think tank. Biden said last month after a U.S. fighter jet shot down a suspected Chinese spy balloon

that he planned to speak to Xi about the episode and clear the air, but this has yet to happen and tensions have only risen since. Campbell said the Chinese



had been "reluctant to engage in discussions around confidence-building or crisis communications, or hotlines" and it would be a "responsible step" to have such mechanisms, given that Chinese and U.S. military forces operated

in proximity to each other.

"We built those during the Cold War. We think that they're appropriate now," he added.

Campbell said the U.S. was in the

said, referring to U.S. priorities when Biden and Xi last spoke at a meeting in Bali in November.

"I think you will see in the coming months whether it's going to be possible to reestablish effective, predictable, constructive diplomacy between the United States and China." Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen arrived in New York on Wednesday on her way to Central America. On her way back to Taipei next week, she will stop in Los Angeles, where she is expected to meet U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Kevin McCarthy, an interaction China has warned could lead to a "serious confrontation" in U.S.-China relations. The visit comes at a time when U.S. relations with China are at what some analysts see as their worst level since Washington normalized ties with Beijing in 1979 and switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei. Campbell said the United States was stepping up its focus on the

Indo-Pacific in spite of the war in Ukraine and this would be seen in its budgets, engagements, aid and assistance.

He pointed to India, which is due to take part in another summit of the so-called Quad countries in Australia expected in May, and said he believed its relationship with the United States was the most important of the 21st century. "I believe we are destined to work more closely together," he said, adding that Washington wanted to see more Indian students in American universities and more Americans in Indian colleges. Campbell said the United States has an "ambitious agenda" for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum summit it hosts in November, and Biden would roll out steps to address U.S. determination to play not just a security, diplomatic and political role in the region, "but a vibrant economic and commercial role as well."



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# Finland joins NATO in major blow to Russia over Ukraine war

Finland joined the NATO military alliance Tuesday, dealing a major blow to Russian President Vladimir Putin with a historic realignment of Europe's post-Cold War security landscape triggered by Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

The Nordic country's membership doubles Russia's border with the world's biggest security alliance. Finland had adopted neutrality after its defeat by the Soviets in World War II, but its leaders signaled they wanted to join NATO after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine sent a shiver of fear through its neighbors. "The era of nonalignment in our history has come to an end — a new era begins," President Sauli Niinistö said before his country's blue-and-white flag was raised outside NATO headquarters. A short distance away, outside the security fence, a few dozen people wrapped in flags of their own chanted, "Ukraine needs NATO." In praising Finland's membership, U.S. President Joe Biden noted it came on the 74th anniversary of the signing of NATO's founding treaty on April 4, 1949. "When Putin launched his brutal war of aggression against the people of Ukraine, he thought he could divide Europe and NATO. He was wrong," Biden said in a statement. "Today, we are more united than ever. And together — strengthened by our newest ally, Finland — we will continue to preserve transatlantic security, defend every inch of NATO territory, and meet any and all challenges we face." The move is a strategic and political setback for Putin, who has long complained about NATO's expansion toward Russia and partly used that as a justification for the invasion.

"I'm tempted to say this is maybe the one thing that we can thank Mr. Putin for because he once again here precipitated something he claims to want to prevent by Russia's aggression, causing many countries to believe that they have to do more to look out for their own defense and to make sure that they can deter possible Russian aggression going forward," U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said before accepting the documents that made Finland's membership official. The U.S. State Department is the repository of NATO texts concerning membership. Ukrainian President Volodymyr

Zelenskyy sent his congratulations to Finland, writing on Telegram that "amid Russian aggression, the Alliance became the only effective guarantee of security in the region." Russia warned it would be forced to take "retaliatory measures" to address what it called security threats created by Finland's membership. It had also warned it would bolster forces near Finland if NATO sends any additional troops or equipment to what is its 31st member country. The alliance says it poses no threat to Moscow. Alarmed by Moscow's invasion of Ukraine last year, Finland, which shares a 1,340 kilometer (832 mile) border with Russia, applied to join in May, seeking protection under the organization's security umbrella. "Russia tried to create a sphere around them and, well, we are not a sphere. I'm sure that Finns themselves feel more secure, that we are living in a more stable world," Niinistö said.

Neighboring Sweden, which has avoided military alliances for more than 200 years, has also applied. But objections from NATO members Turkey and Hungary have delayed the

process. Niinistö said Finland's membership "is not complete without that of Sweden. The persistent efforts for a rapid Swedish membership continue." Finland even gave its ratification of Sweden's application to Blinken as it joined. In Stockholm, Swedish Defense Minister Pål Jonson congratulated Finland and said he believed it would improve Sweden's security but added that "it's no secret that we would like to have concluded it hand-in-hand." Earlier, Russia's Foreign Ministry said Moscow "will be forced to take military-technical and other retaliatory measures to counter the threats to our national security arising from Finland's accession to NATO." It said Finland's move marks "a fundamental change in the situation in Northern Europe, which had previously been one of the most stable regions in the world." Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Finland's membership reflects the alliance's anti-Russian course and warned that Moscow will respond depending on what weapons NATO allies place there. But he also sought to play down the impact, noting that

Russia has no territorial disputes with Finland.

It's not clear what additional military resources Russia could send to the Finnish border. Moscow has deployed the bulk of its most capable military units to Ukraine. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said no more troops would be sent to Finland unless it asked for help. The country is now protected by what Stoltenberg called NATO's "iron-clad security guarantee," under which all member countries vow to come to the defense of any ally that comes under attack. But Stoltenberg refused to rule out the possibility of holding more military exercises there and said that NATO would not allow Russia's demands to dictate the organization's decisions. "We are constantly assessing our posture, our presence. We have more exercises, we have more presence, also in the Nordic area," he said.

In 1939 and 1940, Finland's tiny, ill-equipped forces fought in what became known as the Winter War against the Soviet Union. Over an exceptionally cold winter, Finnish fighters,

sometimes cloaked in white bedsheets for camouflage and typically moving unseen on foot, snowshoes and skis, lost some territory to Moscow but forced out the invaders.

Finland says it can muster a 280,000-strong fighting force, built on near-universal male conscription and a large, well-trained reserve, equipped with modern artillery, warplanes and tanks. The country of 5.5 million joined the European Union in 1995. Finland's Parliament, meanwhile, said its website was hit with a so-called denial-of-service attack, which made the site hard to use, with many pages not loading and some functions not available. A pro-Russian hacker group known as NoName057 (16) claimed responsibility, saying the attack was retaliation for Finland joining NATO. The claim could not be immediately verified. The hacker group, which has reportedly acted on Moscow's orders, has taken part in a slew of cyberattacks on the U.S. and its allies in the past. Finnish public broadcaster YLE said the same group hit the Parliament's site last year.

## SEBI probing Adani offshore deals for possible rule violations, say sources

is probing if the lack of that disclosure violated 'related party transaction' rules. Under Indian laws, direct relatives, promoter groups and subsidiaries of listed companies are considered related parties. A promoter group is defined as an entity that has a large shareholding in a listed company and can influence company policy.

Transactions between such entities have to be disclosed in regulatory and public filings and require shareholder approval above a specified threshold. Violations typically attract monetary fines. An e-mail to SEBI requesting a comment was not answered. SEBI chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch declined to comment on the Adani investigations at a news conference on Wednesday.

An Adani Group spokesperson said Vinod Adani is a member of the Adani family and is part of the promoter group, but he does not hold any managerial position in any of the listed Adani entities or their subsidiaries.

"This fact, like all other material information required to be reported, has been disclosed to the regulatory authorities in the past and also as and when required," the spokesperson added, without commenting on the regulatory probe into offshore

entities.

Vinod Adani could not be reached for comment. Requests for comment sent to his holding company in Dubai, Adani Global Investment DMCC, were not responded to. The probe comes after U.S. short-seller Hindenburg Research's Jan. 24 report alleging improper use of tax havens and stock manipulation by Adani Group, among other things - charges it has denied.

Hindenburg's report eroded more than \$100 billion in the value of shares in Adani group of companies. India's Supreme Court asked SEBI in March to investigate the Adani Group for any lapses related to public shareholding, related party rules, or regulatory disclosures. SEBI's investigation into Adani's possible 'related party' transactions with offshore entities with links to Vinod Adani has not been reported before.

While SEBI investigations are continuing, top regulatory officials are due to give a status report to a court-appointed panel on Sunday, the two sources said, speaking on condition of anonymity as the investigations are private.

### 'DISCLOSURE VIOLATIONS'

Hindenburg in its January report alleged that Vinod Adani entities have collectively moved "billions of dollars" into Adani's

publicly listed and private entities, often without required disclosure of the related party nature of the deals.

