



The South Asian



INSIDER



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Vol. 19

Issue 32

Friday 11 October to 17 October 2020

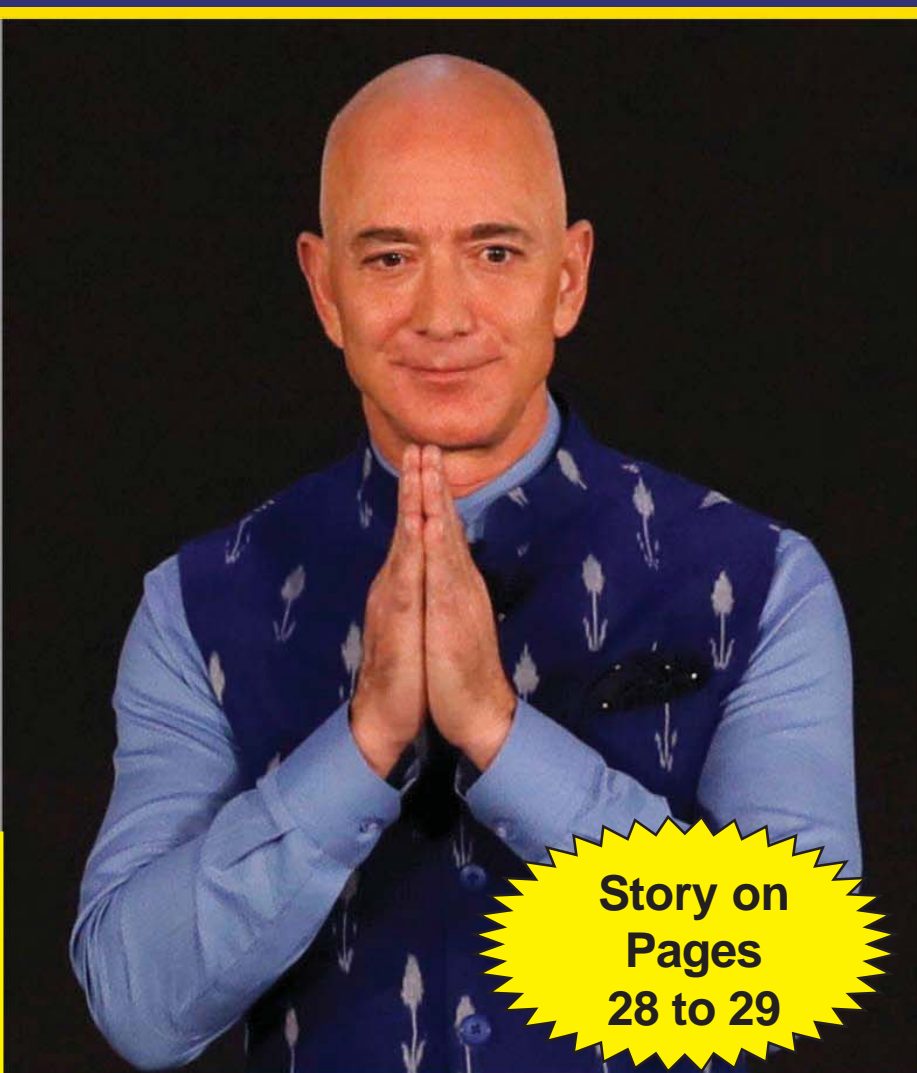
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Ambani Vs Amazon India's raging retail war



Amazon, Reliance and Walmart Inc's Flipkart are in a battle to gain market share in India, as millions of middle class customers are trying to adapt to the new culture of buying food and groceries online amid coronavirus pandemic. Amazon has sent a legal notice to Future Group, alleging the Indian retailer breached the terms of its contract by signing a deal with Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries.



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Laid Off And Unpaid, Kerala Workers Return Home From The Gulf

With a vaccine still months away and the number of coronavirus cases rising around the world, there is little prospect that anything will return to normal any time soon for the world's 164 million migrant workers who cross borders.

(Insider Bureau)- In his long years away from his family, Ramakrishnan Athekkatil often imagined what it would be like to settle down back in India.

He never imagined he would return like this: laid off, in debt and pursued by a sickness racing around the globe.

Home was a small village ringed by coconut palms and paddy fields on the India's southwestern coast. His father, pushed by poverty, had been the first to leave for the Persian Gulf in search of work. Later Ramakrishnan, 47, and his four brothers all made the same voyage.

"Ever since I was young, I wanted to go," Ramakrishnan said. "I used to tell my father, 'Just take me with you to the gulf.'"

The family was part of a vast migration from South Asia to countries flush with wealth but short on labor. The migrants

worked to raise gleaming cities in the desert, and built the schools, hospitals and power plants that helped transform collections of villages and port towns into modern Arab countries.

Now, one of the largest migration corridors in the world is flowing in reverse. The coronavirus pandemic and crashing oil prices have led to mass layoffs in gulf states, leaving foreign workers vulnerable and in some cases destitute. Out of money and fearing the virus, hundreds of thousands have returned home. With a vaccine still months away and the number of coronavirus cases rising around the world, there is little prospect that anything will return to normal any time soon for the world's 164 million migrant workers who cross borders.

About one-third of them come from South Asia, and India is the

single largest source of such migrant labor in the world.

Kerala, the small southern state where the Athekkatils live, plays an outsize role in such flows. An estimated 2.5 million Keralites were working abroad before the arrival of the virus, the vast majority in the Persian Gulf. The pandemic is pushing them home in record numbers: As many as 500,000 migrants and their families are expected to return by the end of the year, the largest such exodus ever, experts say. Nearly 400,000 people have already returned to the state from the gulf since May, according to data provided by the Kerala government agency responsible for overseas workers. At least half of the returnees said they were coming back because they had lost their jobs.

Meanwhile, the pandemic has also prompted some countries in the region to accelerate plans to



"nationalize" their workforces - in other words, to reduce their reliance on foreign migrants altogether.

The workers who came home are struggling. Indians who lost their jobs in the gulf are returning to an economy crippled by rising infections and by the aftermath of one of the world's strictest lockdowns.

"You're looking at devastation on both sides of the corridor," said Shabarinath Nair, a regional migration specialist at the International Labor Organization. The coronavirus crisis has upended many aspects of globalization previously taken for granted - in manufacturing, in

education, in tourism - but one of its most dramatic impacts has been on migration. As country after country closed borders and banned flights, migrant workers around the globe faced chaos without precedent. Some began a desperate scramble to get home. Others were stranded and faced an equally desperate wait.

A survey of migrants from Central America and Mexico conducted by the International Organization for Migration found that half had lost their jobs in the pandemic. From Ukraine to Myanmar, Mozambique to Venezuela, migrant workers around the world retraced their steps by the millions.

"Will Make Her Proud": Kamala Harris On Mother During Big Debate



(Insider Bureau)-US Senator Kamala Harris mentioned her immigrant mother and how proud she would be to see her on the stage during her one-off with Vice President Mike Pence for the vice presidential elections. "The fact that I am sitting here will make her proud," said the democratic vice-presidential candidate during the debate at Salt Lake City, Utah, ahead of the November 3 election. "I think about my mother... the fact that I am sitting here right now would make her proud. It is because of my mother who came to US at 19, gave birth to me at 25. I think I am sitting here that will make her proud. Joe and I have share purpose about lifting people," Ms Harris said. The democratic vice-presidential candidate has often referred to her mother, Shyamala Gopalan, as her source of inspiration who had guided her throughout her entire life. "My

mother always used to say, "Don't just sit around and complain about things. Do something", Harris, 55, wrote in a fundraising email to her supporters last month. The Biden-Harris campaign have been receiving support from the Asian American community with many showing solidarity for Harris by tweeting images and the stories of their mothers and grandmothers in a campaign #SheRose #AAPISheRose that's picked momentum on Twitter. Just hours before the much-anticipated face-off between Harris and Pence, Kamala Harris's sister Maya tweeted an image of her and her sister Kamala with their mom, who immigrated to the United States from India, writing, "My shero: Shyamala Gopalan. #SheRose and made it possible for @KamalaHarris to run. #AAPISheRose."

My shero: Shyamala Gopalan. #SheRose and made it possible for @KamalaHarris to run.???? #AAPISheRosepic.twitter.com/OK0P2kFzLY - Maya Harris (@mayaharris_) October 7, 2020

Kamala Harris, the daughter of Indian and Jamaican immigrants, made headlines in August after being selected as Democratic nominee.



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151st Birth Anniversary Observance of Mahatma Gandhi, at Royal Albert Palace From September 30th to 2nd October, 2020 (By Vijay Shah)



Rotary Club of Hicksville South (RCHS) hosted its Children Garments Giveaway Project



Top L-R RCHS President Nilima Madan and Services Director Jasbir Singh Supervisor Saladino with others
Bottom L-R Supervisor Saladino giving a Citation and speaking to Senator Anna Kaplan

Top L-R Oyster Bay Supervisor Joseph Saladino, Kamlesh C Mehta, Senator Kevin Thomas
Bottom Rotary Club Hicksville South President Nilima Madan and team with Senator Kevin Thomas

(SAI Bureau)- Rotary Club of Hicksville South (RCHS) hosted its Children Garments Giveaway Project, on Friday, September 25th, 2020 in the evening outside HAB Bank at Hicksville, NY on Broadway. Under the leadership of the Club President, Ms. Nilima Madan and the Project Chair, Mr. Arjen Bhatija, the event was well organized and very successful. Rotary Club of Hicksville South organized 2,500 pieces of new Children-Garments (shirts, pants, shorts, etc.) to be

distributed to different local charities and to the foster children through the Nassau County Department Social Services besides children who are under the family court supervision and custody. Some garments were given to a church in Hempstead Township. Many dignitaries were present at the event and they each addressed the audience. The Town of Oyster Bay Supervisor Mr. Joseph Saladino, New York State Senator Kevin Thomas - Chairman of Committee on

Consumer Protection, Ms. Anna Kaplan New York State Senator Anna M. Kaplan - Chair of Committee on Commerce, Economic Development and Small Business, Commissioner of Nassau County Social Service, Ms. Nancy Nunziata, and Deputy Commissioner, and Director, of Nassau County Employment Program, Ms. Sunita Manjrekar graced the event. The Club Secretary, Mr. Mizan Rahman, began the proceedings with the Pledge of Allegiance.

RCHS President Ms. Nilima Madan welcomed all the elected officials, distinguished guests and RCHS members in her speech and highlighted the new Children Garments' project taken up in 2020 by RCHS. She emphasized the need of clothing for children under supervision of Dept of Social Services and others in the community and commended the team members who worked to put the charity event together, especially the Project Chair and RCHS Treasurer, Mr. Arjen Bhatija, Co-

Chairs, RCHS Past President Dr. Urmilesh Arya, and RCHS Vice President Mr. Rizwan Qureshi.

President Nilima Madan extended special thanks to Mr. Rizwan Qureshi, who is also the Senior Executive Vice President of HAB bank for generous accommodation and the hospitality for the project event. Among others, Club's Founding President and Rotary District 7255 Past District Governor, Mr. Kamlesh Mehta praised the activities that are undertaken by the Club President, Ms. Nilima Madan and the progress made by the club in charitable giving. Supervisor Mr. Joseph Saladino thanked RCHS for its continuous philanthropic projects and other community services for past years. Senator Mr. Kevin Thomas acknowledged the relentless work that South Asian Americans are involved in and Indian Americans in particular who serve our greater community of New York. He specifically mentioned the leadership role of President Nilima Madan, Mr. Kamlesh Mehta and Mr. Jasbir (Jay) Singh, Club's Service Director. Senator Ms. Anna Kaplan delivered her speech with excitement and spoke of RCHS's leadership in volunteering work in the community.

"Violation Of Rights": Indian-American Couple Convicted For Forced Labour

The Indian American couple compelled the victims into servitude for up to 18 hours a day, with minimal pay, through intimidation, threats and violence, the court said.

(Insider Bureau)- An Indian-American woman from California has been sentenced to 15 years in prison for forced labour violations. Sharmistha Barai and her husband Satish Kartan were found guilty of conspiracy to obtain forced labour and two counts of obtaining forced labour by a federal jury on March 14, 2019, after an 11-day trial. Kartan will be sentenced on October 22.

"The United States abolished slavery and involuntary servitude more than 150 years ago. Yet, inhuman forced labour and

deprivations of liberty and dignity persist because human traffickers are modern-day slave masters who endeavour to exploit their fellow human beings for profit and other gruesome purposes," said Assistant Attorney General Eric Dreiband. The Indian American couple compelled the victims into servitude for up to 18 hours a day, with minimal pay, through intimidation, threats and violence, he said, adding this is an unconscionable violation of the victims' individual rights, freedom and dignity.

According to court documents

and evidence presented at trial, between February 2014 and October 2016, Kartan and Barai hired workers from overseas to perform domestic labour in their home in Stockton, California.

In advertisements seeking workers on the internet and India-based newspapers, they made false claims about the wages and conditions of employment.

Once the workers arrived at their residence, Kartan and Barai compelled them to work up to 18 hours a day with limited rest and nourishment, federal prosecutors alleged.



Few of them were paid any wages. The couple kept the domestic workers from leaving and coerced them to continue working by threatening them, by creating an atmosphere of fear, control, and disempowerment,

and at times by physically hitting or burning them.

"When a victim resisted or expressed a desire to leave, the threats and abuse became worse," the Department of Justice added.

PM Modi to launch Covid-19 awareness campaign today

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will launch an awareness campaign on Thursday to promote Covid-19 appropriate behaviour ahead of the upcoming festival and winter season as well as the opening up of the economy.

(News Agencies)- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will launch an awareness campaign on Thursday to promote Covid-19 appropriate behaviour ahead of the upcoming festival and winter season as well as the opening up of the economy.

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday gave nod to the campaign, which will be launched to encourage people's participation (Jan Andolan) and will be a "low cost high intensity" affair aimed at delivering messages of mask wearing, physical distancing and hand

hygiene.

"Mask, social distancing and washing hands are the only weapons to remain safe, in the absence of a Covid-19 vaccine," information and broadcasting minister Prakash Javadekar said. To achieve a multiplier effect, the campaign will involve those working in anganwadis, health sector and around 500 influencers from sports, culture and the film industry. Communication touch-points such as markets, railway stations, anganwadi Centres will be utilized for the campaign.

"A Covid-19 pledge will be taken by all. A concerted action plan will be implemented by central ministries and state and UT departments," said an official statement, adding there would be region-specific targeted communication in high case-load districts.

The government has prepared slides - with photos of PM Modi - to be used both physical and online. The tagline of these slides will be "no carelessness until there is a cure" and they will contain messages such as "stay protected from corona", "wear



your mask properly" and "maintain safe distance" with visual representation.

Officials said the campaign will be conducted in various languages across the length and breadth of the country. Bodies such as the Confederation of

Indian Industry and Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry may also be encouraged to participate while Doordarshan has already initiated a Mask Up India campaign, it is learnt.

Dissemination throughout the

Covid-19: India crosses 82 million tests in 9 months



At least one million samples are being tested for Covid-19 each day on an average since past month and a half, with country's current Covid-19 testing capacity being 1.5 million tests each day

(News Agencies)- Testing for coronavirus disease (Covid-19) has picked up exponentially in the past 9 months, with around 82 million cumulative number of samples having already been tested so far.

At least one million samples are being tested for Covid-19 each

day on an average since past month and a half, with country's current Covid-19 testing capacity being 1.5 million tests each day.

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) that is spearheading the Covid-19 testing initiative in the country

has currently approved 1,893 laboratories from across the country that also include several standalone labs.

Of all ICMR approved laboratories performing Covid-19 tests in India, 1,104 are in the government sector and 789 labs are in the private sector.

There are at least 15 more applications pending for approval before ICMR that are currently being processed. Of these, 15 are in Maharashtra, and 1 each in Sikkim and Andhra Pradesh.

There are 973 laboratories in all that are performing the gold standard real-time polymerase

chain reaction (RT-PCR) test; 791 that perform Covid-19 tests using the TrueNat testing platform; and about 129 labs that perform CBNAAT testing for Covid-19.

Both TrueNat and CBNAAT testing platforms are used to conduct tuberculosis testing, and have been re-purposed to also conduct Covid-19 tests in a bid to enhance country's overall Covid-19 testing capacity.

"There are multiple factors behind India's low death rate; from implementing public health measures such as nationwide lockdown, to inter-ministerial

collaborations for launching several make-in-India initiatives, and increasing testing," says Dr Samiran Panda, head, epidemiology and communicable diseases at ICMR.