The Adani Group, in a 413-page response to the allegations, had said all transactions entered into by it with entities who qualify as 'related parties' under Indian laws and accounting standards have been duly disclosed.

The three offshore entities with links to Vinod Adani being probed for 'related party' transactions are Mauritius-based Krungal Trade and Investments Ltd and Gardenia Trade and Investments Ltd, and Electrogen Infra in Dubai.

There was no response from Krungal, Gardenia and Electrogen Infra to e-mails requesting comment.

While the sources said that other similar transactions are also under regulatory examination, Reuters could not ascertain the names of other entities and their possible violation of 'related party' transaction rules. SEBI suspects there were "disclosure violations" on some of those transactions, said one of the two sources. If proven, it could lead to monetary penalties and the matter may be referred to India's Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) for transactions that are beyond SEBI jurisdiction, the source said.



# Iran-Saudi Arabia pact: What China-brokered peace deal means for West Asia?

A historic event took place this month when a peace deal was signed between Iran and Saudi Arabia, brokered by China, taking the world by surprise. An agreement that could put China in a leading role in West Asia, a position once held by the United States of America.

But, it is not just West Asia, there are countries in many other parts of the world that have veered towards Beijing, much to the chagrin of states that have been either troubled or concerned about China's territorial claims and increased aggression. According to the March 10 agreement, both sides decided to re-establish relations and re-open embassies within two months. The deal was announced after four days of talks in Beijing.

Timing it with the beginning of his third and unprecedented term as Chinese President, Xi Jinping played a critical role in ensuring that Iran and Saudi Arabia find common ground. He visited the Saudi capital Riyadh in December for meetings with oil-rich Gulf Arab nations crucial to China's energy supplies and also hosted the Iranian president in Beijing in February.

## China's growing economic footprint

An economic powerhouse and a major trading partner in the Gulf, Beijing's economic footprint is visible in West Asia or the Middle East since the turn of the

21st century and it continues to expand. So, what allowed these geopolitical tectonic shifts and will China be able to succeed in finding a permanent resolution to the Iran-Saudi tensions? Or will this agreement be shortlived? What are the implications of this development? C Raja Mohan, senior Fellow, at Asia Society Policy Institute, explains, "As China's comprehensive national power has grown rapidly in the last two decades, it was inevitable that China would eventually step in to play a larger political role in shaping the evolution of regional conflicts. Well before its recent political intervention in the Middle East, China has been gingerly experimenting with peace-making in Myanmar, Afghanistan, and in Africa. The big move in the Gulf is really a culmination of Beijing's recent regional diplomacy." Previously reserved for longtime global heavyweights like the US and Russia, China's entry as a mediator is a sign of Beijing's growing diplomatic clout to match its economic footprint in the region. So is Beijing charting a new course for itself in the strategic space - that of a global peacemaker?

Raja Mohan says, "While Beijing does deserve credit for brokering a truce between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the fact is that Riyadh and Tehran have been talking to each other for a while, with the help of their neighbours, Oman and Iraq.

In letting China take the credit, Saudi Arabia was sending a signal to the US that it can't take the Gulf kingdom for granted."

"Beijing, too, knows that one photo-op does not make China the decisive peace-making in the volatile Middle East. It is not easy to navigate the multiple contradictions of the region, but Beijing has made an impressive start," he adds. Meanwhile, Middle Eastern trade with the United States has declined from \$120 billion in 2019 to \$82 billion in 2021. China continues to develop its economic ties across regional divides, cementing its position as the largest trading partner to regional powers such as Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.

The deal elicited mixed reactions globally. While the US welcomed the decision, many countries that have faced continued aggression from Beijing, like India, maintained silence.

## The timing of the deal is crucial

The move comes now because of Iran's nuclear activities and enrichment of Uranium beyond 80 per cent which means crossing the nuclear threshold. Also, the soured ties with Washington DC certainly helped Beijing make inroads. There was growing frustration in Saudi Arabia in working with the Biden administration, particularly when it came

to the Khashoggi trial in the US, which led the Saudis to diversify its security interests and work with other players.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia is in talks with Syria to reopen its embassy in the war-torn nation for the first time in a decade.

## Implications of the deal

This growing proximity of West Asia to China could lead to the de-dollarisation of the petrodollar. American pressure on Saudi Arabia to increase oil output to ease the global energy crunch owing to the Russia-Ukraine war did not go down well with Riyadh. This deal and any positive movement could lead to ease on Iran's economy which has suffered greatly because of US-led sanctions. The message from China is that only the traditional form of democracy is not the beacon of light for peace and that China can also broker peace between governments which also do not have government structures that are considered democratic according to the West. Finally, the agreement and its success depend on the stakeholders living up to their part of the deal and ending regional conflicts that have fueled proxy wars in Yemen, frustrated stabilisation efforts in Iraq and led to a protracted crisis in Lebanon and a political stalemate in Syria, all deeply entrenched in the Saudi-Iran rivalry.

# Proselytisation in Punjab : How Mazhabi Sikhs and Valmiki Hindus are being 'lured' into Christianity

Punjab has also seen its fair share of Christian conversions, like all other states. For the outer world, Punjab is commonly characterised by its Sikh faith, food, music, philosophy, and folk dances. According to the Punjab Religion Census of 2011, Sikhs constitute a majority religion in the state with approximately 58 percent of the share, Hindus are 38 percent, Muslims are nearly 2 percent, and Christians at 1.26 percent. However, media reports and Christian leaders argue that the actual number of faith followers is between 10-15 percent. The big gap in the calculation has emerged from the fact that the converts originally belonged to vulnerable communities such as the Dalits. The converts keep their original identity to enjoy the benefits of reservation and miss out on their current religion in the census.

## CHRISTIANITY IN PUNJAB: NOW AND THEN

Christianity in Punjab is not new, as it entered the state in 1834 and has stayed as a socio-cultural force. The initial set of Christians in Punjab was predominantly urban, literate, and socially diverse. However,

the focus of present-day conversions is specifically on the large population of marginalised population of the Dalits and other vulnerable caste groups. A mass conversion movement of rural Dalits transformed a predominantly urban community of Christians into a rural and backward community. The reason behind the community being backwards in a relatively forward state is due to the conversions of Dalits. The converts inherit their past identities and follow customs, traditions, and lifestyles as they did in their previous religion. Therefore, Punjabi Christians are now characterised as backward, economically unstable, illiterate, and less urbanised. Dalits and Valmiki Hindus, along with Mazhabi Sikhs, are converting to Christianity in large numbers as they believe their original religions do not provide them with solace as Christianity does. Dalits and Valmiki Hindus allege that their communities still suffer the consequences of rigid caste structures. The surprising case is that of Mazhabi Sikhs, who have already converted from Hinduism and gone to Sikhism. Sikhism is preached as a

religion of equality; however, the story is different on the ground. In rural areas, many Gurudwaras of various denominations can be seen in a single village, such as Ravidas Gurudwara, Jatt Gurudwara, and Mazhabi Sikh Gurudwara. In reality, Sikhism is not an equalising religion, as the upper-caste Jatts look down upon Mazhabi Sikhs and treat them differently. Such discrimination has become a root cause for Mazhabi Sikhs to leave the Sikh faith behind and embrace Christianity. The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) came to take notice of conversions in 2012, when 40 Mazhabi Sikhs converted to Christianity in the Taran Taran district. The head of Akal Takht, Sardar Harpreet Singh, had said that there is no doubt that the followers of the Christian faith are increasing; however, the pressing issue that needed attention was that the Hindu and Sikh communities should analyse why the Dalits, Valmiki Hindus, and Mazhabi Sikhs were leaving their religions. Church preachers fill the vacuum left by other religions and introduce vulnerable groups to a new religion and faith of Christianity. Hindu and Sikh

organisations allege that these preachers take in people on the pretences of healing the sick, bringing back the dead, and so on. The allegations have also led to violent clashes as Punjab witnessed a series of clashes and protests between the Christians and the radical Nihang Sikh communities in November 2022. Earlier in August, a Catholic Church was vandalised, and the car of a Church functionary was set on fire in Patti, Taran Taran.

## CONVERSION AT THE COST OF SOCIAL RELATIONS

The recent conversions have created a scenario of communal hatred in Punjab as Christian groups are targeting vulnerable communities. Moreover, the distorted number of Christians on census data leads to misinformation as the converted communities retain their original identity in documents to avail the benefits of reservation. Hindu and Sikh organisations allege that the missionaries use monetary influence to lure people from vulnerable communities. There have been videos circulating widely on social media sites of people being cured miraculously of their diseases as soon as they

embrace Christianity. It is believed that almost all villages have one or two converted Christian families in Punjab. Over 65,000 missionaries are active in the state. The conversions have severely impacted social relations as people from other religions see the converted Christians as unfaithful towards their religion. The demographic change in the state of Punjab has become starkly apparent as the population has increased by 14 percent since the last census in 2011. With the population growth, there has also been a rise in religious denominations, as a notable decrease in the number of Sikhs from a previous 59 percent to a recent 57 percent is visible. The decrease in the Sikh population has ultimately added to the population of Christians in Punjab. Another impact of rampant Christianisation has been the appropriation of the social landscape as Christian missionaries have designed churches on lines of Sikh gurdwaras to attract people from other religions. The pastors and Church leaders have also composed songs praising Jesus on lines of Sikh kirtan.



# From ChatGPT to algo-based pricing: How Air India is transforming under Tata

Air India is not only reworking every aspect of operations - from systems to supply chains - but integrating four Tata-related airlines, with Air India due to merge with Vistara while low-cost Air India Express and AirAsia India also converge. Air India, until recently tied to an antiquated manual pricing system when setting airfares, is shifting to algorithm-based software long used by rivals to help it squeeze out more revenue from each flight.

In another sign of the formerly government-owned carrier's whirlwind transformation under its new owner Tata Group, Air India is testing ChatGPT, OpenAI's popular chatbot, to replace paper-based practices.

The push to modernise underscores the decay left by years of under-investment as Air India looks to shed decades-old bureaucratic processes and recapture customers from Dubai's Emirates and powerful domestic rival IndiGo.

"Frankly, the system is almost so bad it's good," Chief Executive Officer Campbell Wilson told Indian airline executives last week, adding that this offered the chance to start from scratch rather than "jury-rig" existing architecture.

Air India is not only reworking every aspect of operations - from systems to supply chains - but integrating four Tata-related airlines, with Air India due to



merge with Vistara while low-cost Air India Express and AirAsia India also converge. Some areas, such as technology, allow for a clean-sheet approach, the 52-year-old New Zealander said, which is why he is putting artificial intelligence (AI) and other tools at the centre of Air India's reboot.

Modern "revenue management" software aims to stay one step ahead of demand, continuously anticipating where people want to go and how much each individual flyer is prepared to pay, rather than the old method of having one fare for each block of seats.

The result is higher revenue per flight, making it low-hanging fruit in the company's transformation.

Fixing the fleet

Wilson faces a tangle of fleets and staff as daunting as Delhi's zig-zagging traffic, leaving the airline's path to profit strewn with obstacles.

"Complexity is the curse of

airlines," said Keith McMullan, partner at UK-based consultancy Aviation Strategy, who has experience in the Indian market.

"What they are saying is absolutely right - they should go back to a blank piece of paper, but saying it and actually doing it are two very different things," he said. "The danger is that you keep on fighting legacy-related fires."

Air India's success is critical for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, which wants to harness its scale and reach to turn India into a global aviation force like Dubai or Singapore. Wilson's immediate game plan is to tackle pressing problems to get idle planes flying before Air India starts receiving the 470 jets ordered in a record deal last month.

For instance, it is working with Tata Technologies to build some plastic components locally instead of waiting for suppliers to deliver the obsolete parts.

And it is grabbing what planes it can find on lease while reworking its network strategy to attract Indians overseas.

Any inconsistencies can be ironed out as the turnaround gathers momentum, Wilson said in an interview on the sidelines of the CAPA India conference last week.

"This is a transformation as well as a startup," said Wilson, who was appointed to lead the turnaround last year by Tata after it regained control of the carrier. "In a startup, you just do what you need to do to get going and then you refine along the way," he told Reuters, drawing from this experience of being the founding chief of Singapore Airlines' SIAL.SI budget carrier Scoot.

But he said a clean-sheet approach cannot and should not be applied everywhere.

Merger challenges

Analysts say Wilson's staggered turnaround plans will be severely tested as Air India executes the twin mergers.

Airline mergers in India have had little success with Air India still hobbled by the botched integration of Indian Airlines in 2007. Jet Airways' takeover of Sahara and Kingfisher's merger with Air Deccan hurt them for years. Jet and Kingfisher are now bankrupt.

Air India's planes are already a mix of Airbus and Boeing jets with multiple cabin

configurations. This will be further complicated when it absorbs the new carriers.

"Managing mixed fleets is a nightmare and given a choice no airline would want to do it," Vinod Kannan, chief executive of Tata-Singapore Airlines joint-venture Vistara, told Reuters.

Once an inspiration for Singapore Airlines, Air India is now far behind, especially on service and punctuality - areas it must improve swiftly if it wants to reclaim share from the Gulf carriers, who carry most of India's international traffic.

There are some early signs of success: Air India's international traffic was up 28% in the Oct-Dec quarter versus April-June and its domestic share rose to 9% at the end of February from 7.5% in mid-2022, according to government data.

Those figures should jump significantly when Air India combines with Vistara, but that deal brings new challenges.

"You can get everything right but the people and the culture ... it is not easy to get that right," Kannan said during an interview at Vistara's office near Delhi where the average age of staff is 29 years. At Air India it is 50-plus. "The intent is very much there," Kannan said of the combination, due to be completed by March 2024. "It's now just a matter of execution, which is not easy, but we'll get there."

## US chip controls threaten China's technology ambitions

Furious at U.S. efforts that cut off access to technology to make advanced computer chips, China's leaders appear to be struggling to figure out how to retaliate without hurting their own ambitions in telecoms, artificial intelligence and other industries.

President Xi Jinping's government sees the chips that are used in everything from phones to kitchen appliances to fighter jets as crucial assets in its strategic rivalry with Washington and efforts to gain wealth and global influence. Chips are the center of a "technology war," a Chinese

scientist wrote in an official journal in February.

China has its own chip foundries, but they supply only low-end processors used in autos and appliances. The U.S. government, starting under then-President Donald Trump, is cutting off access to a growing array of tools to make chips for computer servers, AI and other advanced applications. Japan and the Netherlands have joined in limiting access to technology they say might be used to make weapons.

Xi, in unusually pointed language, accused Washington in March of trying to block

China's development with a campaign of "containment and suppression." He called on the public to "dare to fight." Despite that, Beijing has been slow to retaliate against U.S. companies, possibly to avoid disrupting Chinese industries that assemble most of the world's smartphones, tablet computers and other consumer electronics. They import more than \$300 billion worth of foreign chips every year.

The ruling Communist Party is throwing billions of dollars at trying to accelerate chip development and reduce the need for foreign technology.

China's loudest complaint: It is blocked from buying a machine available only from a Dutch company, ASML, that uses ultraviolet light to etch circuits into silicon chips on a scale measured in nanometers, or billionths of a meter. Without that, Chinese efforts to make transistors faster and more efficient by packing them more closely together on fingernail-size slivers of silicon are stalled. Making processor chips requires some 1,500 steps and technologies owned by U.S., European, Japanese and other suppliers.

"China won't swallow everything.

If damage occurs, we must take action to protect ourselves," the Chinese ambassador to the Netherlands, Tan Jian, told the Dutch newspaper Financieele Dagblad.

"I'm not going to speculate on what that might be," Tan said. "It won't just be harsh words."

The conflict has prompted warnings the world might decouple, or split into separate spheres with incompatible technology standards that mean computers, smartphones and other products from one region wouldn't work in others. That would raise costs and might slow innovation.



# Sarbat Khalsa: An 18th-century strategic Sikh plenary

**Fugitive Amritpal Singh has sought a Sarbat Khalsa. Does his call merit the convening of the strategic Sikh plenary that shaped the community's course during the turbulent period of Mughal and Afghan attacks?**

Amritpal Singh, a fugitive on the run for more than two weeks, has sought to pressure the Akal Takht to convene a Sarbat Khalsa to discuss his own issue, the Punjab police crackdown on his supporters and other matters concerning the community.

He made the recommendation from his hiding place last week, suggesting that the Jathedar of the Akal Takht, the highest seat of the Sikh temporal authority, call the congregation on the festival of Vaisakhi at Takht Sri Damdama Sahib.

**WHAT IS SARBAT KHALSA?**

But what is the Sarbat Khalsa and can it be subject to the whims and fancies of one individual or political groups with vested interests?

History offers insights into how the concept, which literally translates into Sikh collective, originated, and under which circumstances.

The Sikhs in Punjab and the Marathas are largely credited with bringing about the disintegration of the Mughal empire.

In 1710, Baba Banda Singh Bahadar, the Khalsa commander, and his troops vanquished Sirhind, a power centre of the then Mughal empire. It was at Sirhind, which means the crown of Hind, where the younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh were executed six years earlier.