"Testing was increased by not only enhancing laboratory network in a short span of time but also by repurposing of existing diagnostic platforms, for example that for tuberculosis, to use for Covid-19 testing. All these were crucial in identifying the infected, and isolating them as per requirement very early on in the disease stage," he adds.

Three terrorists gunned down in encounter in J-K's Shopian

Three terrorists were killed in an overnight encounter in south Kashmir's Shopian district, police officials said on Wednesday.

(News Agencies)- Three terrorists were killed in an overnight encounter in south Kashmir's Shopian district, police officials said on Wednesday.

The police, army and CRPF started a joint search and cordon operation in Sujan area of the district on Tuesday evening, officials said.

"During the search operation, the terrorists were given the opportunity to surrender. However,

they fired indiscriminately upon the joint search party, which was retaliated leading to an encounter," a police spokesperson said.

He said that the operation was suspended due to darkness and the area was cordoned off. "Terrorists trapped inside made certain attempts to break the cordon and escape," he said. Early on Wednesday morning, the operation resumed and the

three militants were killed. "Their bodies were retrieved from the site of encounter," he said.

The terrorists were identified as Sajad Ahmad Malla, affiliated with Hizbul Mujahideen and Waseem Ahmad Magray, who was affiliated with Al-Badar outfit. The third militant has been identified as Junaid Rashid Wani. The spokesperson said that the militants were part of groups involved in planning and



executing several terror attacks in the area.

In view of the Covid-19 pandemic, the bodies of the terrorists will be sent to Handwara

for burial following medico-legal formalities. "The nearest family members of the killed militants shall be allowed to participate in the last rites," he said.

In a first, PM Modi to hand over Aadhaar-like cards for properties mapped by drones

The title deeds can be leveraged by their holders as financial assets for loans and will also help keep a record of properties in the rural areas; no such records exist currently.

(News Agencies)- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will, on Sunday, hand over physical copies of property titles of their homes and the surrounding areas they own (as opposed to the cultivated land) to around 132,000 land owners across 763 villages in a significant land ownership reform that could improve the finances of rural property-owners and also end property disputes that have gone on for years, sometimes decades. The title deeds can be leveraged by their holders as financial assets for loans and will also help keep a record of properties in the rural areas; no such records exist currently. The title deeds will be handed over under the "Svamitva" project launched by PM on April 24 and will map all urban or abadi (populated) areas of 6.40 lakh villages by 2024.

House owners from 763 villages including 221 from Haryana, two from Karnataka, 100 from Maharashtra, 44 from Madhya

Pradesh, 346 from Uttar Pradesh and 50 from Uttarakhand will receive physical copies of title deeds as well as digital property cards, people familiar with the matter said.

The objective of this scheme is to provide an integrated asset verification solution for rural India, they added on condition of anonymity. The land of the residents in rural abadi areas will be demarcated using the latest survey methods using drones and with the help of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, State Revenue Departments and the Survey of India. This will not only enable village household owners to use their homes as a collateral for loans but also cut down on costly rural litigation.

The local representatives of the revenue department and representatives of other allied departments will prepare a record of the ownership of the people in the presence of the inhabitants.

Along with this, a detailed arrangement has been set in place for on the spot settlement of disputes, the people explained. Since the very beginning, the villages of India have been the backbone of its economy, because "Malgujari" or land revenue was the main source of the state income, these people said. When the British took over the reins of governance here, they inherited a land record system established over centuries.

As their sole objective was to collect as much land revenue from tenants as possible, the British established the Zamindari system in many parts of the country and the so-called ryotwari system in the remaining parts. Even as the ownership of the cultivated land and their measurement maps were prepared, they did not make any effort to measure the populated area of the village; nor did they try to determine the ownership of residents in those



populated areas. This was not done as there was no land revenue to be collected from the abadi area. Unfortunately even after independence, no effort was made to either demarcate the abadi land or create ownership rights there. Due to the absence of any kind of ownership records or demarcation of abadi land, whenever any dispute arose regarding possession, drainage, or boundaries, the parties have to go to a civil court for settlement of disputes, a lengthy process that sometimes transcends generations. According to a person well

versed in land titling issues who asked not to be named, of the total number of cases pending in the civil courts of our country, at least 40% are related to the disputes concerning the abadi land. The concept of property ownership being a way to access credit and improve the financial position of the poor is well established. It is the central thesis of Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto Polar who argues that providing the poor with access to listless would unlock their economic potential and prevent their assets from being what he terms dead capital.

Bengal govt sites Shaheen Bagh ruling, Covid to stop BJP's 'Nabanna March'



Mamata Banerjee had supported Shaheen Bagh protest in Delhi, held against the CAA.

The Shaheen Bagh blockade started in December 2019 and continued till March 2020. TMC chief Mamata Banerjee supported the movement and she still opposes the new citizenship law and the National Population Register (NPR) in public, saying these will trigger social and religious discrimination. A Shaheen Bagh-like agitation was held in Kolkata as well earlier this year.

The SC order also asked authorities to ensure that public places were free of occupation by protestors. "Occupation of public places for protests is not acceptable. Authorities must ensure removal of occupation of public places," the bench held on Wednesday.

However, the manner in which occupants should be removed to clear public places is to be decided by government authorities and they should not hide behind or wait for court orders in order to carry out their functions, the court added.

Hours later, the West Bengal home department, while replying to a letter from the state BJYM, cited the same ruling, saying it was duty-bound to follow it.

"You are probably aware that, only a few hours back, the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India has given a judgement in Civil Appeal No 3282/2020 wherein the Hon'ble Apex Court has held certain principles regarding protest and occupation of sites and public places and public ways. You will kindly appreciate that we are duty-bound to comply with the solemn order of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India," said the letter sent by the special secretary of the home department to the BJYM. HT has seen the letter.

In a parallel development, the state government declared that all offices in Nabanna will remain closed for two days so that they can be sanitised.

In its bid to discourage BJYM's 'Nabanna March', the state home department also cited the

prohibition on large political gathering as per the latest Central guidelines issued to contain the spread of Covid-19 pandemic.

"You are also probably aware that the Government of India, on the strength of the National Disaster Management Act, has issued guidelines banning gatherings and political rallies having more than 100 people in view of the current Covid-19 pandemic. It seems that your protest march is in clear violation of this disaster guideline of the Government of India. Indeed, you have categorically mentioned that each of your rallies will have around 25,000 youths," said the home department's letter.

"You are probably also aware that Section 144 CrPC is in force in and around Nabanna," said the letter, adding that the government would help the BJYM hold peaceful and democratic rallies at places where prohibitory orders under Section 144 are not violated.

(News Agencies)- Hours after the Supreme Court on Wednesday ruled in reference to the blockade against Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) at south Delhi's Shaheen Bagh that right to protest in public places is not absolute and public places cannot be occupied indefinitely, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) government cited the same order to dissuade the youth wing of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) from holding a mega protest outside Nabanna, the state secretariat in Howrah district, on Thursday.

The Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM), the youth wing of the BJP, has organised the 'Nabanna Chalo' (march to Nabanna) programme to raise its

voice on issues ranging from an alleged lack of employment opportunities in Bengal to law and order problems. Top BJP and BJYM leaders are to lead four processions from different locations in Kolkata and Howrah to Nabanna on Thursday. The BJYM informed the government that each of these rallies will have around 25,000 youths.

On Wednesday, the Supreme Court highlighted the troubles faced by the general public due to the road blockade at Shaheen Bagh by protestors who were opposing the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and ruled that dissent and democracy go hand in hand but protests must be carried out in designated areas.

NHRC asks states to expand category of prisoners who can be released

NHRC advisory states that police shouldn't arrest persons accused of minor, bailable offences

(News Agencies)-The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has asked all the states and union territories to consider expanding the categories of prisoners who could be released in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, as social distancing is difficult to observe inside the prisons, and hiring medical officers at a "war-footing". It has also asked police departments not to arrest persons accused of minor and bailable offences so as to keep public interaction minimum.

On Monday, the rights body issued an advisory to all the states/Union Territories (UTs) and the Centre on the rights of prisoners and police personnel based on an impact assessment by a Committee of Experts formed by it to look into the

human rights and future response. The Supreme Court had, in March this year, asked the chief secretaries of all the states/UTs to release a certain category of prisoners to avoid overcrowding in the jails in the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak. A large number of under trial inmates has been released by states in the past five or six months.

In its communication, NHRC has said that all inmates should be provided with soaps, sanitisers, masks and their regular use must be mandated.

It has also asked the jail authorities to fill up vacancies of medical officers and paramedical staff on a "war-footing"-preferably within the next six months. "In the meantime, where there are only visiting doctors available,

efforts may be made to explore collaboration with local private doctors as the pressure on public health care system would be immense," states the advisory.

The rights body has suggested that jails can also collaborate with local and specialist hospitals so that inmates and jail staff can be provided appropriate testing and treatment quickly. Sufficient stocks of medicines like paracetamol, Vitamin E, Zinc and others should be maintained in all jails, for which extra budget should be given to prison authorities, NHRC said.

NHRC also issued an advisory for the police, asking them to not arrest persons accused of minor, bailable offences.

In its advisory related to the rights of police officers, who are



most vulnerable to contracting Covid-19 due to the nature of their job, NHRC said, "Arrests and remand to be undertaken only in serious [cases]. In non-bailable offences, the accused be produced before the court at the earliest if he or she is no longer required for investigation."

Police departments have also been asked to have a worst-case scenario business continuity plan-ensuring the continuity of core functions of police services,

while supporting the public health services and general governance of the state.

For managing big crowds or protests, NHRC has said that police should use proportionate force only when necessary.

The rights body said that law enforcement officers are likely more heavily impacted as they are one of the "essential workers" that must continue to work and respond to calls for service while others shelter at home.

PM Modi starts 20th year as the head of a govt



The Union Cabinet on Wednesday lauded Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his leadership as he started his 20th year as head of government, 13 years as chief minister of Gujarat and six years as Prime Minister of the country.

schemes. He made foundational reforms for development," Information and broadcasting minister Prakash Javadekar said. BJP, also heaped praises on PM Modi for achieving the feat.

Party president J P Nadda on Twitter said, "October 7, 2001, when Modi was sworn in as Gujarat chief minister for the first time, is a "milestone" in India's political history. Modi has since been notching up bigger victories and his popularity has only gone up." The party also projected

graphic images showing Modi's record in elected office as compared to legendary figures like Franklin Roosevelt, Margaret Thatcher and Francois Mitterand. "Be it as a chief minister for Gujarat or as the Prime Minister of the world's largest democracy, Narendra Modi has always been a crusader for people's welfare," the party said on social media. Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri also lauded Modi for "20 years in service of humanity & Maa Bharati with dedication,

vision & selflessness". "Heartiest congratulations to PM @narendramodi Ji for becoming the only democratically elected world leader to serve the people continuously for 20 years since 2001," Puri said. "PM Sri @narendramodi Ji has completed 6941 successful days in total as CM of Gujarat & PM of India. One of the unblemished tenures ever seen. Kept public welfare as a priority and never worried about himself," its spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi tweeted.

(News Agencies) -The Union Cabinet on Wednesday lauded Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his leadership as he started his 20th year as head of government, 13 years as chief minister of Gujarat and six years as Prime

"The Cabinet congratulated the Prime Minister for entering the 20th year as a government head, uninterrupted, and by democratic means. He gave the corruption-free government to the nation, fulfilled long-awaited pending

India's first Covid-19 wave finally recedes

(News Agencies)- The first wave of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) appears to be receding for the first time across the country, with cases seeing a steady drop for three consecutive weeks now. Experts warn that with the festive season coming up, the curve may rise again if people let their guard down during the celebrations.

The seven-day average of daily cases in India touched 93,617 on September 16, the highest till date. In the three weeks since, this number (also referred to as the daily case trajectory)

has dropped every single day and stands at 74,623 on Wednesday - down around 20% from the peak.

This has meant that India's doubling rate - the number of days it takes for the number of infections to double - has seen a drastic improvement in the past month. On Wednesday, it stood at 60 days, as against 32.6 days on September 7.

This drop is also mirrored in the death trajectory. The seven-day average of daily deaths in the country was at its highest on September 15, when it touched 1,169. This number has dropped

near consistently since then, and as on Wednesday, it stands at 977 - a drop of 16% from the peak.

This is the first time a drop of this magnitude and consistency has been recorded in the Covid-19 case and death trajectories in India. Across the world, there have been fluctuations and waves in the case (and death) trajectories - the US, for instance, is on its third wave currently - but India's trajectory has been climbing throughout till mid-September.

This reversal in trajectory has been led by the some of the

states that have so far caused the national spike in cases - Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Delhi. Together, these four states have been responsible for 46% of all infections in the country.

In Maharashtra, India's worst-hit state responsible for a little under a quarter of all infections in the country, daily cases peaked at 22,149 on September 17, a day after the peak in the national trajectory. The trajectory in Delhi also peaked the same day, although Delhi is the only major region in the country that has seen a distinct

second wave of infections. Cases in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, meanwhile, have been dropping since the start of September - their respective peaks were on September 2 and 1 respectively.

A handful of states, particularly Kerala and Karnataka, however, appear to be defying the larger trend and cases there remain currently at peak levels and appear to be rising. "Even though cases have started dropping, we are nowhere close to the end of the first wave.

Will Trump's Covid diagnosis hurt his political standing?

Donald Trump has one particular skill: pretending things are different than they seem. He was never a good businessman, but he was fantastic at playing a good businessman on TV. His coronavirus response has been abysmal, but his public insistence that everything is fine has somehow managed to keep him from losing significant support. Trump's specialty is PR – spinning bad things rather than doing good things. But PR can only do so much. Trump has consistently downplayed the seriousness of the pandemic and encouraged people to resist public health measures. He mocked Joe Biden for wearing a mask. Then, having taken few precautions to protect himself or others, he landed in the hospital with Covid-19 and has taken a course of heavy-duty experimental treatment meant for severe cases. He's also been at the center of an explosion of new positive tests among high-ranking Republicans, including three senators, the former New Jersey governor Chris Christie, Trump's new campaign manager, the White House adviser Hope Hicks, the former White House counselor Kellyanne Conway, and White House press secretary, Kayleigh McEnany. Trump is being criticized for having knowingly exposed staff, donors, and secret service agents to potential infection. Reality has finally caught up with the man who once suggested that "like a miracle, [coronavirus] will disappear". Trump has not, of course, responded by humbly admitting that he behaved stupidly and should have listened to his critics. Instead, he is reacting in the only way he knows: pretending nothing is wrong. Trump's doctor has given misleadingly rosy accounts of his medical condition, and Trump reportedly became furious with his chief of staff, Mark Meadows, for contradicting the doctor and admitting that Trump's vitals had been "very concerning". Trump released videos to demonstrate that he is in good health and even appears to have staged a photoshoot in which he pretended to work while hospitalized. Trump's advisers are doing their level best to spin the crisis, with the campaign spokesperson Erin Perrine even suggesting it's a positive, because Trump now has "experience fighting coronavirus" that Joe Biden lacks. On Monday, when he returned to the White House after his hospitalization, he took off his mask to be photographed, despite being likely contagious. Trump may have a sense that cavalierly flouting Covid-19 guidelines and then getting a severe case of Covid-19 is not a good look for the president. He reportedly pressed his doctors to let him return to the White House as soon as possible, to show that he is strong and capable. It is still possible that Trump will come out of this crisis better off politically

than before. If he recovers quickly, which he claims to be the case, he will use it to try to humanize himself and may be able to revive his earlier insistence that Covid-19 is not much worse than the flu. Trump will work very, very hard to manipulate the American people into not judging him negatively over this. And with Joe Biden withdrawing attack ads during Trump's illness, perhaps Trump will weather this scandal like he has weathered so many before. After all, Trump once said he could "shoot somebody on Fifth Avenue" and not lose support, and since then he's essentially done everything short of that. Will this new crisis finally be Trump's undoing? I don't think we can count on it. Trump is a television president and his presidency is a giant reality TV show. The reason people don't see through his lies is that Trump makes sure the lies are all they see. He keeps people glued to the TV and to Twitter, where he creates an imaginary reality totally separate from the world that actually exists. His supporters do not question it, partly because it's a reality they want to live in. It is, after all, a world where the president is fine, the virus is not too threatening, we can go about our business as normal, the economy is thriving, and America is becoming great again. It's easy to see why people joined the throng gathered outside Walter Reed to wish Trump well (and probably spread coronavirus). We can blame people for not seeing through Trump's transparently false picture. But that's not entirely fair. When our understandings of the world are developed through media, we are only as perceptive as the information we take in, and being deluged with lies has a tendency to make us believe them. Critics are flabbergasted by the sheer volume of Trump's lies, but the regularity is critical to their success. Trump has to create an entire alternate reality that exists solely on Fox News and in the minds of supporters. As this fiction becomes more and more difficult to maintain, increasingly absurd claims must be made to sustain it. Trump had to deny the seriousness of the virus as it tore through the country; now he is having to deny its seriousness as it tears through his own body. It sometimes feels like we are living in a reality television show. The problem, though, is that we aren't, and Trump's fantasy television world is suddenly coming into sharp conflict with the real one. Devastating wildfires are making climate denialism much more difficult to sustain, and the coronavirus pandemic has finally reached the White House. The reality TV clown we elected to rule is now facing serious crises that are harder and harder to wish away. But do not expect Donald Trump to develop a more sober understanding of reality and take the show off the air. After all, the ratings are fantastic.

How Hathras can hurt the BJP in UP

Long before Boolgarhi village in Hathras, there was Bisada village in Dadri. Exactly five years ago, in September 2015, 50-year-old Mohammed Akhlaq was lynched to death for allegedly storing and consuming beef. The killers were all upper caste men who were eventually let off on bail. The local Member of Parliament (MP), Mahesh Sharma, then a Union minister, attended the funeral of one of the accused, the body draped in the Tricolour. Uttar Pradesh (UP) chief minister (CM) Yogi Adityanath began the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s 2019 election campaign from the village in the presence of the accused. There was not a word of regret for Akhlaq's death, but instead a ringing endorsement of the anti-cow slaughter campaign. The BJP had won the Gautam Buddha Nagar (Noida) Lok Sabha seat, where Bisada is located, in 2014, before the incident, and it did so again, after the incident, in 2019. Like in Bisada, fear and intimidation has replaced any genuine sense of remorse at Boolgarhi. Rather than empathising with the family of the victim, the CM's office claims that there is an "international conspiracy" to foment caste and communal violence in the state. The police have filed FIRs against "unknown persons". The ex-BJP Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) of Hathras has organised a panchayat of the predominantly upper caste villagers to defend the accused. A vicious campaign of character assassination has begun: The girl's dying declaration where she claims to have been gang raped is also under the

scanner. Amid conflicting narratives, the truth is a young girl suffered a traumatic death, her body was cremated in undignified haste at night, and her family was forced to grieve in their barricaded homes. At both Bisada and Boolgarhi, the Yogi government has shown itself to be an insensitive regime. And yet, there is a crucial difference. Akhlaq was a Muslim, a community which has been systematically demonised in Yogi's UP and whose social and political marginalisation is part of a conscious majoritarian agenda. Which is why his government could openly line up behind Akhlaq's killers without any compunction. In fact, any civil society or political campaign to seek justice for Akhlaq suited the BJP: It only made it easier for the party to polarise the electorate. Which is why Akhlaq's killers will get away. Which is also why a Dr Kafeel Khan, the Gorakhpur doctor, who dared to raise his voice against the Yogi government, has spent months in jail on specious charges or in hiding. Which is why anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act protesters in UP are being arrested under stringent provisions. But while Muslim lives might not matter, Dalit votes do. Dalits may still struggle to socially confront upper caste dominance in deeply hierarchical rural societies such as Hathras. Many are still burdened by preordained caste occupations in an unjust and unequal Hindu social order. And yet, Dalit support to a cross-caste Hindutva appeal has been a vital factor in the BJP's recent electoral supremacy, especially in UP.



ISSN No. 1554 06X

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Hathras: Making a mockery of the idea of justice

The institutional response to sexual violence is critical. On this, the UP police have covered themselves in shame. At every turn, they robbed the family of its agency to make key decisions

There is so much noise over the horror of what has happened in Hathras, Uttar Pradesh (UP), that it is difficult to believe that a week ago, the family of the 19-year-old Dalit victim was running from town to town, hospital to hospital, police station to police station, ignored, overlooked, forgotten.

I first met her family when they arrived in Delhi to seek medical help at Safdarjung hospital. Her father and brother were hapless and broken. "Take me home," the woman had said to her brother Sandeep, younger by just a year. Those were her last words. By the morning, she was dead.

Sandeep, employed at a pathology laboratory and thus, a frontline worker in these coronavirus pandemic times, said many things to me, some from rage, some from sorrow. But what really stays with me is his response to my question on how they coped over the last fortnight. "My sister was raped on September 14," he said softly, "but it's only after her death that anyone has bothered to give us attention. Till now, for politicians and for the media, we were invisible."

The Hathras rape - and despite the sudden counter-claim by the UP police, I will call it exactly that because it was in the dying testimony of the victim - has represented the failure of every institution in India. Whether it is the police, the bureaucracy, the politicians - we have all failed.

As I spoke to Sandeep, there was a sudden swarm of politicians eager to get onto the camera, jostling for their five minutes of fame. These were the same people who had not bothered to give this family - the father is a daily wageer and the mother works at home - an iota of their attention all these days.

From being on the margins of public attention, Hathras is now in danger of being reduced to a noisy, unfeeling spectacle.

The egregious behaviour of the UP police has been the most brazen. The undercover cremation of this young woman, forcibly executed by the police by keeping her parents out, was just the first illustration of callous unprofessionalism. Lawyers and senior Indian Police Service (IPS) officers say that for a senior police officer to give a statement that "no rape took place" and make a

forensics report public goes against all tenets of a rape investigation.

For a moment, think of this young woman strapped to a hospital bed, strangled with her own dupatta, her limbs paralysed, her tongue cut, fighting valiantly to live. The gang rape charge was her testimony in her dying hours. She named the four men who she said did this to her. Her brother told me they found her lying "in a pool of blood with no clothes on".

If indeed, there are gaps, a complete investigation, done quietly and with dignity, could have established that. Now, it will be very difficult for anyone to believe anything the state police says about this case.

Meanwhile, rape has become the predictable political pawn. In the competitive finger-pointing between states, no one actually cares even a tiny bit about women, about Dalits or, indeed, about justice. The government's own data points underscore the inanity of this whataboutery. National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) statistics released just a few days ago tell us that 87 rapes are reported every day in



India and that crimes against women are up by 7.3%. Remember, this is only counting the women who actually decide to speak out. For anyone who thinks that sexual violence is not compounded by class and caste, here is a fact; 10 Dalit women are raped every day, making up 11% of the reported cases.

UP tops the list of crimes against women and the girl child. Rajasthan tops the list of states with the most number of rapes; 18% of all rape cases in UP are that of Dalit women, compared to 9% in Rajasthan. A third of all rapes of Dalit women have been reported from Rajasthan and UP. So, everyone should spare us the political slugfest because it is just a convenient and noisy excuse to not do anything to make India safer for women.

The institutional response to sexual violence is critical. On this score, the UP police has covered itself in shame. At every turn, they have robbed the family of its agency to make key decisions. I am not a big fan of politicians turning tragedy into opportunity, but I believe that which politician a victim's family wants to meet is entirely their decision. Blocking Opposition politicians such as Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi from making a trip to Hathras and shoving them around on the expressway is just wrong. It's for the family, not the police, to turn the Gandhis away, should they so wish.

So far, we are making a mockery of the idea of justice. Soon, this headline will fade and we will all move on. Till the next horror strikes us. And it will.

The impact of Trump's illness

The rest of the world could have done without a further shot of uncertainty in the international system.

Covid-19 is, once again, proving to be a key determinant in the United States (US) election, with President Donald Trump testing positive. The virus has also taken down a chunk of his White House staff and even the Republican Party leadership. Presuming the president recovers, there is unlikely to be any major change in present voting patterns. The few polls that have come out since the announcement indicate previous trends remain unchanged, with Mr Trump holding to about 42% of the vote and Democratic candidate Joe Biden trending at 50% but slowly picking up undecided votes.

In the case of a temporary presidential incapacitation, there will be three likely consequences. One, with less than a month left before polls, it has eroded Mr Trump's hopes of using his campaign rallies to move the needle in his direction. Two, it has further enhanced

the sense of a seriously dysfunctional if not outright chaotic administration. Finally, and arguably most damaging, it has brought the US voting public's focus back to the pandemic - the electoral issue on which Mr Trump fares the worst.

The rest of the world could have done without a further shot of uncertainty in the international system. The gloating of the state-owned Chinese media at Mr Trump's illness carries its own subtext. The real known unknown would be if Mr Trump's health took a serious turn for the worse. If this were to happen just before or just after ballots are cast, the US constitution and its elaborate succession clauses would be severely tested. All of this would add to an already volatile mix of a superpower deeply polarised at home and facing major security challenges abroad.



Hathras horror: India must wake up, repair its justice system

It is imperative for state governments and the Opposition to come together now to restore our institutions, committed to women's security and empowerment.

Yashovardhan Azad

As the pyre was lit for the Dalit victim a little after midnight on September 30, just outside her village Boolgadhi in Hathras district, under the watchful eye of 300 policemen, her family lay grieving at home. The police claim that the law and order situation warranted the cremation at night. With its unprofessional conduct and apathy in the last two weeks on brazen display, the police could not muster enough courage to face the law and order situation and give the victim her right to dignity even in death, by letting the family perform the last rites as per custom in daylight. Her right to dignity was denied even when she was brought to the police station on September 14, barely alive. Instead of rushing her to the hospital to save her life, the police left the family to take the victim on their own. Such insensitivity and crass behaviour in a case of Dalit atrocity went unheeded in the village and higher echelons of the police and bureaucracy.

This, despite several standing orders and guidelines by the state government and laws for stringent action to be taken in such cases. The FIR was registered five days later, and her statement recorded by the magistrate only on the 22nd.

The callousness was compounded when a senior police official held a press conference ruling out rape, knowing fully well that semen does not survive beyond 90 hours and that the dying declaration is sacrosanct. The assertion spoke volumes of police credibility and its investigation. What was more important was, instead, an inquiry into police inaction, availability of investigative officers at that time, forensic back up and also the effectiveness of the UP 100 line, launched by the police with great fanfare for responding to distress calls and monitoring them.

The collector of Hathras escaped suspension while the district police chief and two others did not. As the law and order head, the collector should have been

the first to go. Why was the cremation done at night? Why was the family quarantined earlier? Did he check whether ambulance on call was available that day? Did he ever enquire about the status of the victim from the hospital?

The investigation by the local police was handed over to the Special Investigation Team and is now recommended for takeover by the Central Bureau of Investigation. The family wants an investigation monitored by a retired judge of the Supreme Court. Such drastic erosion of faith in institutions is a serious issue, and it will take elaborate corrective efforts to restore their lost credibility.

The Hathras incident reveals a broken system in our countryside - a rural police station lacking basic amenities, human resources and sensitivity; a health care system with glaring gaps; a rudderless panchayat; and social fault lines running deep in a caste-ridden patriarchal



society, corroding every institution.

The opposition leaders are baying for the blood of the UP chief minister (CM). Several leaders have visited the family of the victim, under the glare of the media, and hurled accusations against the state government, exhorting the CM to resign - knowing fully well that things do not change at the grassroots with change of CMs.

These speeches did not ask for reforming the broken rural administration. No one cared to look at police infrastructure and functioning even as a Bureau of Police Research and Development report on the issue gathers dust. No one spoke about improving the call for ambulance scheme or

inadequate hospitals routinely transferring cases to Delhi. No one referred to the mere 35% utilisation of the fund, set up in the wake of the December 2012 Delhi gang rape incident, by various states so far.

The Hathras shame is a gaping wound in the conscience of a nation aspiring to be a major global power. Even as women scale tremendous heights, much to our pride, other women from remote corners are still subjected to medieval depravity. When will our conscience stir? It is imperative for state governments and the Opposition to come together now to restore our institutions, committed to women's security and empowerment.

Protect Indian crafts; ban Chinese imports

China is flooding Indian markets with cheap craft replicas, destroying jobs, local traditions, culture

Ritu Kumar

On a cold February morning in 2017, I was in Paris, on my bi-annual reconnaissance of European fashion. We were striding down Avenue Montaigne, a street that connects the Eiffel Tower with the famous Champs-Élysées, the most glamorous street in the fashion world, which houses the haute couture designers of Europe. To my surprise, there was a queue, around the block, of Chinese customers waiting to enter the LVMH store. As I was about to enter the store, I was approached by two Chinese women. They requested me to buy two handbags from the Louis Vuitton range at any price and had the money in hand. There was a quota system of sales in the store, and since they had exhausted their quota, they needed help.

In February, I was visiting the same avenue. The economy was undergoing great pain, and it was apparent with the absence of well-heeled customers. The Chinese were the only buyers around who were wooed by the French. Gone were the days of quotas on purchases. But it is not just in terms of consumption

patterns. The Chinese have become a force to reckon with in the fashion world, as they manufacture and supply almost all of the luxury clothing and goods to the world. But Covid-19 has dramatically altered the situation, with the market for Chinese goods shrinking.



China, however, remains focused on flooding the India market, by supplying copies of indigenously popular crafts, at a fraction of the cost. The Chinese do not work with a costing policy on their goods when they enter a market. It is, at best, a political policy which decides the price of their products. This means they can undercut anything, at any price, to get into India's fashion and wedding

business. They have been quick to create a collection, based on deep research of the values and habits of the Indian consumer. Unfortunately for Indian handmade crafts, China is focused on the production of machine-made alternatives, copying designs from India's vast resources of craft skills, practised even today by 16 million Indians.

This cannot be allowed to continue, especially in a context where Indian craftsmen and women are already confronting rising unemployment due to the Covid-19 crisis. One really must look very carefully at

why India is today being inundated with Chinese copies made on cheap fabrics, which is now taking on a vast repertoire - Benarsi and Chanderi saris; Rajasthani crafts of bandhani, printed on synthetics; copies of mirror work embroideries of Gujarat and Kutch; a whole repertoire of kantha, suzani, phulkari and Lucknow embroideries, recreated on synthetics

by digitised machinery in China; Banjara bags and Kolhapuri chappals, mostly imported from Xinjiang; fake cashmere from Mongolian wool, labelled as pashmina. Not one of these products, imported from China, now rapidly available in most markets, in big or small-town bazaars, helps generate local employment. Instead, they take away work from established craft sectors.

India is the only country which has preserved its fashion identity, and given indigenous fashion a young, modern interpretation based on traditional silhouettes, crafts and textile processes organic to the country - a truly Make in India product. It is a miracle, and an enigma, especially if one compares it with countries as disparate as Japan and Mexico where organic clothing is now in museums and the countries follow diktats of the ramps in Paris, with little relevance to their traditional culture and climate. In India, this miracle is a combination of a deep presence of India's cultural textile crafts and its newfound affluence.

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Where reforms and federalism clash

The Centre's attempt to bulldoze the states on agriculture weakens the entire reform process

Yamini Aiyar and Mekhala Krishnamurthy

Days after Parliament passed the controversial agriculture bills, several state governments have begun crafting strategies to avoid its implementation. This is a predictable consequence of a process of law-making that undermines India's federal consensus. Agriculture is a state subject. The passage of national laws, on a state subject, marks a rupture in India's federal trajectory. There is no argument that India's agriculture markets, mandis in particular, have been stuck in a low-level equilibrium and need reform. Greater accessibility, transparency and competition are necessary goals. But even the most ardent supporters of the new laws recognise that liberalising agriculture markets requires negotiating knotty implementation issues. The Constitution assigned jurisdiction over agriculture markets to states due to the very localised nature of farm production. The first sale

between the farmer and the trader is linked with the production process. This is location specific and it is states who are best placed to determine the contours of production and sale including, taxation, credit, building farmer producer organisations and physical markets.

The current laws upend this. They bypass states by drawing on the Centre's constitutional powers to regulate inter-state and intra-state trade - note that the Act dealing with Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) reform is titled The Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020. But they leave a critical institutional vacuum about how state-specific implementation investments, crucial for running efficient markets, will be negotiated and managed, when states are bypassed. Moreover, they create an artificial distinction between "markets areas" (regulated by the mandi system under state governments) and "trade areas"

(now under the central Acts), thus risking a regulatory maze. Beyond implementation, the choice of bypassing states in the quest to reform raises questions fundamental to the federal bargain. Our national debates on agriculture, and indeed other factor markets, have been framed by a deep disenchantment with state governments. This is not unjustified. States have routinely failed to challenge political interests. Agriculture subsidies and minimum support price (MSP) systems are intertwined with vested interests in states. Punjab, for instance, has failed to challenge this regime despite significant fiscal and environmental damage. On markets, states have done more. Karnataka experimented with electronic market integration, Madhya Pradesh with private single-licence yards, Maharashtra built infrastructure for private markets. However, the pace was uneven. State "failure" raises an important federal



conundrum. What is the Centre's role when state political economy is the binding constraint for reform? As the economy becomes more complex, there is a sound economic rationale for pursuing the goal of a common national market across factor markets. This requires consensus-building, a task that rests squarely with the Centre. But when states allow political concerns to override, should the Centre bypass states by bulldozing reforms?