Banda's reign cut off the vital links between the Mughals' Delhi Durbar and Lahore. Retaliation was ferocious.

Backed by heavy reinforcements, the Mughal army captured Banda Singh Bahadar. He, and 780 Sikhs, were caged and brought to Delhi, where they were savagely tortured and killed in 1716.

The Sarbat Khalsa plenaries are believed to have been established firmly after Banda's execution.

Persecuted by the Mughals, the community started the tradition of holding biennial meetings at Amritsar during the lunar month



of Vaisakh and around Diwali. Resolutions passed at these conclaves were called Gurmattas.

and given the title of Nawab. In 1745, the Sarbat Khalsa met on Diwali and resolved to merge numerous units of their cavalries



**TIMELINE OF KEY SARBAT KHALSA PLENARIES**

In 1721, a major dispute within the Sikh community was settled amicably through a Gurmatta. "Once the internal squabble were settled, the Sarbat Khalsa became a real force," Khushwant Singh wrote in A History of The Sikhs.

The Sikhs re-organized militarily under Sarbat Khalsa instructions and began taking villages and jungle hideouts under their protection.

In 1733, Lahore's governor Zakarya Khan sent his envoy to the Sarbat Khalsa meeting on the first of Vaisakh, offering three towns in revenue. This offer was accepted, and a Virk Jat, Kapur Singh, was nominated the estate's jagirdar

into 25 regiments under the overall command of Nawab Kapur Singh.

In 1747, following a Sarbat Khalsa, Sikhs erected a fort in Amritsar and Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was appointed the commander of the Khalsa forces.

The tide turned against the community soon and the violent campaign against the Sikhs was re-launched in Punjab.

In accordance with a Sarbat Khalsa resolution in 1760, Ahluwalia briefly captured Lahore a year later, picking Afghan invader Ahmed Shah Abdali's hours of triumph as he returned home victorious from the battle of Panipat, notes author Patwant Singh in his book, The Sikhs.

**SARBAT KHALSA TRADITION IN DISARRAY**

The Sarbat Khalsa tradition fell into disarray during four decades of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule till he passed in 1839.

The Maharaja, historians note, wanted no competing power centres around him.

**CONSENSUS DROVE SARBAT KHALSA IN 18th CENTURY**

In the Sarbat Khalsa conclaves of the 18th century, participants would get an equal opportunity to speak and discussions would be held with attention to detail.

The resolutions of the 18th-century Sarbat Khalsa plenaries would stem from complete consensus.

No weapons would be allowed into the meeting venues.

In the tense aftermath of Operation Blue Star in 1984, certain Sikh religious and political organizations tried to revive the Sarbat Khalsa with congregations called in the name of the tradition in 1986.

In 2015, disparate Sikh groups held a similar event near Amritsar with the same nomenclature.

But various scholars insist the events named after the Sarbat Khalsa in the post-independence period didn't reflect the unanimous views of the community, now spread out across the world.

Some of the resolutions passed in those assemblies have, therefore, courted controversy. **SGPC TREADS CAUTIOUS OVER AMRITPAL'S CALL**

For now, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, the top Sikh religious administration, has taken a cautious approach toward Amritpal Singh's suggestion for a Sarbat Khalsa.

SGPC general secretary Gurcharan Singh Grewal has reportedly said that the Jathedar, who is leading the Sikh community, takes each decision with deep thought followed by the opinions of Sikh scholars and intellectuals.





# Apple CEO Tim Cook doesn't want people using phones too much, urges parents to limit their kids' screen time

Apple CEO Tim Cook says he doesn't want people to use their phones too much as that is not what the company wants. He also added that parents should limit their kids' screen time.



(News Agency) It is no secret that smartphone addiction is slowly catching hold of people and is a serious issue that needs to be talked about more. There have been ample studies and reports over the years that have mentioned the negative side of always looking at your phone's screen. Even in your everyday life, if you take a moment to reflect, chances are that you might find how most of our lives revolve around our phones and that it is a task to not use it for extended periods

of time. The University of North Carolina also published the results of a three-year-long study in February this year, warning that digital media addiction might have an effect on adolescents' brains. Apple CEO Tim Cook also says that people shouldn't be looking at their phones for too long. He added that parents should set some limits on how much time their kids spend in front of screens. Tim Cook warns against excessive phone use. The Apple CEO, in an interview with GQ, said that kids these days are 'born digital' and are 'digital kids now'. He added that he feels it is 'really important to set some hard rails around it'.

Talking about Tuesday, mobile calling turned smartphone addiction in people, Tim Cook said that Apple stands against digital addiction and doesn't want people spending too much time on their phones. He also added that the company actually 'provides tools' so that people don't indulge in excessive usage of their phones.

He said, "We don't want people using our phones too much. We're not incentivized for that. We don't want that. We provide tools so people don't do that." He further said that Apple is focusing on products that will 'empower people to do, learn, or create things they otherwise couldn't'. Father of cellphones on smartphone addiction On

Tuesday, mobile calling turned 50 years old as the first cellphone call was made by Martin Cooper on April 3, 1973. Eventually, Cooper began to be known as the 'father of cell phones' and was working for Motorola when he made the first call. Today, Martin, who uses an iPhone, called out the state of cellphone addiction in people and said that it was quite worrisome. He said that he found it 'devastating' when he sees people crossing roads while looking at their mobile phones. "They are out of their minds," the 94-year-old said and jokingly added, "After a few people get run over by cars, they'll figure it out."

# Branson's Virgin Orbit files for bankruptcy, to seek buyer

Richard Branson's Virgin Orbit Holdings filed for bankruptcy on Tuesday after the satellite launch company failed to secure the long-term funding needed to help it recover from a January rocket failure.

(News Agency) Richard Branson's Virgin Orbit Holdings filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy on Tuesday after the satellite launch company failed to secure the long-term funding needed to help it recover from a January rocket failure.

The Long Beach, California-based company lodged the filing in the US Bankruptcy Court for the District of Delaware seeking a sale of its assets after announcing the layoff of roughly 85% of its 750 employees last week. "We believe that the

Chapter 11 process represents the best path forward to identify and finalize an efficient and value-maximizing sale," Virgin Orbit CEO Dan Hart said in a statement. The company listed assets of about \$243 million and total debt at \$153.5 million as of Sept. 30 in the filing. Virgin Orbit went public in 2021 through a blank-check deal, raising \$255 million less than expected. Spun off from Branson's space tourism firm Virgin Galactic in 2017, Virgin Orbit air-launches rockets from

beneath a modified Boeing 747 plane to send satellites into orbit.

Virgin Orbit's strategy has been that launching small rockets from a 747 in flight would allow for short-notice launches from anywhere. But a shift in demand toward larger launch rockets and more cost-effective shared rides to space on SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket over the past two years raised the competitive stakes for Virgin Orbit, analysts and industry executives have said. Virgin



Orbit's sixth mission in January with its centerpiece LauncherOne rocket, the first rocket launch out of Britain, failed to reach orbit and sent its payload of US and UK intelligence satellites plunging into the ocean. The company scrambled to find new funding after the rocket failure, halting operations and furloughing nearly all its employees on March 15 to conserve cash.

## VIRGIN GROUP FUNDING

Branson's Virgin Group, which owned roughly 75% of the launch company, said it had invested over \$1 billion in the unit, including \$60 million in secured loans since November. Abu Dhabi's sovereign wealth fund Mubadala was the second-biggest investor in Virgin Orbit with a 17.9% stake. Virgin Investments, a unit of Virgin Group, will provide \$31.6 million in new money to Virgin Orbit

through debtor-in-possession financing to fund operations while it looks for a buyer in bankruptcy, the companies said. Reuters reported last month that Texas-based Matthew Brown had been in talks to invest \$200 million in the company. Those talks collapsed, sources told Reuters last week. Virgin Orbit had a market value of \$65 million based on Monday's closing price, down from more than \$3 billion two years ago. Virgin Orbit's bankruptcy filing showed its largest creditor as London-based Arqit Ltd, which was owed almost \$10 million for services and as a customer deposit. Arqit had no immediate comment. In 2021, Arqit Quantum and Virgin Orbit announced a deal for two satellite launches intended to provide encryption services to the "Five Eyes" nations: the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

# McDonald's shuts US offices as it gears up to announce corporate layoffs

(News Agency) McDonald's is temporarily closing its US offices this week as it prepares to inform corporate employees about impending layoffs.