Our disenchantment with states has legitimised the bulldozing approach. But this undermines reforms. For instance, the artificial distinction between "markets areas" and "trade areas" in these laws, has

resulted in a new battleground as states are now expanding their market territory. Punjab has declared its intent to declare the entire state a market area. Haryana stopped trade from Uttar Pradesh.

Further bulldozing breaks trust. There is much more to agriculture reforms than mandis. Several elements of the production process including subsidy reforms and the vexed MSP question need untangling. As agricultural economist, Sudha Narayan, has noted, the Punjab farmers' concerns with MSP are different from those of the Bihar farmers. Arriving at an appropriate pathway of subsidy, price support and procurement reforms will require extensive consultations.

Where India stands on peace in Afghanistan



Jayant Prasad

A significant minority in India's policy circles questions what India has gained from its reconstruction activities in Afghanistan. India has earned (back) goodwill and traction with Afghans from all parts of the country. Before Taliban rule in Afghanistan, India had an exiguous presence in the minds of Afghans, who felt that India had turned away from them. They now know that India wants Afghans to stand on their own feet and make their own decisions. They know India is working for a sovereign, united,

and peaceful Afghanistan. They believe in the commonalities between Indian and Afghan objectives, and that India will celebrate Afghan successes. India's effort to rebuild Afghanistan goes beyond financial support or constructing the Afghan parliament, a dam on the Hari Rud River, transmission lines and a power station to bring electricity to Kabul, and Small Development Projects for education and health. India has contributed to building institutions, developing human resources, training Afghan public officials and providing the country

Abdullah Abdullah, Chairman of Afghanistan's High Council for National Reconciliation will be in Delhi from Tuesday to consult with India's top leadership, seeking a reiteration of India's support for the peace process.

with a new generation of educated and skilled workers. The Taliban gained ground in parts of Afghanistan not because they are "smart" and "tough" as Donald Trump believes, but because of American mismanagement, Afghan incapacity, and support to the Taliban from the Pakistan army. Afghanistan's defence minister, Asadullah Khalid, told me several years ago, when he was Kandahar's governor: "It is not that the Taliban are strong, it is that we are weak." The Taliban profile is disproportionate to its gains on the ground.

Many in Pakistan insinuate that India is sabotaging the Doha negotiations because India would not like Afghanistan and Pakistan to have good relations. Far from it. Unlike Pakistan, which fears harmonious ties between India

and Afghanistan, India would be quite content with friendship between Pakistan and Afghanistan. After all, the same families, clans and tribes straddle the two sides of their long and porous frontiers. That said, India would be content if, irrespective of relations between Islamabad and Kabul, the Afghan people and government were free to decide the kind of relationships they should have with other countries, including India.

Does India have reasons to worry about the peace deal concluded between the United States (US) and the Taliban and a future peace deal between the Taliban and the Afghan government? Not if all Afghans agree that the peace deal safeguards their interests. Not if they can preserve the gains made in

Afghanistan since 2001. All parties, including the Taliban, should feel assured that they will have India's support if they acted independently.

India is, therefore, just right in lining up behind Afghanistan, with the external affairs minister participating in the September 12 inaugural of the Doha inter-Afghan negotiations. It is not to suggest that India has now warmed to the Taliban but to underline that India has no reservations in interacting with the Taliban if the Afghan government has none. With Doha, India has ended the erstwhile ambiguity in its policy. India is willing to engage with any party committed to peace and stability in Afghanistan. The invite to India was an acknowledgement that India has vital interests in Afghanistan.

Steps to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 if you are sick

FOLLOW THE STEPS BELOW: If you are sick with COVID-19 or think you might have it, follow the steps below to help protect other people in your home and community.

Stay home except to get medical care

- **Stay home:** People who are mildly ill with COVID-19 are able to recover at home. Do not leave, except to get medical care. Do not visit public areas.
- **Stay in touch with your doctor.** Call before you get medical care. Be sure to get care if you feel worse or you think it is an emergency.
- **Avoid public transportation:** Avoid using public transportation, ride-sharing, or taxis.



Separate yourself from other people in your home, this is known as home isolation

- **Stay away from others:** As much as possible, you should stay in a specific "sick room" and away from other people in your home. Use a separate bathroom, if available.
- **Limit contact with pets & animals:** You should restrict contact with pets and other animals, just like you would around other people.
 - Although there have not been reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with COVID-19, it is still recommended that people with the virus limit contact with animals until more information is known.
 - When possible, have another member of your household care for your animals while you are sick with COVID-19. If you must care for your pet or be around animals while you are sick, wash your hands before and after you interact with them. See COVID-19 and Animals for more information.



Call ahead before visiting your doctor

- **Call ahead:** If you have a medical appointment, call your doctor's office or emergency department, and tell them you have or may have COVID-19. This will help the office protect themselves and other patients.



Wear a facemask if you are sick

- **If you are sick:** You should wear a facemask when you are around other people and before you enter a healthcare provider's office.
- **If you are caring for others:** If the person who is sick is not able to wear a facemask (for example, because it causes trouble breathing), then people who live in the home should stay in a different room. When caregivers enter the room of the sick person, they should wear a facemask. Visitors, other than caregivers, are not recommended.



Cover your coughs and sneezes

- **Cover:** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- **Dispose:** Throw used tissues in a lined trash can.
- **Wash hands:** Immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.



Clean your hands often

- **Wash hands:** Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. This is especially important after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food.
- **Hand sanitizer:** If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry.
- **Soap and water:** Soap and water are the best option, especially if hands are visibly dirty.
- **Avoid touching:** Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.



Avoid sharing personal household items

- **Do not share:** Do not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding with other people in your home.



cdc.gov/COVID19

'Russia hoax' was lie created by Hillary Clinton and one of the dirtiest political tricks ever

The genesis of the smear came from the then-presidential candidate herself

By Gregg Jarrett

For Hillary Clinton, inventing the lie was easy. Spreading the lie was even easier. For President Trump, uncovering the truth has been hard. The truth always has its enemies.

This is the maxim - and chilling lesson - of the Russia hoax.

Newly declassified handwritten notes authored by former CIA Director John Brennan show that on July 28, 2016, he briefed President Barack Obama on intelligence evidence that Clinton had approved a plan to vilify Trump with false accusations that he was colluding with Russia. She did it, the intel concluded, to distract from her own damaging email scandal.

It was an audacious plot put in motion by one of Clinton's foreign policy advisers and then sanctioned by the then-Democrat presidential candidate on July 26. But the genesis of the smear came from Clinton herself. For months, she had peppered her campaign speeches with increasingly venomous accusations that her

opponent was a Kremlin asset and a "puppet of Putin." There was not a shred of plausible evidence. It was a shameless lie drawn from the insidious depths of Clinton's fictive imagination. It was magnificently devious and classic Clinton. But the lie didn't stop there. Through a conduit, her campaign commissioned an ex-British spy who composed an anti-Trump dossier of rumors and disinformation derived from a suspected Russian spy.

These fabricated stories were then secretly and sedulously fed to James Comey's FBI and the gullible media, both of whom went after Trump with a vengeance.

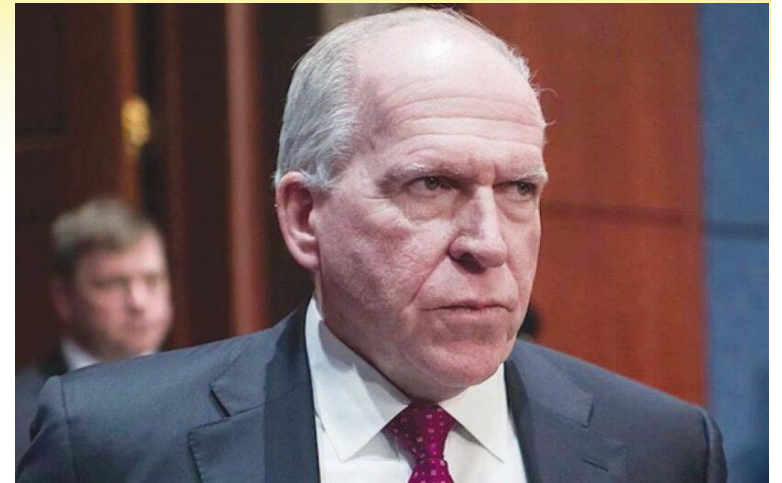
The result was the greatest mass delusion in American history and one of the dirtiest political tricks ever perpetrated. In short, it was Clinton who invented, financed and disseminated the collusion hoax.

The intelligence community caught on to Clinton's machinations. The evidence of what she had done was so credible and persuasive that

Brennan determined Obama must be informed immediately. That briefing is memorialized in Brennan's top-secret notes that have been buried for four long years in the bowels of the vast intelligence apparatus. Until now.

John Ratcliffe, the new director of National Intelligence, deserves credit for having the courage to dig up and make public the shocking proof. But it should have happened long ago. On May 23, 2019, President Trump granted Attorney General William Barr "full and complete authority" to declassify and unveil the carefully guarded government secrets in the Russia investigation. Trump directed that it be done quickly to "ensure that all Americans learn the truth about the actions that were taken and to restore confidence in our public institutions."

So, why did it take more than 16 months? The answer is an indictment of the nefarious elements working destructively within our nation's clandestine intelligence operations. Their



desire is power; their methods are often corrupt. The term "cover-up" is their mantra. Without conscience, they weaponize their authority for political gain.

It is truly reprehensible that the CIA, FBI and Obama concealed this vital information over the last four tumultuous years. The truth would have dramatically altered Trump's presidency, spared Americans from a rancorous national nightmare, and saved taxpayers \$30 million in a phony investigation.

It was Clinton who should have been investigated for promulgating a lie, not Trump. And yet, Obama remained silent. Did he do so to protect Clinton, his chosen successor, and to

destroy Trump? The question answers itself.

The former president sat idly by and watched as the country devolved into convulsive turmoil.

He uttered not a word about the incriminating evidence he had seen. He could have blown the whistle on Clinton, Comey, Brennan and others. Obama's failure to do so is an ugly stain on his legacy. Brennan shares equal blame. As a paid commentator for MSNBC, he repeatedly stoked the odious narrative that Trump was a Russian asset, knowing full well that it was untrue. He even accused Trump of treason. Brennan's conduct and conspicuous silence are, by any reasonable standard, despicable.

Why Trump's COVID experience could completely change the trajectory of the 2020 campaign

By Cal Thomas

President Trump's infection with COVID-19 adds to a year no fiction writer could have contrived. The image of Trump last Friday walking out of the White House wearing a mask and traveling by helicopter to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center was an optic we have not seen with this president and it was sobering. Trump usually makes remarks to the press, but this time he gave no more than a thumbs-up. Before departing he tweeted a brief video thanking Americans for their support. His departure Monday night from Walter Reed will likely bring attacks from his opponents and most of the media that he is putting himself and others at risk, though his doctors assure the public that facilities at the

White House are more than adequate to continue his treatment. Will this experience produce changes in his campaign? More importantly, will it inject a dose of humility into his persona? It will necessarily curtail his personal appearances for a time. How long and whether it alters plans for a second debate depends on his progress. At this writing, President Trump says he is planning to debate next week in Miami.

It may also bring some sympathy to him if he responds in a way that encourages mask-wearing and other



practices that have shown to be effective in warding off the coronavirus.

A Wall Street Journal editorial had it right: "The shame is that America's media have peddled the fiction that every new COVID case represents a failure of policy. Their line now is that Mr. Trump's infection is karma because he didn't take the disease seriously enough. In remarks Friday, Joe Biden also came close to indulging the karma explanation, while disclaiming partisanship."

If he fully recovers -- and everyone with an ounce of goodwill for a fellow human being should hope he does -- he should not engage in triumphalism, as if he is Superman, but share with the nation what he has learned from the experience and what the country can also learn.

The first lesson is that no one is guaranteed complete immunity from the virus. Democrats and foreign leaders have been infected, too. Wearing masks, frequent handwashing and practicing social distancing does help.

It is why the number of daily cases is declining in a few places (although in the past few days some states are reporting slight upticks in new cases and hospital admissions).

The president might also appeal to former Vice President Joe Biden, who properly pulled Trump attack ads last Friday afternoon, following the White House announcement, to take the virus off the table as a campaign issue and stop the blame game, though CBS News reports, "It may take a little time to pull all of the ads down." It would be a rare moment of cooperation between fellow countrymen. The second lesson is that Americans have sympathy, even empathy, for people who have overcome challenges.



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The political aftermath of December 6, 1992

With the rise of Hindu nationalism, the beginning of the alienation of Muslims, and the erosion of the rule of law, India changed fundamentally

On December 6, 1992, India changed. Irrespective of one's views on the issue of the Ram Temple, the act of demolishing the Babri Masjid was criminal. It was a blot on the rule of law. It undermined India's secular credentials deeply. It damaged Hindu-Muslim relations like no other act since Partition. It led to riots, killings, breakdown of social trust, and grief for families and individuals caught in the violence that rocked the country. And while a range of political leaders may have been acquitted last week for their alleged role in the demolition of the mosque, there is little doubt that the criminal act was preceded by identity-based political mobilisation which created the environment for the actual demolition.

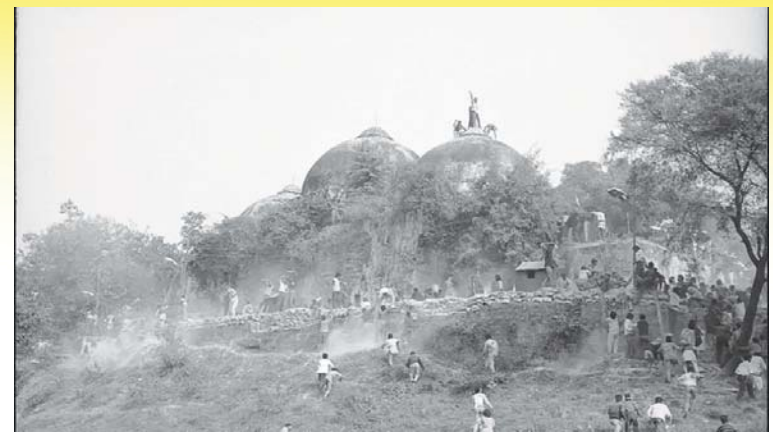
A lot has happened since then. Last year, the Supreme Court enabled the construction of the Ram Temple at the disputed site, and in August, with a brick-laying ceremony, the process to build a grand temple commenced. In what appeared to be a move to compensate them for the loss of

the mosque, as well as the loss of the land, the court ordered that Muslim parties were to be offered five acres separately to construct a new mosque. Key political actors who were at the forefront in 1992 in different capacities have either died (the then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao and Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader Ashok Singhal, for instance) or become marginalised (LK Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi, Kalyan Singh, Uma Bharti, Vinay Katiyar on one side, and Mulayam Singh on the other). Many observers have declared that the issue is now closed, and it is time to move on.

But this closure cannot really happen, for a lot of the current trends in Indian politics can be traced back to that fateful day in Ayodhya. The demolition changed Indian politics in four distinct ways, the impact of which can still be felt.

One, it marked the arrival of Hindu nationalism as a force to be reckoned with. Advani's Rath Yatra galvanised hundreds of thousands of people directly, but it had an even greater indirect

impact. A sense of Hindu political consciousness deepened; a narrative that Hindus had been under subjugation - first from Muslims, then from the British and finally from "pseudo secularists" in Independent India - gained ground. The narrative of Indian pluralism, diversity and its rich - admittedly complex and even occasionally conflictual - tradition of Hindu-Muslim relations gave way to the thirst for correcting historical injustices usually blamed on minority citizens. Suddenly, it was common to hear Hindu professionals and middle-class citizens speak disparagingly of Muslims, perpetuating stereotypes and prejudices about India's principal minority. The temple movement also helped the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) expand their social base - for this was an emotive issue that Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and Dalits could relate to as well. The construction of the "other" - Muslims in this case - proceeded apace. This may not



have yielded immediate electoral dividends for the BJP (it lost state elections after the demolition), primarily because the mandir card (the politics of religion) was neutralised by the Mandal card (the politics of caste). But this process eventually saw the decline of Mandal parties which failed to deliver the justice and progress they had promised to their marginalised social base; simultaneously, the BJP began co-opting backward classes. Smarter Mandir politics eventually defeated Mandal. Second, while the older leaders associated with the temple movement may have faded away, a new generation of leaders in the BJP emerged for whom the late 1980s and early 1990s served as crucial years of political socialisation. The

most-prominent example is, of course, Narendra Modi. Involved in organising a part of Advani's Rath Yatra, Modi's political life was to have a close overlap with the aftermath of the demolition, although it was only in the early 2000s that he took the first tangible step towards where he is now, when he was named chief minister of Gujarat. The fact that the temple construction was allowed when he was PM, and he did the bhoomi puja for the temple, is also in sync with his older association with the movement.