Burger chain McDonald's Corp is temporarily closing its US offices this week as it prepares to inform corporate employees about its layoffs as part of a broader company restructuring, the Wall Street Journal reported on Sunday. In an internal



email last week to US employees and some international staff, McDonald's asked them to work from home from Monday through Wednesday so it can deliver staffing decisions virtually, the report said. It is unclear how many employees will be laid off. "During the week of April 3, we will

communicate key decisions related to roles and staffing levels across the organization," the Chicago-based company said in the message

viewed by the Journal. McDonald's also asked employees to cancel all in-person meetings with vendors and other outside parties at its headquarters, the report added. McDonald's did not immediately respond to Reuters' request for a comment. The fast-food chain said in January that it would review corporate staffing levels as part of an updated business strategy, which could lead to layoffs in some areas and expansion in others. McDonald's is expected to begin announcing key decisions by Monday.



# Around 1 in 6 people worldwide experience infertility, says WHO

The new estimates in the report show limited variation in the prevalence of infertility between regions.



(News Agency) Around 17.5 per cent of the adult population, roughly 1 in 6 worldwide, experience infertility, according to a new report by the World Health Organisation (WHO). The report stated that as per new data there is an urgent need to increase access to affordable, high-quality fertility care for those in need. Infertility is a disease of the male or female reproductive system, defined by the failure to achieve pregnancy after 12 months or more of regular unprotected sexual intercourse. It can cause

significant distress, stigma, and financial hardship, affecting people's mental and psychosocial well-being, as per WHO.

The new estimates in the report show limited variation in the prevalence of infertility between regions. The rates are comparable for high, middle and low-income countries, indicating that this is a major health challenge globally. Lifetime prevalence was 17.8 per cent in high-income countries and 16.5 per cent in low and middle-income countries. "The sheer proportion of people affected show the need to widen access to fertility care and ensure this issue is no longer sidelined in health research and policy, so that safe, effective, and affordable ways to attain parenthood are

available for those who seek it," said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, WHO. Dr Pascale Allotey, Director of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Research at WHO, including the United Nations' Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction (HRP) said that millions of people face catastrophic healthcare costs after seeing infertility treatment, making this a major equity issue, a medical poverty trap for those affected. "Better policies and public financing can significantly improve access to treatment and protect poorer households from falling into poverty as a result," said Dr Pascale Allotey. Despite the

challenges, solutions for the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of infertility remain underfunded and inaccessible to many due to high costs, social stigma and limited availability. At present, in most countries, fertility treatments are largely funded out of pocket – often resulting in devastating financial costs. High costs frequently prevent people from accessing infertility treatments or alternatively, can catapult them into poverty as a consequence of seeking care. While the new report shows convincing evidence of the high global prevalence of infertility, it highlights a persistent lack of data in many countries and some regions and calls for greater availability of national data on infertility.

## UK develops genetic early warning system to identify new variants for future pandemics

British researchers are developing groundbreaking technology to monitor genetic changes in respiratory viruses as they circulate around the world.

(News Agency) Researchers at Wellcome Sanger Institute in Cambridgeshire, UK, are developing a groundbreaking technology to monitor genetic changes in respiratory viruses to identify dangerous new variants as they emerge and act as an early warning system for new diseases and future pandemics, The Guardian reported.

The team of researchers aims to make the technology cheap, easy to use and capable of being scaled up to provide global surveillance of a wide range of viruses. Targets would include influenza viruses, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), coronaviruses and previously unknown pathogens. The project, titled the Respiratory Virus and

Microbiome Initiative, aims to create a system that would deploy DNA sequencing technology to identify all viral, bacterial and fungal species in a single sample collected from a nose swab from a patient. Ewan Harrison, who is leading the project at the Sanger Institute, a world-leading centre for genetics research and DNA



sequencing, said, "Britain was at the leading edge of the genomic surveillance of Covid-19 and was responsible for about 20% of all the Sars-CoV-2 genomes that were sequenced across the planet during the pandemic." "The knowledge and data we generated allowed us to track – with unprecedented speed and accuracy – Sars-CoV-2, the virus responsible for Covid-19, and to monitor how it was changing. It was a wonderful aid in helping to fight the disease. Now we are aiming to contribute to building global genomic surveillance for all respiratory viruses. These, after all, are the agents most likely to trigger new pandemics," Harrison added. An illustration of the threat of future pandemics is provided by coronaviruses. The technology's remarkable potential was revealed when researchers

used genomic surveys during the Covid pandemic. In December 2020, when there was a sudden rise in Covid cases in southeast England, the technology showed that this surge had been triggered by the appearance of a new, more infectious variant. Known originally as the Kent strain, it was later relabelled the Sars-CoV-2 Alpha variant, The Guardian reported. Leader of the Sanger Institute's genomic surveillance unit, John Sillitoe, said, "The discovery was a gamechanger. We generated genomic data very quickly and could see that this variant was transmitting at a very high rate. Suddenly, the world could see what genomics could do. It allows you to see changes in viruses much, much more quickly than by other methods, and now we are going to exploit that power."

## Covid-19 cases on the rise: Here's what you can do to avoid the virus

Though there is an increase in Covid cases, the need for hospitalisation is less as compared to previous waves.

(News Agency) Daily cases of Covid, over the last few days, have seen an upsurge, especially in Delhi. The capital city recorded 429 new cases on Sunday, the highest in more than seven months.

The city's health department stated that one Covid-related death was reported on Sunday. However, the primary cause wasn't Covid. In light of the situation, it is important to administer vaccines and avoid crowded



places, say experts. Dr Avi Kumar, Senior Consultant, Pulmonology, Fortis Escorts, Okhla, New Delhi, told indiatoday.in that in spite of the increase in cases, the current Covid climate isn't as intense as it was in the previous waves. He

explained that the need for hospitalisation is less as compared to previous waves and most of the patients are being treated at home. "The criticality and severity of this Covid are less. Patients with

comorbid conditions like heart disease, liver disease, kidney disease, lung disease and elderly patients are being admitted. Currently, people above the age of 18 years have been vaccinated, but a booster dose for many patients is still pending," said

Dr Avi Kumar. In this Covid wave, the symptoms are fever, which gets recovered on its own within 3-4 days, cough, runny nose, and sore throat. "After the fever, patients have body aches and affecting their digestive system as well," said Dr Avi Kumar.



# Sara Ali Khan Looks Hot in Red Bikini, Shares Stunning Photos From Her Udaipur Vacation

(News Agency) After the release of Gaslight, actress Sara Ali Khan jetted off to Udaipur. The actress has been treating her fans to scenic views from the lake city. On Tuesday, she shared a couple of pictures from her trip, which is truly unmissable. The first photo captures Sara seated close to the hotel's garden section, dressed in a salwar suit, and sporting a natural expression. The second picture shows the diva in a red bikini, chilling by the poolside. The last photo shows Sara giving an intense look at the camera as she sits by the lakeside. Along with the pictures, she also added several emojis in the caption section, which consist of the sun, moon, swimming, heart and much more.

As soon as she shared the post online, fans complimented the actress for her beautiful looks. One of

the users wrote, "You look so pretty." Another user commented, "Looks like someone is having fun." One more user wrote, "The red bikini." Take a look at the post below: Sara Ali Khan's passion for travelling is well-known, as she frequently goes on holidays with her mother and brother or just with friends. Last month, the 27-year-old actress posted some stunning pictures from Spiti valley, where she was seen relishing some delicious parathas while taking in the magnificent scenery. In the photos, Sara was dressed in warm black and white winter clothes to cope with the freezing weather. She wrote, "Parvato Mein Parathe. Jannat in Pahade. Chalti Rahi Coffee ke Sahare. Barf mein bhi Bahaare. Toh Azmao yeh Nazaare (Parathas in the mountains, paradise in mountains, walking with the

support of coffee, spring even in snow, then try these scenes)."

Meanwhile, Sara Ali Khan's movie Gaslight has been released. The film also stars Vikrant Massey, Chitrangda Singh and Rahul Dev in crucial roles. The actress is currently filming Metro... In Dino with Aditya Roy Kapur, Anupam Kher, Pankaj Tripathi, and Ali Fazal. Sara also has the movie Ae Watan Mere Watan from Karan Johar's production company in the works. The story follows the courageous journey of a college woman in Bombay who eventually becomes a freedom fighter. The film is inspired by the life of Usha Mehta, a freedom fighter who played a pivotal role in using radio to make citizens woke throughout the country during the Quit India Movement.