Arguably, if there was no Ram Janmabhoomi temple agitation, the BJP is unlikely to have become the force it has, and Modi may not be where he is today.

By Chanakya

Broaden the idea of a smart city in India



KumKum Dasgupta

On September 20, New York City (NYC)'s "iconic" buildings were lit up in green for the launch of the week-long global Climate Week NYC, which coincided with the United Nations General Assembly session. The summit was the first big one (virtual) in this Covid-19 year, and was held in the backdrop of an ongoing global conversation on the need for the world to chart a new green development path.

While globally, cities are struggling to tackle the impact

of the climate crisis (with heat waves, cold waves, flash floods and cyclones among others issues), many have also become hubs of climate action. They are thinking of innovative ways to reduce temperatures and make their urban environments sustainable and liveable for their residents by designing and constructing buildings that need less energy to run and employ passive means of climate control. For example, Chicago and Toronto are building rooftop gardens; Milan is building vertical

forests; and Madsar City in Abu Dhabi is building houses close to each other so that they can provide shading to public walkways, and also prioritising walking and cycling over polluting cars.

Unfortunately, the responses of India's cities to the climate crisis are still at a nascent stage. In fact, they have "little incentive to act", writes Radhika Khosla and Ankit Bharadwaj in India in a Warming World. Therefore, most cities do not mention, let alone adequately address the climate challenge in their development plans. Recently, however, there has been a policy nudge from the Centre: It unveiled the Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework 2.0 that provides a road map and technical expertise to cities to combat the crisis. It will make eminent sense for India to invest in climate-resilient planning now as the country is still urbanising. How cities are built over the next decade will,

as Khosla and Bharadwaj argue, condition how most Indians live until the end of the century: In the choice of building types; in how they expend energy; in the amount of distance travelled; and the way in which distances are covered. These choices will have material consequences for air, water, congestion, energy, and the climate crisis.

India's cities, however, must look for their own solutions, starting with meeting the basic requirement in a warmer world: Make housing climate-friendly so that they don't need excessive energy for air-conditioning, and also are good enough to protect those who cannot afford artificial cooling from heat waves. To do this, first, buildings must stick to the basic principles: Shade, insulate, use reflective roofing, ventilate. Second, planners, developers and buyers must stop aspiring for glass-and-steel monoliths (such as the "iconic" buildings of NYC). While huge

glass facades may work well in colder climates because they lock-in heat, in India, these constructions become "solar cooker" buildings, guzzling huge amounts of energy for air-conditioning, which, in turn, heat up the atmosphere.

In addition, taller buildings need more steel, cement, aluminium and glass which have deep carbon footprints. Third, at a policy level, the Centre must push the states to weave the Bureau of Energy Efficiency's energy conservation code into their building by-laws. Fourth, cities must invest to improve microclimate by investing in green roofs, parks, gardens, green facades and water bodies.

India must also look back to plan for the future. The country's heritage towns and traditional architecture are great examples of how built up areas can be cooler and improve microclimate.

This Is Rahul Gandhi's "Atal-Advani" Moment

Ashutosh

"Rahul has re-invented himself!" "Has he really?" a close friend of mine unbelievably asked me. His question was in the context of the Hathras incident and Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi going there to meet the victim's family. A few others asked rather sarcastically, "How many times he will reinvent himself?" None of them are sympathetic to Hindutva or the Sangh Parivar or the ruling regime. They can all be called liberal, who have an ideological leaning towards the Congress, but skepticism was writ large on their faces. All of them have one question in common - will he continue like this or he will again disappear? I have not seen any other politician under such public scrutiny. And within the Nehru-Gandhi Family, no other member has had to face so much ridicule and scorn. In this regard, Rahul has not been fortunate like his parents and grandparents. Motilal Nehru, when he entered politics, was already a famous lawyer with inordinate national standing. His lateral entry was applauded

immediately. His son Jawaharlal also did not have to struggle. In no time, he was adopted by Mahatma Gandhi and by the mainstream leadership of the freedom movement. In fact, when the presidency of the Congress passed on from father to son in 1929, nobody called it dynastic politics. By then, Jawaharlal Nehru was recognised among the frontline leaders of the movement. Even Bhagat Singh was so enamoured of his magnetism that while comparing Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Bose, he advised the youth to follow Jawaharlal and not Bose as he found him more revolutionary than Bose.

Indira lived under the shadow of her father for long. Though she became the Congress president in the late 50s, when she became Prime Minister, she was dubbed by opposition stalwart Ram Manohar Lohia as 'Goongi Gudiya' (a mute doll). Within her own party, Morarji Desai and a few others used to call her 'Chhokri' (chit of a girl) but within two years, she proved herself and became the empress of the Congress Party

and forced all the big leaders to either retire from politics or cross over to the opposition camp.

Rajiv and Sanjay Gandhi did not have to prove themselves to anyone. Sanjay Gandhi became a parallel power centre during Indira Gandhi's time and after his death, Indira Gandhi took Rajiv under her wing. Rajiv Gandhi's transition to the top job in the country was the smoothest in the Nehru Family. After his demise, Sonia Gandhi avoided being in politics but to save the Congress from disintegration, she had to take over the reins of the party. She did face a small rebellion but after that, she has remained the unchallenged leader of the party. Ever since Rahul Gandhi has joined politics, he has been struggling. The aura that has been the hallmark of the Nehru-Gandhi family is missing in him. But Rahul Gandhi changed the rules and maybe he is paying the price for that. Despite a smooth entry into the party, he decided to take the vertical route. He contested elections, became an ordinary MP. Before becoming Congress President, he served as General Secretary and Vice President of the party. Let us not



forget that from 2004 to 2014, there was a Congress-led government at the centre and it was not a member of the Nehru-Gandhi family but Dr. Manmohan Singh who was Prime Minister. Even after 2009, when it was expected that Rahul might ascend to the top job, he did not. Who knows if history would have been different had he decided to avoid the roundabout route and become Prime Minister directly on joining politics? The office of Prime Minister transformed the public persona of Dr. Manmohan Singh. Today, he is one of the most respected persons in the country and every word of his is taken seriously. This was the same Dr. Manmohan Singh who was a low-profile bureaucrat who

wasn't noticed even in his own peer group. Secondly, Rahul Gandhi decided to lead the party in the 2014 parliamentary elections which in my view was a strategic mistake. He had to answer for mistakes which he had not committed or was responsible for; the onus of these should have been on the Manmohan government. The Congress was in disarray due to corruption charges, the cadre was demoralized. The Anna Movement had put a serious blot on the credibility of the Congress. Instead of Dr Manmohan Singh, Rahul Gandhi became the symbol of whatever was wrong with the Congress and its government. It was a monumental handicap.

The Real Whodunit In SSR Case Is Obvious, Isn't It - by Vir Sanghvi 35

If you have been following the Sushant Singh Rajput case - and these days, who can avoid hearing about it? - then you will know that there have been several important developments in the last few days.

First of all, Rhea Chakraborty has not only got bail but the Bombay High Court has poured scorn on the Narcotics Bureau's case. "There is nothing at this stage to show that Rhea had committed any offence involving a commercial quantity of contraband," the judge said. This criticism of a case that has already been widely criticized outside the court comes as the All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS) has confirmed that there is no evidence that Sushant Singh Rajput was murdered. Suicide is still the most likely explanation.

The CBI, which is investigating the case, has said that it has found no suspicious circumstances and there is no evidence that Rhea Chakraborty stole money from Sushant Singh's account.

The Union Health Minister, Dr. Harsh Vardhan who, it was reported, would disregard the verdict of the AIIMS doctors and conduct an investigation himself, has issued a strong denial, calling the reports "fake news". The Mumbai police, who have always maintained that Sushant's death was a suicide, are treating these developments as a vindication. But they have also made a more serious charge. They claim that their cyber cell has found that 80,000 fake social media accounts were set up to spread misinformation about the Sushant Singh Rajput case. These accounts were outsourced to professional troll factories in such countries as Romania, Poland, Turkey, Indonesia, etc. It was this manipulation of social media that created the uproar over Sushant's death and led to the dissemination of fake news. No doubt there will be questions about the Mumbai police's claim but nobody who has been following this controversy can

seriously dispute that it has been fuelled by fake news, fed by social media and amplified by TV channels.

All this leads to several questions.

First of all, who did it? Who manipulated social media and TV to manufacture this controversy? It is hard to be sure, but we know that whoever did it had access to vast sums of money, to a domestic core of social media trolls and bots, and has influence over our TV channels.

Your guess as to who this could be is as good as mine.

Secondly, what purpose did the controversy serve? Why was it worth it for somebody to spend several crores on a controversy that has not only ruined the lives of innocent people but may have actually besmirched Sushant's memory?

The explanation most often offered is that the uproar was engineered with an eye on the forthcoming Bihar assembly election. The idea was to portray Sushant as the innocent Bihar murdered by the big city, big

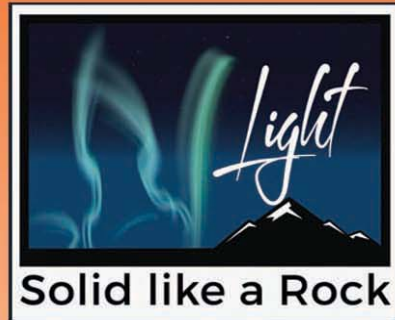


shots of Bollywood after being seduced into a drug-fuelled lifestyle by a Bengali vishkanya. If this was really the motive, then it has worked. Nitish Kumar's party has raised the issue and feelings run so high in Bihar that every political party has refused to challenge this narrative. Even in neighbouring Bengal, Mamata Banerjee, who counts on Bihari voters, has not spoken up against the slur on Bengali womanhood.

The Mumbai police say that there was another motive: to smear them. As they are not, in themselves, important enough to warrant such an elaborate and

expensive attack, what seems more likely is that the idea was to destabilise the Shiv Sena-led ruling alliance. Throughout the campaign, it has been suggested that Shiv Sena leaders prevented the police from investigating the case and many attempts were made by TV channels and social media trolls to try and drag Aaditya Thackeray into the case.

Both these reasons seem to me to be indisputable. But I think there was also a third motive: to teach Bollywood a lesson. Never before have politicians been so obsessed with Bollywood.



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NSA Ajit Doval meets Afghan peace negotiator Abdullah Abdullah in Delhi

Abdullah Abdullah arrived in New Delhi on Tuesday afternoon for a five-day visit, during which he will hold talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday and external affairs minister S Jaishankar on Friday.

(News Agencies)-Afghan peace negotiator Abdullah Abdullah on Wednesday discussed his country's peace process with National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, who told him India is in favour of a democratic and sovereign Afghanistan "where no terrorists can operate".

Abdullah, chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation in Afghanistan, met Doval on Wednesday evening to brief him on the talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban at Doha in Qatar. Doval hosted a dinner for Abdullah's delegation that was attended by foreign secretary Harsh Shringla, Chief of Defence Staff Gen Bipin Rawat, army

chief Gen MM Naravane, senior officials of the external affairs ministry and key members of the High Council for National Reconciliation.

Abdullah tweeted that he had a "constructive discussion" with Doval on the Afghan peace process and the talks in Doha. "He [Doval] assured me of India's full support for the peace efforts, and that any peace settlement acceptable to Afghans, will have the support of India," Abdullah said.

"He [Doval] further stated that his country is in favour [of] an independent, democratic, sovereign & peaceful Afghanistan, where no terrorists can operate," he added.

Abdullah also thanked India for its continued support for Afghanistan and its "constructive role in peace efforts".

There was no official word on the meeting from the Indian side.

Abdullah arrived in New Delhi on Tuesday afternoon for a five-day visit, during which he will hold talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday and external affairs minister S Jaishankar on Friday. He will also deliver a speech at the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) on Thursday. Before his arrival in India, Abdullah issued a statement that described India as a "strategic partner of Afghanistan". He said, "Our historical relation with India is



very important to us, and the role of India in establishing a lasting peace in Afghanistan and the region is vital. I am visiting India on an official invitation by the government of India to discuss the peace efforts, and the need for regional consensus and support for the Afghan peace process."

Abdullah's visit is part of an outreach to key countries in the region for support for the negotiations in Doha. He

travelled to India after a three-day visit to Pakistan last week.

In Islamabad, he had met Prime Minister Imran Khan, foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and army chief Gen Qamar Bajwa. Abdullah told the Pakistani leadership that a message about reducing violence and showing greater flexibility in negotiations should be communicated to the Taliban leadership participating in the negotiations in Doha.

China's dos and don'ts for Indian media ahead of Taiwan national day



(News Agencies)-China on Wednesday issued a series of guidelines for the Indian media for coverage of the national day of Taiwan, observed on October 10, saying all countries having diplomatic ties with Beijing should "firmly honour their commitment to the One-China

policy". The move followed full-page advertisements issued by the Taiwan government in two Delhi-based newspapers ahead of the national day, which featured an image of President Tsai Ing-wen and the slogan "Taiwan and India are natural partners". The advertisement

referred to Taiwan's efforts to counter Covid-19 and its sharing of experiences and essential medical items with like-minded partners. Against the backdrop of the India-China border standoff, experts and commentators have called for New Delhi to review its relations with Taipei, which has been dealing with the Chinese military's actions in recent months. In 1995, India and Taiwan established representative offices in their respective capitals though the two sides do not have formal diplomatic relations. Taiwan has the Taipei Economic and Cultural Center in New Delhi, while India has the India-Taipei Association in Taipei to

promote interactions and facilitate business, tourism, and people-to-people exchanges. People familiar with developments said on condition of anonymity that Taiwan had cancelled a reception for its national day because of the Covid-19 pandemic and would only have advertisements and a TV show to mark the occasion. A letter sent out by the Chinese embassy in New Delhi referred to the "so-called forthcoming 'National Day of Taiwan'" and said it "would like to remind our media friends that there is only one China in the world, and the Government of the People's Republic of China is the sole legitimate government representing the

whole of China". "Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory...All countries that have diplomatic relations with China should firmly honour their commitment to the One-China policy, which is also the long-standing official position of the Indian government," the letter said. "We hope Indian media can stick to Indian government's position on the Taiwan question and do not violate the One-China principle. In particular, Taiwan shall not be referred to as a 'country (nation)' or 'Republic of China' or the leader of China's Taiwan region as 'President', so as not to send the wrong signals to the general public," the letter further said.

Pakistani court acquits Christian man on death row for blasphemy

(News Agencies)-A Pakistani appeals court has acquitted a Christian man who spent about seven years in jail on the accusation of blasphemy, a charge that led to communal rioting that saw more than 120 houses in a Christian-majority area in Lahore city burned down by an enraged mob in 2013. Sawan Masih, 40, was arrested in 2013 on blasphemy charge following an argument with a Muslim man in the eastern Pakistani city. A two-member bench of the Lahore High Court

on Tuesday acquitted Masih of all charges, with a full verdict detailing the reasons for the



acquittal to be issued at a later date.

Masih was convicted and sentenced to death under

Pakistan's strict blasphemy laws by a lower court in 2014.

The court had convicted him of insulting Prophet Muhammad, a charge that carries a mandatory death penalty under Pakistani law. Blasphemy is an emotive subject in Pakistan, where the country's strict laws criminalise insulting Islam,

its prophet and the holy book, as well as other offences against the religion. These crimes can carry a death sentence and,

increasingly, mobs and vigilantes have been taking matters into their own hands. At least 77 people have been killed in mob and targeted attacks in connection with blasphemy allegations since 1990, according to an Al Jazeera tally. The latest such attack took place in the northwestern city of Peshawar in July, when a man accused of blasphemy was shot dead in a court during a hearing in his case. In 2013, a day after the accusations against Masih surfaced, a mob attacked his

Christian-majority neighbourhood of Joseph Colony, in Lahore's Badami Bagh area, in what was then one of the worst incidents of violence around the blasphemy laws. More than 120 homes were burned down, in addition to a church and several shops, as hundreds of protesters armed with sticks, pipes, and stones ransacked the colony before setting it on fire. In 2017, all 115 suspects who were under trial for the arson were acquitted by a Lahore court for want of evidence.

Ex-PM Sharif, daughter face sedition charges for criticising Pakistani military

(News Agencies)- Pakistani police filed sedition charges on Monday against former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, his daughter Maryam Nawaz and dozens of his party leaders over comments he made criticising the interference of the military in national politics. Last month, Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League and eight other opposition parties came together to accuse the military of meddling in politics and of rigging elections in 2018 that brought Prime Minister Imran Khan to power.

Sharif left Pakistan last November to get medical treatment after being granted

bail from a seven-year jail sentence for corruption, though his daughter remains in the country. Sharif, a long-standing critic of the military, denies the corruption charges.

"We will ensure a court trial against the accused," government official Musarrat Cheema told Reuters regarding the sedition charges.

In his recent speeches via video links from his London home, Sharif has said the interference of the military in politics was the root cause of all Pakistan's problems.

The sedition case filed against Sharif, his daughter and 44 top party leaders says he has sought in his speeches to isolate Pakistan internationally and have

it declared a rogue state.

"Convict Nawaz Sharif has been openly inciting the public to commit treason," said the case, a copy of which was seen by Reuters, adding that it was aimed at maligning the armed forces and the judiciary.

The military, which has ruled Pakistan for half of its history since independence in 1947, denies meddling in politics or electoral wrongdoing.

The opposition parties have formed a new alliance, known as the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), and announced a campaign of nationwide protests to dislodge Khan's government, saying it has been a failure on all fronts.

Sharif's close aide Shahid



Khaqan Abbasi said the sedition charges would not deter the opposition's campaign.

"Arrest us, we're ready for that," he said.

Sharif's third term as prime minister ran from 2013 to 2017,

when he was removed by the Supreme Court amid revelations over his personal wealth, which he blames on the army generals after he fell out with them over the handling of Islamist militants.

As Bangladesh hosts over a million Rohingya refugees, a scholar explains what motivated the country to open up its borders



(News Agencies)- Over 1.1 million Rohingyas continue to remain stranded in crowded camps in Bangladesh while the international community fails to provide a resolution to the crisis. When in 2017 this lower-middle-income, majority Muslim country opened its borders to

the Rohingya fleeing ethnic cleansing in Myanmar, they were largely welcomed. Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina stated back then: "We have the ability to feed 160 million people of Bangladesh and we have enough food security to feed the 700,000 refugees."

It wasn't just the government. Many private citizens came forward to offer assistance. Existing data indicates that 86% of residents in Teknaf, which is the closest administrative region to the Rakhine state from which most Rohingya originate, were involved in providing emergency relief and housing to the new arrivals. In an era when many rich nations have tried to stop the entry of refugees, Bangladesh's decision to accept refugees in the early days of the crisis could seem puzzling. A scholar of refugees and forced migration, I spent the summer of 2019 in Bangladesh to understand the forces that shaped this initial humanitarian response.

Faith and morality

My ongoing research indicates that many factors played a

critical role in Bangladesh's political decision to host the Rohingya, including the country's cultural and religious identity, which centers around ideas of community and responding to those in need.

Interviews conducted with political leaders, NGOs and local volunteers revealed that the shared Islamic faith and the Muslim identity of many of the Bangladeshis and the vast majority of the Rohingya galvanized humanitarian assistance in two specific ways.

First, the Islamic concepts of "zakat," obligatory charity, which is one of the five pillars of Islam, and that of "sadaqa," or voluntary charity, played crucial roles in motivating private citizens to offer emergency assistance. Both

these concepts emphasize the imperative to give to those in need. Religious leaders also used these concepts to encourage donations. In her 2019 address to the United Nations, Prime Minister Hasina referred to humanitarianism in Islam to explain her border policy.

Second, the fact that the Muslim Rohingya in particular were being persecuted because of their faith compounded the sense of urgency among those who identified as Muslim to assist the Rohingya.

While the vast majority of the Rohingya who fled to Bangladesh were Muslim, smaller numbers of Hindu and Christian Rohingya who arrived with the influx also received emergency assistance and shelter.

Bangladesh rocked by fresh protests over sexual assaults

(News Agencies)- Hundreds of Bangladeshis have staged protests and scuffled with police for a second day as anger mounts over the latest instance of sexual violence towards women.

The protests in Dhaka and elsewhere erupted after video emerged showing several men stripping and attacking a woman from a disadvantaged community in the southern district of Noakhali.

Before being taken down, the clip was shared tens of



thousands of times on Facebook, sparking outrage online in a country where activists say only a tiny percentage of sexual

assault victims see justice.

The protests come after a week of growing outrage in neighbouring India against the

alleged gang rape of an "untouchable" Dalit teenager by four higher-caste fellow villagers. Amnesty International in Bangladesh said the new "disturbing footage demonstrates the shocking violence that Bangladeshi women are routinely being subjected to", and called for a thorough and impartial investigation.

Even before the video footage emerged, anger had been brewing since several members of the ruling party's student wing were arrested

last week and charged with gang raping a woman in northern Sylhet.

In Dhaka on Tuesday, demonstrators scuffled with police while marching on the office of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, leaving several people injured. Dhaka University students and some left-wing protesters chanted "shame Hasina" and called on her to resign, in a rare show of defiance in a country where open criticism of the government is rare.

UK, France and Germany plan Russia sanctions over Navalny poisoning

(News Agencies)-The UK, France and Germany are planning to impose targeted sanctions on Russia, after an international chemical weapons watchdog confirmed that Russian opposition leader Alexey Navalny was poisoned with a Novichok nerve agent. Navalny, a fierce critic of the Kremlin, became gravely ill on a flight from the Siberian city of Tomsk to Moscow on August 20. He was treated at the Charité Hospital in Berlin and was discharged in late September. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons confirmed Tuesday that blood and urine samples taken from Navalny showed the presence of Novichok, a

Soviet-era group of nerve agents. A Novichok agent was also used in a March 2018 attack on former Russian spy Sergei Skripal in the English city of Salisbury. The foreign ministers of France and Germany released a joint statement Wednesday saying they were putting forward a proposal to European partners that target "individuals deemed responsible for this crime and breach of international norms," including Russian officials and entities involved in the country's Novichok chemical weapon program. "A murder

attempt has been made on Russian soil, against a Russian opposition figure, using a military-grade nerve agent developed by Russia," the statement said. "We believe that there is no credible explanation for the poisoning of Mr Navalny other than Russian involvement and responsibility," the pair said in a statement. UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said Britain would work with its international partners to take such sanctions forward. "The UK stands side by side with our German and French partners in our response to the abhorrent poisoning of Alexey Navalny," he said in a statement Wednesday evening.

"Despite having a clear case to answer, the Russian authorities continue to make no credible attempt to investigate this attack. There is no plausible explanation for Mr Navalny's poisoning other than Russian involvement and responsibility for this appalling attack." The Kremlin has strongly denied any involvement in Navalny's poisoning, and offered to cooperate with Germany in an investigation into the matter, according to state news agency TASS.



Honduras caravan heads towards US to escape pandemic-induced poverty

(News Agencies)- Hundreds of Hondurans formed a caravan headed towards the United States on Wednesday, seeking to improve their living conditions as the coronavirus has killed over 2,000 people and paralyzed the economy in the



Central American nation, local media reported. The migrants, mostly young men and women carrying backpacks and small children, departed from a bus terminal in the northern city of San Pedro Sula headed toward the Guatemalan border, according to local television. "I'm leaving with my husband and my two children. There is no work here. There is nothing to do, and if you find a job they only pay you 100

lempiras (\$4) a day," said a woman who identified herself as Cristina to local television program Hoy Mismo. Wednesday's group marks the first caravan to depart Honduras in 2020, as the nation suffers the largest recorded economic decline in its history after six months of strict lockdown measures aimed at slowing the spread of the novel coronavirus. In October 2018, US President Donald Trump ordered soldiers to the border with Mexico in response to caravans of Central American migrants who were moving north to the United States. Trump, who railed against unauthorized immigration in his successful 2016 presidential campaign, claimed that the troops were needed to secure the border against the migrants but critics said the move was a political stunt in the lead up to US congressional elections that November.

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- Do not touch your face with unwashed hands.
- Do not shake hands. Instead wave or elbow bump.
- Monitor your health more closely than usual for cold or flu symptoms.



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- Stay home and call your doctor if you have symptoms like coughing, shortness of breath, fever, sore throat.
- If you do not feel better in 24-48 hours, seek care from your doctor.
- If you need help getting medical care, call 311.
- NYC will provide care regardless of immigration status or ability to pay.



PROTECT THE MOST VULNERABLE

- If you have chronic conditions like lung disease, heart disease, diabetes, cancer or a weakened immune system, avoid unnecessary gatherings and events.
- If you have family or friends who have one of these conditions, do not visit them if you feel sick.



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Ahead of White House security office is 'gravely ill with coronavirus and has been hospitalized since September'



according to a leaked FEMA tally.

Hope Hicks, counselor to the president, was the first to have her positive diagnosis confirmed, again reported by Bloomberg rather than being announced by the White House.

Since then the president and first lady; Kellyanne Conway and her daughter; Trump's speechwriter Stephen Miller; campaign manager Bill Stepien; debate adviser Chris

Christie; and press secretary Kayleigh McEnany have all tested positive.

Bailey, a career federal employee who has seldom appeared in the news, was swept up in a controversy last year over security clearances granted to Trump's daughter, Ivanka Trump, and son-in-law Jared Kushner.

Bailey privately testified to the House Oversight Committee that he didn't face pressure from others at the White House to grant clearances, according to a report by The Hill.

(News Agencies)-The head of the White House security office is seriously ill with COVID-19 and has been in hospital since September, according to reports. Crede Bailey, who is in charge of issuing security credentials to the building and liaising with the Secret Service on the compound, fell ill before the September 26 Rose Garden 'super spreader event', Bloomberg reported on Wednesday.

The White House has not disclosed Bailey's illness, which was confirmed to Bloomberg by four sources.

On Wednesday night it was confirmed that the Marine Corps' second-highest-ranking officer has tested positive.

Gen. Gary L. Thomas, the 58-year-old assistant commandant of the Marine Corps, had been in self-quarantine since Tuesday 'out of an abundance of caution' after being notified he had recently been in contact with someone who later tested positive, a statement from the service said. If Bailey's diagnosis is confirmed, it means that at least 34 people in Donald Trump's orbit are now known to have become infected,

'Our leaders are dangerously incompetent': New England Journal of Medicine slams Trump

(News Agencies)- The New England Journal of Medicine has slammed America's 'dangerously incompetent' politicians for their failed response to the COVID-19 pandemic and calls for Trump to be voted out in the November 3 election.

The blistering editorial was an unprecedented move for the Journal which rarely publishes editorials signed by all the editors.

The editorial does not endorse Joe Biden, but roundly denounces the approach of the Trump administration.

'Crisis has produced a test of leadership. With no good options to combat a novel pathogen, countries were forced to make hard choices about how to respond. Here in the United States, our leaders have failed that test. They have taken a crisis and turned it into a tragedy,' the editorial begins.

'The magnitude of this failure is astonishing,' the editorial reads, pointing to the fact that the US leads the world in COVID-19 cases with more than 7.5

million and 211,000 deaths.

The article continued: 'Anyone else who recklessly squandered lives and money in this way would be suffering legal consequences. Our leaders have largely claimed immunity for their actions. But this election gives us the power to render judgment.'

'When it comes to the response to the largest public health crisis of our time, our current political leaders have demonstrated that they are dangerously incompetent. We should not abet them and enable the deaths of thousands more Americans by allowing them to keep their jobs.'

Dr Eric Rubin, the editor-in-chief of the medical journal and an author of the new editorial, explained to CNN the reasoning behind the piece. 'The reason we've never published an editorial about elections is we're not a political journal and I don't think that we want to be a political journal - but the issue here is around fact, not around opinion.'

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Trump's COVID-19 meltdown fuels Republican fears of Democratic sweep in November

Lindsey Graham's senate race moves to 'toss-up' and Biden goes 51-40 in Florida in the wake of last week's presidential debate and President Donald Trump's diagnosis

(News Agencies)- Republican Senator Lindsey Graham's reelection race to 'toss-up' status, as he faces an energetic opponent and President Donald Trump takes on severe headwinds - a flashing warning sig for Republicans seeking to keep control of the Senate.

The news, in a race ranking by a respected race-tracker, comes amid an onslaught of bad polling for President Donald Trump, who is battling COVID-19 at the White House this week.

A new Quinnipiac University poll has Democrat Joe Biden leading Trump 51-40 in battleground Florida - a jump over a persistent but narrower Biden lead in a state Trump carried in 2016. It has Biden up 54 to 41 in Pennsylvania and 50 to 45 in Iowa, two other states Trump carried.

The poll was taken after Trump interrupted Biden repeatedly at the first presidential debate, and following the president's positive test result for the coronavirus, which came in early Friday morning.

In Florida, the result - taken among likely voters - is a steep drop from early September, where Biden led 48 to 45.

Biden leads in seven out of eight polls there this fall, and tied in one. His average lead has grown to nearly five percentage points, in a state Trump has visited assiduously and where the president switched his residence.

Other polls released Wednesday had Trump leading in Wisconsin and even Ohio, albeit narrowly.

"In varying degrees, three critical states in three very different parts of the country come to the same ominous conclusion.

The president's hopes for re-election are growing dimmer by the day," said Tim Malloy, who conducted the Quinnipiac poll.

This comes as older voters appear to be breaking decisively Biden's way.

An NBC / Wall Street Journal poll days ago had Biden opening up a stunning 27-point lead over Trump among voters 65 and older. The poll had Biden with an overall 14-point lead, above where he is in polling averages.

Another potential challenge for Trump: a new Newsy/YouGov poll of 'moderate' voters shows Biden leading them by a large margin, 68 to 26.

Graham, a key Trump loyalist who has

golfed and advised the president despite attacking him in 2016 as 'race-baiting' and calling him a 'jackass,' is experiencing problems with his GOP base as he faces a stiff challenge from Democrat Jaime Harrison.

Now, he is seeking to use Supreme Court confirmation hearings he will oversee as Senate Judiciary chairman for Judge Amy Coney Barrett as a way to try to bring conservatives home.

'Ultimately, this race has earned a more competitive rating - underscoring just how fast the GOP majority is slipping away if they have to defend turf like this, and also how much Trump's numbers have fallen across the board,' writes Jessica Taylor of the Cook Political Report.

The races moved from 'lean' Republican, despite South Carolina's status as a Republican-leaning state.

Harrison has proved to be a dynamic candidate and fundraising powerhouse, to the point where Graham was pleading with donors during a recent Fox News appearance.

Graham and the GOP have spent a combined \$37 million - compared to \$68

million for Harrison and Democrats on the race - as Democrats try to expand the field and pry control of the Senate way from Republicans.

Two Republican held seats - in Colorado and Arizona - already lead the Democrats' way. One of them, appointed Sen. Martha McSally, got grilled in a debate Tuesday where she refused to say she was 'proud' of President Trump. McSally trails Democrat Mark Kelly by 8 points in new Arizona poll.

The Cook Report rates six other GOP seats as 'toss-ups' - with one Democratic seat, held by Sen. Doug Jones in heavily Republican Alabama, rated 'lean' Republican.

A change of three seats would flip control if Joe Biden captures the White House. The best Senate news for Republicans this week came in North Carolina, where Cal Cunningham has been leading incumbent Sen. Thom Tillis and hauling in fundraising cash. The married Cunningham apologized over the weekend after racy text messages with Arlene Todd Guzman emerged in the conservative National File.

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US Election 2020: Five takeaways from the only vice presidential debate

In 2008, when he was Barack Obama's running mate, Biden said that "no one decides who they're going to vote for based on the vice president." Yet this debate has outsized importance. Biden, 77, would be the oldest president in U.S. history if he were to win the election, and he has hinted he might only serve one term.

Trump, only slightly younger at 74, spent the weekend at a military hospital outside Washington after contracting the novel coronavirus.

From purely an actuarial standpoint, Pence, 61, and Harris, 55, would be more likely to step into the presidency than other vice presidential candidates. That is sure to be a major subtext on Wednesday night.

Pence also carries an additional burden as he has been tasked with campaigning for the ticket as Trump has been sidelined because of his COVID-19 infection.

BARRIERS AND MASKS

Eager for every advantage, campaigns often battle over everything from the format of the debate to the height of the podiums.