## Boney Kapoor is Being Shredded On Twitter Over This Pic With Gigi Hadid

**In the photo, which was clicked on day 2 of the gala event, Boney Kapoor is looking at Gigi Hadid as she smiles at the camera**

(News Agency) You must be living under a rock if you haven't heard about the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre launch event. From Priyanka Chopra-Nick Jonas to Shah Rukh Khan's killer performance on the crazy viral track Jhoome Jo Pathaan, the gala event was sugar, spice and everything nice. Oh, and, how can we not talk about Gigi Hadid? The Hollywood supermodel made heads turn when she walked the red carpet in a masterpiece by Abu Jani Sandeep Khosla. Don't know about you but we simply couldn't keep calm. Now, a picture of Gigi Hadid and Boney Kapoor has gone viral on social media. In the photo, which was clicked on day 2 of the gala event, Boney Kapoor is looking at Gigi Hadid as she smiles at the camera.



## Mrunal Thakur gets trolled for posting pics in bikini. Netizens say 'my Sita is not like this'

**Mrunal Thakur posted photos of herself in a bikini from her beach holiday. The actress got brutally trolled for the same.**

(News Agency) Mrunal Thakur started her career with TV and is now, one of the most prominent actresses in Bollywood and South film industries. The best thing about Mrunal is that she is always her real-self on social media.

From posting photos from not-so-good days to fun-filled vacation days, you'll find it all on Mrunal's Instagram. On April 4, she posted an array of photos from her beach vacation, a couple of them had her wearing a bikini. However, a section of netizens weren't too happy about it.

### MRUNAL WEARS BIKINI

Mrunal Thakur's Kudiye Ni Teri is a vibe! And so is her social media profile. Mrunal is one of the few celebs to unveil her truest self on Instagram. On April 4, she dropped an array of photos from her beach vacation. A couple of photos from the lot had her rocking a blue bikini. However, a section of netizens

weren't too happy about it.

### MRUNAL GETS TROLLED FOR WEARING BIKINI

Mrunal Thakur, in a blue bikini, didn't go down well with a section of the masses. They made Sita Ramam references and mentioned how they don't like their Sita like 'this'. Some also mentioned that Mrunal is the 'only heroine they don't want to see like this'.

### MRUNAL TALKS ABOUT SITA RAMAM

Mrunal Thakur is a part of Nani 30. The mahurat shot took place in Hyderabad in February this year. In an exclusive interview with IndiaToday.in, Mrunal expressed her excitement for the film. She said, "I am doing this film with Nani, which is a beautiful script that I have ever read and I am extremely proud to be associated with the entire team. It's director Shouryuv's debut film. I think I'm extremely blessed to have gotten that role and it wouldn't be possible if I had not done Sita (Ramam)."





# Complaint filed over new poster of Prabhas and Kriti Sanon's Adipurush

A complaint has been filed against Prabhas and Kriti Sanon's Adipurush in Mumbai. Read details inside.

(News Agency) The team of Adipurush has landed in troubled waters. A case has been filed against the makers of Prabhas and Kriti Sanon's Adipurush. The complaint has been lodged at Sakinaka police station against the film producer, artist and the director. The complaint is filed by Sanjay Dinanath Tiwari through Mumbai High Court Advocates - Ashish Rai and Pankaj Mishra. The complainant described himself as a preacher of Sanatan Dharma.

## COMPLAINT FILED AGAINST ADIPURUSH MAKERS

As per the official statement, complaint states that the religious sentiments of the Hindu religion society have been hurt by the filmmaker Om



Raut by inappropriately displaying the character of the Hindi religious text Ramcharitmanas in the new poster of the film. This complaint has been lodged with the

demand for registration of FIR under Section 295 (A), 298, 500, 34 of the Indian Penal Code.

As per the complaint, Adipurush has been made on the biography

of Maryada Purushottam Shri Ram from the Hindu religion holy book Ramcharitmanas. The holy book Ramcharitmanas holds an importance in Hinduism and Sanatan Dharma has been

following this holy book Ramcharitmanas for many ages. According to the complainant, the poster shows Maryadapurushottam Lord Shri Ram in a costume contrary to the natural spirit and nature of Ramcharitmanas mentioned in the Hindu scripture. The complainant further claimed that in the film Adipurush, all the characters of Ramayana have been displayed without wearing Janeu. Janeu has special importance in Hindu Sanatan Dharma, which has been followed for many centuries by the followers of Sanatan Dharma on the basis of Puranas.

## ABOUT ADIPURUSH

Adipurush has been directed by Om Raut. The film starring Prabhas, Saif Ali Khan, Kriti Sanon, releases on June 16, 2023.

## 'Parveen Babi was much more than who she dated' Zeenat Aman shares unknown facts on late actress' birth anniversary

**Zeenat Aman shared unknown facts about Parveen Babi on her birth anniversary. She mentioned how her dating life was more discussed than her work.**



(News Agency) This day, April 4, marks Parveen Babi's birth anniversary. Apart from being a celebrated actress of the yesteryears, Parveen's personal life was widely discussed. From conversations about her mental health to talks about her relationships within the industry, many argue that Parveen Babi's work didn't get the credit it deserved. On her birth anniversary, Zeenat Aman shared many unknown facts about the late actress.

## ZEENAT AMAN PAYS TRIBUTE TO PARVEEN BABI

April 4 marks Parveen Babi's birth anniversary. While a lot is written about her personal life, her work life isn't the first thing that pops up whenever you search for her name. Her contemporary, Zeenat Aman, paid tribute to the actress on her birth anniversary by sharing some unknown facts. She also dropped some unseen pictures. Her note began with the words, "I'd like to remember and honour Parveen today, on her birthday. Parveen was gorgeous, glamorous and talented. Back in the 70s, we wore our hair in a

similar manner and enjoyed Western fashion. Though neither of us saw it, we were told we had an uncanny resemblance. It must have been true, because as recently as last year I was approached in Dubai as "Parveen ma'am" (sic)." She further added, "Naturally the media at the time spun tales of competition and rivalry between us, but in reality we were always warm towards each other. Not best friends, but contemporaries, colleagues and well wishers. We worked together on Ashanti and Mahaan (sic)."

It continued, "Parveen's struggle with mental health illness came at a time when the country was still so insensitive and ignorant on these matters. After her death, I often ruminated on how she was remembered. The tabloids focused on her romantic relationships and "episodes", but Parveen was much more than who she dated or what she said when she was unwell. I feel she never truly got the chance to say her piece (sic)."

And concluded with, "She was intelligent and hardworking and

creative. She loved reading, and I remember her curled up with a book in between shots on set. She achieved incredible success as an actor, even featuring on the cover of Time magazine. Later, she took up various creative pursuits, embarked on a spiritual journey, and started designing interiors. We stayed in touch on and off

for years, before ultimately drifting apart. Parveen was remarkable in many ways, and I hope she will be remembered for the effervescent person she was (sic)."

## CELEBS REACT TO ZEENAT AMAN'S POST

Kajol, Janhvi Kapoor, Farhan Akhtar, Chitrangda Singh, Sophie Choudry, and others

reacted to Zeenat Aman's post.

## PARVEEN BABI'S CAREER GRAPH

Parveen Babi started her acting career with Charitra in 1973. Soon after, she climbed the ladder of success all through the 70s with hit films such as Deewaar, Amar Akbar Anthony, Suhaag, The Burning Train, and others. Her last film was Iraada, which released 1991.

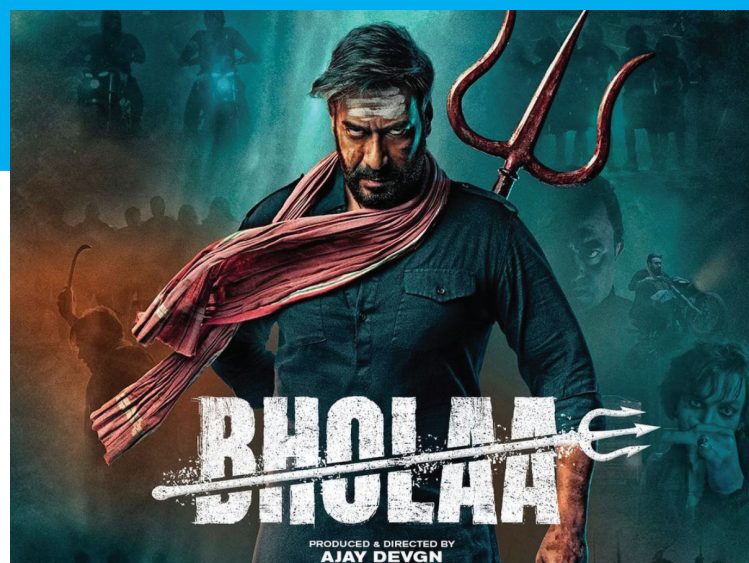
## Sanjay Suri Birthday: Actor's Journey From a Family Tragedy to Entering the Showbiz World

(News Agency) HAPPY BIRTHDAY SANJAY SURI: Actor and producer Sanjay Suri was once an ace squash player, who had no thoughts about spending his life in showbiz. But it was destiny which kept making new ways for the star to keep moving forward. Fans of Sanjay Suri know that the seasoned actor's movie choices are quite different from some of his contemporaries. He rarely kept commercial movies on his priority list and picked up projects that challenge his mettle as an actor. Not many know that behind all the limelight Suri has today, there are scars of a human tragedy. As the actor celebrates his 52nd birthday today on 6 April, 2023, here are

some lesser-known facts about his life that is sure to leave you astonished. According to Mid-Day, Sanjay Suri was merely 6 years old when his elder brother introduced him to squash. His liking for the game grew so much that he made it to the sub-junior squash team for Jammu & Kashmir within two years. He went on to represent the state in Junior national championships. However, everything changed after his family was forced to flee his home state because of a heinous terrorist attack. The actor came from one of the affluent business families of Kashmiri Pandits. He lived in the valley for 19 years but had to escape after his father was killed by militants.