This time around, they have been at odds over coronavirus protections. The Salt Lake City debate stage will feature a Plexiglas barrier between the two candidates, which was installed over the objections of Pence's aides. They also will stand more than 12 feet (3.6 m) apart on stage.

Debate organizers handed out

salmon-colored masks to all debate attendees and cordoned off alternative rows in the theater where the debate will be held to promote social distancing.

It will be a potent reminder that opinion polls show the coronavirus is the most important issue for voters, outstripping traditional concerns like the economy and national security. Pence has headed the Trump administration's coronavirus task force as the pandemic has killed more than 210,000 Americans and shut down wide swaths of the economy.

Members of Trump's entourage refused to wear masks at last week's debate in Cleveland, just two days before he and his wife, Melania, tested positive. The Commission on Presidential

Debates has said anyone who does not wear a mask will be "escorted out."

GUEST LIST

Along with the usual campaign insiders and VIPs, both candidates have invited a handful of guests as a symbol of their priorities.

Pence has invited the parents of Kayla Mueller, who U.S. authorities say was tortured and sexually abused by Islamic State militants before being killed in 2014. The Justice Department said on Wednesday that two suspects in her death had arrived in the United States to face trial. Carl and Marsha Mueller have said Obama's administration should have done more to rescue her and spoke in support of Trump at the Republican

nomination in August.

Pence also invited business owner Flora Westbrooks, whose hair studio was destroyed in riots in Minneapolis following the police killing of Black man George Floyd, and Ann Dorn, the widow of a retired police officer who was killed during protests in St. Louis.

Harris has invited Utah Democratic state Representative Angela Romero and Deborah Gatrell, a candidate for Salt Lake City Council and former military helicopter pilot who currently works as a teacher.

The campaign said in a press release that "they both showcase the resolve hard-working Americans have shown as Donald Trump has failed to control the virus and save the economy."

Republic TV, Arnab Goswami in dock for TRP scam: What you need to know

company that installed these rating boxes called barometers on behalf of BARC, had filed a case with the Mumbai Police saying some of Hansa Research's former employees had leaked or sold the data of the households where these barometers were installed. The data about these households are closely guarded and supposed to be top secret.

MODUS OPERANDI

Once the data about the households with barometers were obtained by the fraudsters, they would pay these households money to keep the channel on even when they were not watching it. In some cases, a household that did not understand English would switch on Republic TV at all hours. This nexus kept Republic TV's TRP high (read our detailed guide on what TRP and how it is measured), the Mumbai Police commissioner Param Bir Singh said. The same tactic was used by Fast Marathi and Box Cinema channels. Republic channel is helmed and owned by Arnab Goswami, known for his loud debates and wild conspiracy theories in the Sushant Singh death case.

FOR WHAT?

The manipulation of viewership data helped Republic and the other two channels notch the top spot for undue time and these channels could charge the advertisers more than they

deserved. TV advertising market in India is worth more than Rs 30,000 crore and all channels compete for their share based on their viewership numbers. By inflating their viewership, Republic TV and the other two accused channels were earning more from advertisements than their due share.

PROPAGANDA MACHINE

Republic TV has also been running a campaign to malign the image of the Mumbai Police, the Mumbai Police commissioner said. Param Bir Singh said Republic TV was running false propaganda to gain TRPs and even the police believed the propaganda was getting Republic TV good rating points but now that the TRP fraud has come to light, the police suspects the 'fake news' and propaganda did not have as many takers as earlier believed.

WHAT NOW?

The Criminal Intelligence Unit of the Crime Branch has arrested two TV channel owners and seized 28.5 lakh rupees from them. Arnab Goswami is the big fish and a known name countrywide. The Mumbai Police has informed the Information and Broadcasting ministry in Delhi about the fraud. Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh said the police will question and act against whoever runs the channel, Arnab Goswami, being

not just an owner but also a journalist, will use his rights as a media person to block any attempts to arrest him.

Mumbai Police commissioner Param Bir Singh said the bank accounts of the channels were being looked into, including the revenue they earned from advertisers to know "whether they are from proceeds of crimes".

"Anyone involved in the channel, no matter how top management, how senior, will be questioned, and if involved they will be investigated," Param Bir Singh said, "There was false TRP spreading. TRP ratings were being bought. The manipulation was mainly for advertising revenues." "Household data were used by the channels for ratings manipulation and they received illegal advertising funds. This will be considered proceeds of cheating," Mumbai Police commissioner param bir singh said.

WHAT HAS REPUBLIC SAID?

In a statement released shortly after the Mumbai Police's press conference, Arnab Goswami's Republic TV said the allegations against it were "false" and that Mumbai Police commissioner Param Bir Singh was making the claims since the channel had "questioned" him on the Sushant Singh Rajput death case. Calling the allegations part of a "desperate measure", Republic

TV said it will file a criminal defamation case against Param Bir Singh and asked him to be ready to face the channel in court.

WHAT IS THE RATINGS AGENCY SAYING?

Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) is the body that gives rating points to India's TV channels. A BARC spokesperson commented on the controversy and said, "As in all our previous cases of suspected panel homes intrusions, BARC India continues to follow its established vigilance and disciplinary guidelines. BARC remains steadfastly true to its purpose to accurately and faithfully report 'What India Watches'." BARC India

appreciates the efforts of the Mumbai Police and will provide the support asked of it."

WHO OWNS REPUBLIC TV?

Arnab Goswami, who is the editor-in-chief of Republic Media Network, is the sole promoter and is also the chairman of the board of the Republic Media Network (RMN). Republic TV's parent ARG Outlier Media Private Limited has two directors -- Samyabrata Ray Goswami and Arnab Ranjan Goswami. Samyabrata Goswami is Arnab Goswami's wife.

Arnab and his entities control 80.8 per cent of ARG. ARG's authorised share capital is INR 50 lakh and the total paid-up capital is INR 29.93 lakh.

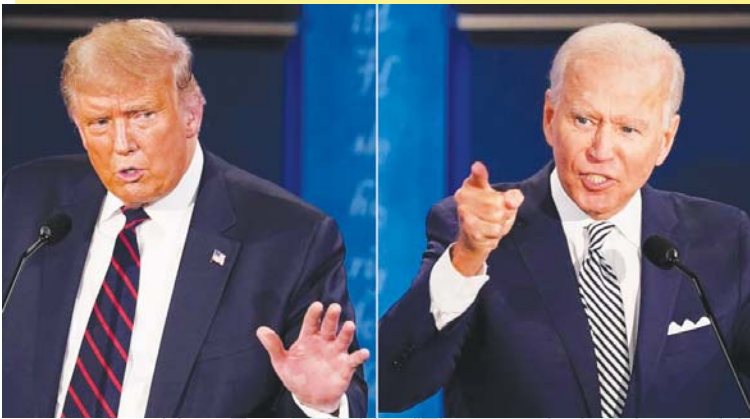
Hathras: UP is on the wrong track, again

administrative officials in Hathras accountable and in the medium-term by instituting structural reforms in the criminal justice system and its intersection with political power.

Instead, it has decided to order a probe into an "international" conspiracy and plot to defame the Yogi Adityanath government and foment caste violence. The UP police has also filed 19 FIRs against both named and unnamed individuals on charges ranging from sedition to promoting enmity between castes and communities. This

is outrageous. The outcry against the injustice in Hathras was because citizens were shaken and angry and wanted action. Not only did the UP government fail in its task of protecting the life, liberty and dignity of a young Dalit woman, it first sought to cover up the incident and is now using the controversy to attack critics and construct conspiracy theories, invoking the proverbial foreign hand. The state should stop looking outside, and look within its own administration. That is where the fault lies.

Trump says he won't participate in virtual debate after CPD announces changes: 'Not going to waste my time'



President Trump, in his first interview since his positive coronavirus test, told Fox Business' Maria Bartiromo on Thursday that he will not participate in the next debate, just minutes after the Commission on Presidential Debates announced the showdown, slated for Oct. 15, will be virtual.

The CPD announced early Thursday that "the second presidential debate will take the form of a town meeting, in which the candidates would participate from separate remote locations." Steve Scully of C-SPAN is still set to moderate the second presidential debate from Miami. But, in a Fox Business interview Thursday, the president said he would not take part in a virtual debate.

"The commission changed the debate style and that's not acceptable to us," Trump said on "Mornings with Maria." "I beat him in the first debate, I beat him easily."

The president added that he expected to "beat him in the second debate also."

"I'm not going to do a virtual debate," Trump went on. "I'm not going to waste my time at a virtual debate."

Biden responded to Trump's claims while talking to reporters in Delaware on Thursday.

"We don't know what the president is going to do, he changes his mind every second so for me to comment on that now would be irresponsible," Biden said. "I'm going to follow the commission

recommendations." During his interview on Thursday, the president said he wasn't going to "sit at a computer" to debate, calling it "ridiculous." "They're trying to protect Biden," Trump said. "Everybody is."

Moments later, Trump campaign manager Bill Stepien said the CPD was rushing to Biden's "defense by unilaterally canceling an in-person debate," calling it "pathetic."

"That's not what debates are about or how they're done," Stepien said. "Here are the facts: President Trump will have posted multiple negative tests prior to the debate, so there is no need for this unilateral declaration. The safety of all involved can easily be achieved without canceling a chance for voters to see both candidates go head to head." He added: "We'll pass on this sad excuse to bail out Joe Biden and do a rally instead." But the Biden campaign seemingly accepted the rules change early Thursday.

"Vice President Biden looks forward to speaking directly to

the American people and comparing his plan for bringing the country together and building back better with Donald Trump's failed leadership on the coronavirus that has thrown the strong economy he inherited into the worst downturn since the Great Depression," Biden's deputy campaign manager Kate Bedingfield said in a statement. The debate format changes come less than a week after the president announced he and first lady Melania Trump tested positive for the novel coronavirus. That announcement threw the status of all future 2020 debates in doubt, though the debate between Vice President Mike Pence and California Sen. Kamala Harris went on as planned Wednesday night with on-stage dividers between the candidates after both had tested negative for the coronavirus.

Trump was discharged from Walter Reed National Military Medical Center on Monday, after his medical team said he could continue his coronavirus treatment from the White House. He had his reelection campaign at the forefront of his mind, tweeting shortly before departing that he would soon be back on the

campaign trail, while blasting polls that showed him trailing Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden.

"Will be back on the Campaign Trail soon!!! The Fake News only shows the Fake Polls," Trump tweeted before being discharged from Walter Reed Monday.

Meanwhile, shortly after the president returned to the White House, where he continued to be treated for COVID-19, his campaign communications director Tim Murtaugh said the president planned to take part in the debates.

"The president intends to debate," Murtaugh told Fox News Monday.

Symone Sanders, a senior campaign adviser to Biden, said on Sunday that the former vice president was "looking forward" to the Oct. 15 town hall-style debate in Miami and that he hoped Trump would be well enough to attend.

"We are looking forward to the debate on Oct. 15 in Miami," Sanders said during an interview on CNN's "State of the Union" on Sunday. "It's a town hall and, as you know, Vice President Biden loves a good town hall."

H-1B visa: Trump administration issues major rule change

Moves by administration likely to end up in court, immigration law firm says

The administration of President Donald Trump on Tuesday moved to impose major new limits on use of the controversial H-1B visa, intended for jobs requiring specialized skills and widely used by Silicon Valley technology firms.

The new rules are expected to reduce the pool of skilled labor and raise costs for tech companies and other employers. Critics say that could force companies to move some operations outside the U.S. The push to limit foreign workers comes one month before the election and as the nation still reels from the coronavirus pandemic. Employment levels are 10.7 million jobs down from February, before the virus hit and many businesses were closed.

Department of Homeland Security acting deputy secretary Ken Cuccinelli said a third of applicants would be denied under the new rules. The changes are expected to have a significant effect on the tech industry in the Bay Area, where federal government data

show Google, Apple and Facebook last year together received approvals for more than 5,500 new H-1B workers. The companies did not provide answers to questions about the rule changes.

Advocates for skilled immigration attacked the administration's changes to the H-1B program.

"It's another step in a continuing trend to restrict immigration at all levels, including skilled immigration, which probably affects companies here more than anywhere else in the U.S.," said Sean Randolph, senior director of the Bay Area Council's Economic Institute. Canada's tech sector, which has aggressively sought to capitalize on the administration's H-1B crackdown by luring skilled immigrants to the north, is "rubbing its hands together with joy because this is a gift," Randolph said.

The announced changes involve

new rules from both Homeland Security and the U.S. Department of Labor.

Homeland Security said its rule, effective 60 days after it's published in the federal register, would "combat the use of H-1B workers to serve as a low-cost replacement for otherwise qualified American workers."

The Homeland Security rule would fulfill a long-running Trump administration promise to revise the definition of which "specialty occupations" are eligible for the visa, according to a draft copy released late Tuesday. Also revised would be definitions of "worksite," "third-party worksite" and "U.S. employer," as well as clarifying how the government will determine whether an "employer-employee" relationship exists. Placements of H-1B workers at third-party sites - as staffing companies do - would last a maximum of a year.



The H-1B program has become a flashpoint in America's immigration debate. Major tech firms employ foreign workers directly through the program, and also via staffing companies and outsourcers. The tech industry has pushed to expand the annual 85,000 cap on new visas, while critics have pointed to reported abuses and argue that the visa is used to supplant U.S. workers, drive down wages and facilitate outsourcing.

Research by Daniel Costa, of the left-leaning Economic Policy Institute, and Howard University political science professor Ron

Hira, found that 60% of H-1B workers receive lower-than-average wages for their job and region, and that major tech companies pay some H-1B workers less than local median wages.

The Trump administration has targeted use of the visa by staffing and outsourcing firms, dramatically increasing denials. The administration, which has long promised to change the H-1B program, is pushing the rules ahead without the typical public-comment period, the agency said.

Is it going to be Ambani vs Amazon?



If it were a ticketed event, they would bill it as Asia's richest man facing off against the world's richest man in a battle of supremacy in one of the toughest markets in the world — India. Essentially, that is what it is coming down to as the Mukesh Ambani-helmed Reliance Industries is set to cross swords with Jeff Bezos-run Amazon, with the Kishore Biyani-held Future Group of Companies being the battle arena, as it were. In a season when plenty of things have happened for Reliance Industries and Jio Platforms, it has emerged that the Ambani firm is in advanced stages of talks to buy into units of Future Group, which as it happens, is already in a tie-up with Amazon. **If this is not taking the fight to the enemy camp, then what is?**

As per multiple media reports, Reliance Industries, in a bid to further its e-commerce ambitions, is planning to buy stakes in Future Group's Future Retail and perhaps another unit, too. As a twist in the tale, the Future Group is also in talks with Amazon, which wants to increase its existing stake. The Future Group, which is in some financial strife, wants to close the deal early so that it is rid of its troubles.

Why Future Retail?

Future Retail operates some of India's most popular retail chains and is in more than 400 cities in every state of the country through digital platforms and over 1500 stores that cover over 16 million square feet of retail space. It has large format stores, Big Bazaar, its flagship chain, besides small store neighbourhood retail chains, EasyDay Club and Heritage Fresh. Though a group with enormous potential, it is now under severe financial strain. The debt book of Future Group's six listed firms increased to Rs 12,778 crore as of September 2019 from Rs 11,463 crore in March 2019. Market news says that the Future Group needs Rs. 6,000-8,000 crore to stay afloat. And earlier, the better.

Hence the company is holding

talks with various players, but the spotlight is understandably on Reliance and Amazon.

Amazon's gameplan

Amazon is betting big on India. It has been considerably increasing its Indian presence slowly. Recently it rolled out Amazon Food Delivery in Bengaluru. And of course, its key business is Amazon online platform, on which it wants to retail every product possible. Amazon already holds an indirect stake of 1.3% in Future Retail. (In August last year, Amazon agreed to purchase 49% of one of Future Group's unlisted firms, allowing it to buy into Future Retail after a period of between three and 10 years.)

The ties between the two companies further strengthened after Amazon became the authorized online sales channel for Future Retail's stores that sell everything from groceries to cosmetics and apparel.

Now, Amazon wants to add its investment in Future Retail for a holding of as much as 49%.

If the deal actually happens, Amazon can consolidate its position in the Indian market, as it has already pledged to invest \$5.5 billion in the country. Amazon, which got bested in China by Alibaba, wants to have better results in India. Hence, it has been pretty aggressive in its approach in India so far. Reliance not ready to roll over

It is no secret that Mukesh Ambani wants to build an Indian Alibaba that will let offline merchants and kirana stores sell their goods online to Indian consumers. Reliance is hoping to tap into its 10,415 retail stores across 6,600 cities and leverage its Jio subscriber base of 380 million to reach the masses. The company built out the connection layer first, providing affordable data and even selling phones for consumers to go online, and is now developing the marketplace by providing hardware (point of sale machines).