## Bhola Review: Ajay Devgn Film Has Enough Thrills; Deepak Dobriyal Steals the Show

It is Deepak Dobriyal, however, who steals the show. He plays Ashwathama, a gangster at the helm of affairs. Dobriyal lights up the screen with his performance. But this is after what can be called an uncomfortable participation in an item number. It does injustice to his character. Nevertheless, you forget it and his gait and speech seem perfectly tailored for his role. Sanjay Mishra and Gajraj Rao play crucial roles from two op-

posite sides of the spectrum. Mishra is meditative in his approach while Rao tunes his accent in this film to play a crooked retired officer. There is a backstory that sees a special appearance by Amala Paul. It seems forced and dilutes the thrill. The intent here is to buttress a sequel which seems likely. Another criticism could be about how the much touted action sequence plays out. The tone is perfect, a drive through

a jungle with numerous mercenary gangs baying for Bhola's blood and to capture Diana. It is hard not to criticize the quality of the VFX. That is not to say it is bad, however, one can easily make out that it is VFX, if you know what I mean.

Bhola comes across as a film which had potential to be a thrilling ride, no holds barred. However, repeated digressions of emotions waters it down to "it could have been".?

## Anupam Kher Talks About His 535th Film, Says 'Choosing Roles is a Luxury Now'

Veteran actor Anupam Kher has come a long way in showbiz with rich content-driven and commercial films which have allowed him to create a niche for himself among other actors. Time and again, he has been reinventing himself and showcasing his acting prowess with perfection. As he announces his 535th film, the 68-year-old looks back at his journey.

In an interaction with Hindustan Times, Anupam shared about finding good work even after the age of 60. He shared, "Choosing roles is a luxury now. We have young writers writing stories for people who are above 60. Fantastic things are happening. I did a film recently called The Signature, it is a love story made by a Marathi director Gajendra.

I have signed one-two more films. There's a film I have done with Vidyut Jammwal. Then there's

Satish Kaushik's Kaagaz 2, and Emergency. I am challenging myself in different ways." Expressing his excitement towards working with younger actors and filmmakers, he shared, "New scripts are written, and they are not by 70-year-old screenwriters, they are coming from 30-year-old writers. Today, Indian cin-

ema is not dependent on a certain kind of hero. I recently got an award for Best Actor!"

Talking about his passion and love for acting he added, "I am hungry, I will never say bahut kaam kar liya ab nahin. This is the best field, there's no syllabus here. There's always something new happening.



Ajay Devgn returns to direction with his latest release Bhola after Runway 34 which released last year. Co-starring Tabu, Deepak Dobriyal in supporting roles with Sanjay Mishra and Gajraj Rao playing pivotal characters, Bhola is a wild ride. In its major chunk, it weaves a watered down Mad Max-like road adventure with a thrilling siege drama.

Bhola, a recently released convict finds himself embroiled in a battle between cops and the underworld through no fault of his own. Tabu, who plays Diana, a no nonsense IPS officer is the pivot on which the film rests. The actress, as always, does not miss a note. She sticks to what's given to her. Perhaps she understands, better than anyone, what the tone of the film will be like. It is Ajay Devgn, who gets the slow motion walks with

the background music. A wronged Shiv bhakt, he keeps a pouch of vibhuti, which he applies to his forehead before he takes on the 'bad guys'.

Devgn's direction is certainly an improvement from his last venture. Here, he is able to craft a much more thrilling narrative. It is during the set up to the siege that the film is able to grab the viewer's attention. This is taken up by another notch in the chase sequence which, although not perfect, manages to keep you on the edge of your seat. As Bhola, Devgn choses to maintain a stoic face, which is not new to his characters. His delivery of one-liners and conversational dialogues, do add a intriguing mystery to his character. This is an Ajay Devgn you have seen before in many films, however, that does not harm the film here.

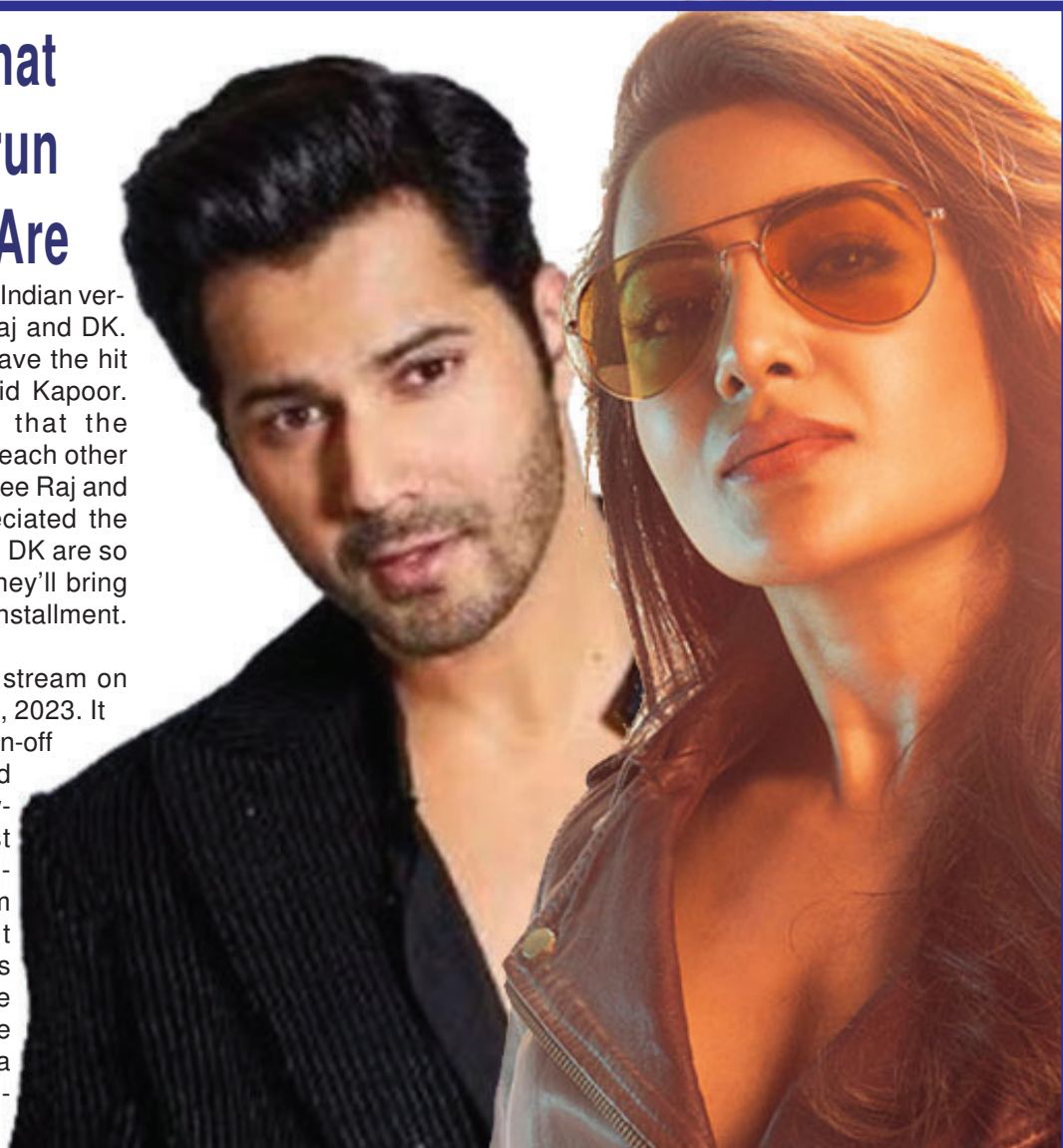
## Citadel Indian Version: Here's What Priyanka Chopra's Inputs For Varun Dhawan, Samantha Ruth Prabhu Are

Priyanka Chopra is back in India for the promotion of her upcoming American web series, Citadel. The actress has been on a spree of promoting the espionage thriller created by the Russo Brothers, in Mumbai. Interestingly, the Indian version of the series will have Varun Dhawan and Samantha Ruth Prabhu in the lead. When asked about what "advice" would Priyanka like to give to the duo, she had a fascinating response in the store!

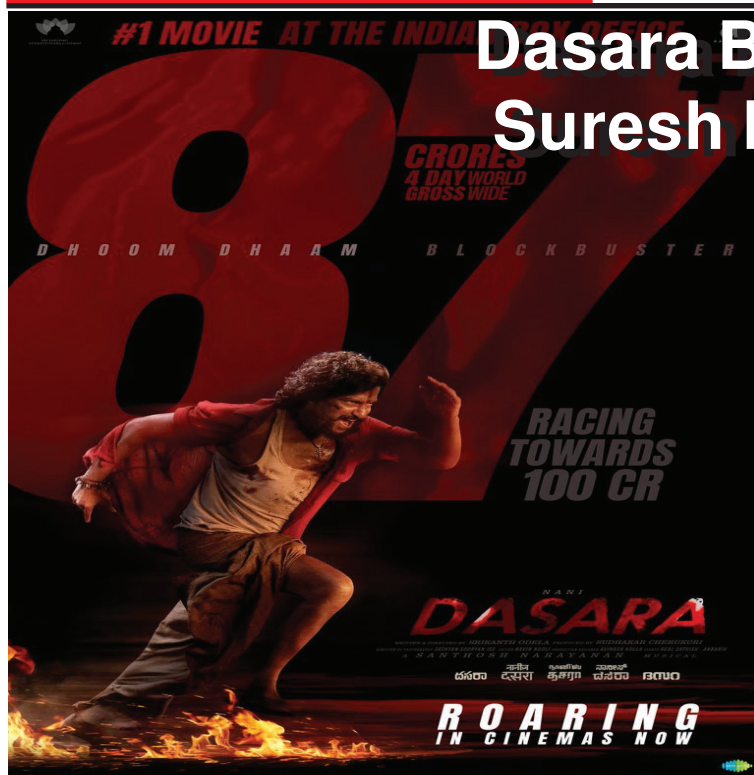
The Barfi actress, who is here with co-star Richard Madden, called Varun and Samantha 'accomplished' actors who do not require her advice. During a Mumbai press conference on Monday, Priyanka was quoted saying, "I don't think I can give them any advice. They're such accomplished actors in their own ways. There's nothing I can say. I met Varun recently at the NMACC event and he was telling me how the shoot is going, how excited he is. There are some really cool threads that connect the other installments with our installment, so we were talking about

those." For the unversed, the Indian version will be headlined by Raj and DK. The director duo recently gave the hit series Farzi, starring Shahid Kapoor. Priyanka further added that the storylines are connected to each other and that she cannot wait to see Raj and DK's work. Priyanka appreciated the filmmakers saying, "Raj and DK are so amazing, so talented and they'll bring their own spin to the Indian installment. So, I'm very excited."

Citadel is all set to stream on Amazon Prime from April 28, 2023. It will have different regional spin-off stories that will be connected to the original one. The viewers will get to watch the first two episodes on release followed by the rest of them in frequent intervals. Priyanka also was recently seen serving some major sartorial goals at the grand inauguration of the Nita Mukesh Ambani Culture Centre (NMACC).







## Dasara Box Office Collection: Nani-Keerthy Suresh Film Earns Rs 87 Crore Worldwide

The movie Dasara, which was released on March 30, has been receiving much love and accolades from cinema-goers. The film marks the directorial debut of Srikanth Odela and stars Nani, Keerthy Suresh, Shine Tom Chacko and Dheekshith Shetty in pivotal roles. As per the latest reports, the movie has earned Rs 87 crore in its first weekend worldwide, putting it on track to join the 100-crore club.

The makers have shared the update on Twitter. "87+ crores worldwide gross in 4 days (fire emoji) Storming towards the Magical 100Crores+ club," the tweet read. A picture of the movie poster's was also

attached to it.

Twitter users were quick to react to this news. One user wrote, "You guys are truly genuine, there are some production houses which would have released 100cr poster third day itself because of the buzz and hype the movie is creating."

**Another user tweeted, "100cr loading."**

One more user wrote, "A world-class work by the south Indian talent." Film critic Jalapathy Gudeli also tweeted about the movie and wrote, "US: With a first-weekend gross of \$1.6 million (?13 Cr), Dasara became Nani's highest-grossing film. The previous highest was 'Jersey' (\$1.5M).

The next goal is \$2 million." As per a report, Nani broke the records of Jr NTR, Pawan Kalyan and Prabhas as Dasara reached the 1 million club in the US market. Actor Mahesh Babu has 11 films in the US market which have earned more than 1 million dollars. Apart from Dasara, Nani has Eega, Bhale Bhale Magadivoy, Ninnu Kori, MCA, Nenu Local, Jersey and Ante Sundaraniki which has earned more than 1 million dollars at the US box office.

Nani has two movies that are slated for a 2023 release. He has HIT 3 and another movie with Mrunal Thakur in the pipeline.

## Ayan Mukerji Postpones Brahmastra 2 To Direct Hrithik Roshan in War 2? Find Out



Moments after Ayan Mukerji announced that his magnum opus, Brahmastra Part Two: Dev and Part Three will be released in 2026 and 2027 respectively, it has now been reported that he will be soon directing Hrithik Roshan starrer War 2.

As reported by trade analyst Taran Adarsh, Aditya Chopra has signed Ayan Mukerji to direct War 2, which is a part of YRF Spy Universe. The first part of the film was directed by Siddharth Anand. However, it should also be noted that neither Yash Raj Films nor Mukerji has not issued any official statement as of now confirming the same. Interestingly, Ayan Mukerji also hinted in his statement earlier today that he will be directing another film very soon. "I also have another piece of news to share...The Universe has presented me with a very special opportunity recently - a very special movie - to step into and direct! What the movie is...more on that when the time is right," a part

of his statement read. Meanwhile, it is also being speculated if War 2 is the reason that Ayan has postponed Brahmastra 2. In an exclusive interview with News18 Showsha last year, Ayan talked about Bhramastra- Part Two: Dev and shared that he planned to release the film in three years (which means by 2025).

"The basic storyline of part two and part three has always been in place. The entire concentration so far was on Brahmastra - Part One: Shiva as that was the foundation film in the trilogy. Our goal is to make the film in a much shorter period. The idea is to come out with the film in three years," he had said. Talking about War, the film was released in 2019 and starred Hrithik Roshan and Tiger Shroff in the lead. Earlier this year, when Hrithik was asked about update on War 2, he told Pinkvilla, "Aditya Chopra is extremely secretive; I think you should just take it from my expression (on what's happening). I am not saying anything."

## Sushmita Sen works out with daughter Alisha and ex-bf Rohman Shawl after 36 days of angioplasty

Sushmita Sen is gradually recovering from her heart condition and embracing the daily routine at her own pace. Taking to Instagram, the former Miss Universe dropped a workout video where she was accompanied by younger daughter Alisha and former boyfriend Rohman Shawl. Sushmita's caption reads, "Will is the only way" #36days. Now allowed more training!!! I leave to shoot for AARYA in Jaipur

shortly...and here are my loved ones, keeping me company & helping me get back in the zone!!! Kisses Alisah Shona & @rohmanshawl... I love you guys!!! #duggadugg" Sushmita suffered a cardiac arrest in February and following that she has undergone angioplasty. Meanwhile, she completed the dubbing for Taali. The series is based on the life of transgender Shreegauri Sawant.



## The epic Asia Pacific premiere of



**Photo Caption: L-R: Sushant Sreeram, country director, Prime Video, Richard Madden, Priyanka Chopra Jonas, Gaurav Gandhi, vice president, Asia Pacific, Prime Video.**

The epic Asia Pacific premiere of Prime Video's upcoming global spy series, Citadel, with the lead pair Richard Madden and Priyanka Chopra Jonas in Mumbai. Ahead of the grand evening, the lead cast of the action-packed series sat down for an entertaining chat and revealed what went into making this ground-breaking spy franchise. Created by Amazon Studios and

Russo Brothers' AGBO, with David Weil serving as showrunner and executive producer, Citadel will premiere exclusively on Prime Video, with two episodes dropping on April 28, and one episode rolling out weekly through May 26. They were joined by Gaurav Gandhi, vice president, Asia Pacific, Prime Video and Sushant Sreeram, country director, Prime Video.





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