Having put in all the hard yards over the last 3-4 years, Reliance

now wants to move in for the kill. It has gone for some over-the-top, aggressive investment soliciting, and sold close to quarter of its stake in Jio Platforms and raised a whopping \$15.2 billion in just over two months time. Reliance Retail, as of now, operates a network of 11,784 stores covering 28.7 million square feet and reported a revenue of Rs 38,211 crore in the January-March quarter. Thanks to its sustained efforts, Reliance Industries has become debt free much ahead of its schedule.

Reliance Industries has raised over Rs 168,818 crore in just 58 days through:

1. Global tech investors - Rs 115,693.95 crore
2. Rights issue - Rs. 53,124.20 crore.

The combined capital raised has no precedence globally in such a short time. Both of these are also unprecedented in Indian corporate history and have set new benchmarks.

Along with the stake sale to BP in the petro-retail JV, the total fund raise is in excess of Rs 1.75 lakh crore.

Reliance's net-debt was Rs 161,035 crore, as on 31 March 2020. With these investments, RIL has now become net debt-free.

Mukesh Ambani, in a press release said, "Today I am both delighted and humbled to announce that we have fulfilled our promise to the shareholders

by making Reliance net debt-free much before our original schedule of 31 March 2021." He added: "Over the past few weeks, we have been overwhelmed by the phenomenal interest of the global financial investor community in partnering with Jio."

Ambani is now ready for the next haul for Jio and Reliance Retail, which he said at the company's AGM early this year, "will induct leading global partners in the next few quarters, and move towards listing of both these companies within the next five years." Battle royal The e-commerce space in India is very attractive for all big players. With 500 million internet users and e-commerce growing 30% a year, experts expect online retail in India to become a \$200 billion opportunity by 2027. Basically, there should be enough space for multiple players. But both Amazon and Reliance have shown that they don't like competition in the spheres they operate.

As personalities Bezos and Ambani are different, but both are no-nonsense guys and don't brook any threat to their market suzerainty.

In India, Amazon has also got to be wary of government rules. Being a local player, Reliance gets to enjoy more benefits than Amazon, which is why Amazon wants to ride piggyback on Future Group and reap the benefits of

being an Indian competitor.

Last year, the Indian government issued new e-commerce guidelines that directly affect foreign players like Amazon and Walmart (which acquired Flipkart for about \$16 billion two years back). The main focus may be on warehouses. Foreign-funded firms aren't allowed to hold e-commerce inventory in India. That's a disadvantage for Amazon, since it prevents the firm from fully capitalizing on the strengths of its vaunted logistics operation, seen as one of its most decisive edges in the US. And this is a good moment to point out that Amazon is also in discussion for taking a controlling stake in Kishore Biyani-promoted Future Supply Chain Solutions (FSC), which is a third-party supply chain and logistics service provider that offers warehousing facilities also. So there are many layers in this Ambani vs Amazon battle for stakes in the Future Group. Reliance, needless to say, is aiming for a controlling stake in the Group, so that it can call the shots from all corners. As we said, Reliance vs Amazon is basically a variation of immovable object against unstoppable force. They say Jeff Bezos could be world's first trillionaire by 2026, Mukesh Ambani by 2033. Both the industry captains would, however, value who gets to win the battle for the Indian market.

Amazon sends legal notice to India's Future Group over deal with Ambani's Reliance Retail

Amazon has sent a legal notice to Future Group, India's second largest retail chain, for breaching the terms of its contract by selling a significant portion of the business to Ambani's Reliance Retail.

Future Group announced in late August that it was selling its retail and wholesale business, as well as its logistics and warehousing business, to Reliance Retail for \$3.4 billion. But before Reliance Retail came into the picture, Future Group and Amazon also had a deal. Last year, Amazon acquired a 49% stake in Future Coupons, a group entity owned by Future Group's retail business. The deal gave Amazon a 3.58% stake in Future Retail, and the right of first refusal to purchase more stake in Future Retail both directly as well as via entities, Future Group said in a filing at the time. According to TV network ET Now, which first reported about the legal notice, the deal between Amazon and Future Retail also restricted the Indian firm from entering into a deal with certain firms. Future Group, which kickstarted its journey as a stonewashed-fabric seller in the 1980s, served millions of customers through more than 1,500 stores in more than 400 cities as of earlier this year.

The legal notice has puzzled many in India, as Amazon is reportedly preparing to acquire a multi-billion-dollar stake in Reliance Retail, India's

largest retail chain, according to earlier reports by ET Now and Bloomberg. With e-commerce commanding only between 3-7% of all retail sales in India — and Reliance Retail launching its own e-commerce business to fight Amazon and Flipkart — Amazon's deal with Reliance Retail is seen by many industry analysts as crucial for the American e-commerce firm's future in India. Amazon, which kickstarted its journey in India seven years ago, has invested more than \$6.5 billion in its local business in the country.

Amazon confirmed that it had filed a legal notice but did not elaborate as the matter is "sub judice." Reliance Retail and Future Group did not comment. As of Wednesday midnight (local time), Future Group had not disclosed the notice on the stock exchange. Founded in 2006, Reliance Retail serves more than 3.5 million customers each week (as of early this year) through its nearly 12,000 physical stores in more than 6,500 cities and towns in the country.

The retail chain, run by India's richest man, Mukesh Ambani, has raised about \$5.14 billion by selling about an 8.5% stake in its business to Silver Lake, Singapore's GIC, General Atlantic and others in the past four weeks. Ambani's other venture, Jio Platforms, this year raised over \$20 billion from more than a dozen marquee investors, including Google and Facebook.

Ambani versus Bezos: Who's winning the battle for India's \$700 billion retail industry

India's retail industry has become a racetrack for two of the world's wealthiest men—and one might well be close to the finish line. On Aug. 29, Reliance Retail Ventures, owned by Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani, said it will acquire the retail, wholesale, logistics, and warehousing operations of India's leading brick-and-mortar retailer Future Group for Rs24,713 crore (\$3.4 billion). The deal gives Reliance Retail access to around 1,800 stores of Future Group's popular brands Big Bazaar, FBB, EasyDay, Central, and Foodhall. With this deal, Ambani has taken a giant leap in the retail sector, leaving behind all domestic and international rivals, including Amazon, led by the world's richest man Jeff Bezos. "Reliance was already much ahead of the competition. This deal has just further strengthened its position in the industry," said Arvind Singhal, chairman at retail management consultancy firm Technopak Advisors.

Reliance's retail universe

Reliance Retail, which started operations in 2006, was the country's largest retailer

by number of stores even before the recent deal with Future Group. The company operates more than 10,000 stores across categories like standalone stores, supermarkets, wholesale cash-and-carry outlets, and speciality stores, across various segments. It also has several e-commerce portals. In the year ended March 2019, Reliance Retail reported a turnover of Rs1.3 lakh crore. In recent months, the Reliance group has been actively working to increase its presence in the e-commerce space, too. In November 2019, the group launched JioMart, an online selling channel for Reliance Retail's grocery outlets. JioMart was launched with a WhatsApp order-booking service where customers could place orders via the instant messaging app. This gave JioMart the potential to tap into WhatsApp's massive user base of over 400 million Indians. More recently, Reliance Industries bought a 15% stake in online lingerie retailer Zivame and paid Rs620 crore for a majority stake in online pharmacy Netmeds. The company is

reportedly also in talks to buy stakes in other online retailers such as furniture seller Urban Ladder and grocery delivery app MilkBasket. While Ambani has been trying to go online, Bezos' Amazon has been trying to tap offline opportunities.

Amazon in India

India's retail market is estimated to touch \$1.3 trillion by 2025 from \$700 billion in 2019. This massive potential has drawn global retailers to the country.

Since its entry into India in 2013, Amazon has invested over \$5 billion in its business here. Earlier this year it committed another \$1 billion investment over the next five years. Despite stiff competition from homegrown unicorn Flipkart (now owned by Walmart) and a host of vertical-focused e-commerce firms, Amazon has managed to establish itself as one of the largest players in the segment in India. However, e-commerce is still a sliver of India's overall retail. In 2019, online sales accounted for just 1.6% of India's retail sector. So, Amazon has been trying to tap

into brick-and-mortar retail in India. In 2017, Amazon bought 5% of ownership in department store chain Shoppers Stop for Rs179.25 crore. And in 2018, Amazon invested in Aditya Birla Group's food and grocery retail chain More. In January, the Jeff Bezos-led company acquired a 49% stake in Future Coupons, the promoter entity of Future Retail. While Future Coupons' business is limited to value-added payment solutions such as corporate gift cards, loyalty cards, and reward cards for corporate customers, the deal gave Amazon around a 3.6% share in Future Group. These acquisitions have benefitted Amazon, but they aren't enough. Ambani's retail focus. Some industry experts have already declared Ambani a winner. "We cannot say the competition has intensified because for that we need players with similar strength or capability. Foreign retailers such as Amazon and Walmart have a limited reach due to the existing policy restrictions," said Singhal. "Currently, it's nothing but an open playing field for Reliance from which it'll reap benefits."

Ambani's \$2 Chutzpah Unlocks Another Fortune

It's not chump change if you're getting multibillion-dollar deals with Facebook, Google and possibly Amazon.

Mukesh Ambani has joined the league of world's richest with the help of a simple formula: assembling admirers for \$2 businesses. First he got Facebook Inc. and Google to back his fledgling digital ambitions, and now he may be trying to entice Amazon.com Inc. into his retail venture, already India's largest.

In four years, the Indian billionaire has amassed roughly 400 million customers for his mobile data business. What does Ambani eke out from each of them? Less than \$2 a month. The chump change didn't deter Facebook and Google's parent, Alphabet Inc. Together with marquee private equity investors and sovereign wealth funds, Silicon Valley tech titans made a beeline recently to invest in Ambani's Jio Platforms Ltd., valuing it at about \$65 billion.

That \$20 billion fund-raising spree has already met the refining and petrochemicals czar's goal of making his flagship Reliance Industries Ltd. net-debt-free, giving it enviable financial strength just as the coronavirus pandemic is taking a toll on most other balance sheets. The tycoon wants a repeat performance for another \$2 business in his stable: retail.

He has offered a 40% stake in Reliance Retail Ventures Ltd. to Amazon, Bloomberg News reported Thursday. It's unclear if Jeff Bezos will bite. But others have. Menlo Park, California-based Silver Lake Partners, which bought a stake in Jio, has written a \$1 billion check for 1.75%. Another Jio investor, KKR & Co., is also probably coming on board.



To see how the excitement is rising once again over a princely \$2, consider Reliance's 30 million square feet of retail space. Each square foot, analysts expect, will garner \$2 a day by 2022. On an operating margin of 7%, that translates to \$1.5 billion in earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization. All Ambani had to do was to convince Silver Lake that this Ebitda is worth 38 times today. And with that, he unlocked the gates to a \$57 billion enterprise.

If the Facebook deal for Jio is any guide, Amazon as a strategic partner might get its 40% for a small discount to what Silver Lake paid, though the reported \$20 billion price tag is still formidable. Excluding his \$38 billion divorce settlement, Bezos hasn't done a transaction as large as this. There's another wrinkle. Amazon India, in which he has already committed billions of dollars, competes with Reliance Retail's physical stores — as well as with Ambani's version of "phy-gital" retail.

But on his own, Bezos must fight with one hand tied behind his back. Foreign-owned e-commerce sites, such as his or Walmart Inc.'s Flipkart, must operate as pure marketplaces for third-party sellers. The law against owning inventory has become stricter, with discounts triggering allegations of favoring connected parties. India's competition commission received a fresh such complaint from a group of Amazon vendors recently. Being an Indian company, no such restrictions apply to Reliance's grocery stores, supermarkets, or JioMart, Ambani's vision of virtually connecting 30 million neighborhood shops with his telecom customers.

Although still untested, the latter is his edge. The bulk of the 20-fold growth that India's online grocery sales might witness over the next five years may go to the Jio-Facebook partnership, Goldman Sachs Group Inc. estimates. The advantage for Ambani could also carry over to higher-margin items, the

same way as Costco Wholesale Corp.'s popular \$4.99 rotisserie chicken helps the American retailer sell a little more of everything from apparel to flat-screen TVs. Covid-19 has been a shot in the arm for Reliance, despite retail Ebitda of only \$145 million in the June quarter, a 47% drop from last year. The carnage from a nationwide lockdown allowed it to swoop on debt-strapped rival Future Group's retail, wholesale, logistics and warehousing units, acquiring the lot for just \$3.4 billion. More importantly, the prospect of getting stuck with sub-5% growth in the post-pandemic economy is making Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government reliant on an increasingly small number of domestic groups to pull India out of its tight spot.

Unlike China, India's billion-plus consumer market has been open to U.S. tech firms. But when Ambani requested Modi last year to end "data colonization" by global corporations, it became clear that a shift was coming. Any remaining doubts have been removed by the post-Covid surge of economic nationalism.

Where does that leave Silicon Valley and Wall Street? With U.S.-China relations deteriorating — most recently over the erosion of Hong Kong's autonomy — both need an alternative. In a billion-plus consumer market, even a \$2 business holds the promise of future riches, and Reliance is demonstrating that it has more than one such opportunity. To get into bed with Facebook, Google, and possibly even Amazon at the same time takes some chutzpah, though. Chalk it up to Ambani's dominance of the market.

The increasing value of Quad

Opposition to China provides the strategic glue. But a lot more needs to be done

(News Agencies)-The degree of interest in a meeting of foreign ministers is evidence of how important the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) has become as a mode of geopolitical signalling. Its relevance was accentuated by the foreign ministers meeting in person in the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, of Indian and Chinese troops facing each other, and of the United States (US) president getting infected by the disease. Critics are not wrong to grumble that the dialogue remains informal; that it fails to produce a joint

statement; and that its only tangible accomplishment is its existence. The real measure of the Quad, however, is to look at its trajectory. The original Quad was a disaster-relief exercise. It broke up, came together again, and then struggled to find convergence among its members. The present meeting strengthened four important elements of the Quad's present stage of evolution. One, all the member-states represent a domestic political consensus on the Quad and its importance in balancing China in the Indo-Pacific. This was not true in the

past. Australia, for example, changed its Quad policy when there was a change in government. Two, though most members prefer to not name China, the expanded areas the members have agreed to work together, from the maritime realm to cyberspace, are aimed at countering China's influence and capabilities. Three, the foreign ministers' agreeing they would meet at least once a year and upholding the importance of Southeast Asia indicates that both institutionally and in terms of geographic spread, the Quad is set to deepen and widen. And



finally, the language of the participants indicates that Quad has already assumed a quasi-formal status. The most important driver of the Quad's evolution is China. Its military aggression against India and Japan, its attempts to subvert Australian civil society and its

embrace of open geopolitical rivalry with the US is the strategic glue of the Quad. The most important determinant of which path is taken is the degree to which the Quad members can disentangle themselves from the economic and technological embrace of China.

Delhiwale: Just another day at work



(News Agencies)-Like many jobs, being a waste collector is hectic. One has to walk along one's assigned streets, go through piles of garbage to pick up the viable

trash, put it in a sack and transport it to the collection point, which can be the collector's own home. "It's hard physical labour," says Shakir Husain. Himself a

collector, Mr Husain operates in the central parts of the city. This afternoon he has collected enough stuff to fill up two medium-size bags. Both bags are hanging down from his right arm.

Standing by a tea stall, he says he shall now walk back to the room where he lives, deposit the trash there, and go out again for another round. "I've already made four rounds," he says. Mr Husain works daily from 10am to 5pm. Gesturing towards the empty shirt sleeve falling down on his left, he says he lost that arm many years ago. "I got electrocuted by 11,000 volts."

It had happened back home in Moradabad, UP. "Losing one hand was a setback, but one has to make a living to support one's family." His wife, kids and mother live in the village and depend on his earning.

Not long after the accident, Mr Husain followed the footsteps of some of the folks in his village and arrived in Delhi to find a living. "One is not born a waste collector," he explains. "Finding an employment in a big city is a matter of luck and kismet (fate)... I could have been something else, perhaps, but my destiny was to be a kabadi walla." He admits "that the work was

very tough in the early days, because I had to manage everything using only one arm." By now, he says, he has grown used to "the nature of my job." Suddenly, Mr Husain's attention is claimed by a pile in the corner. He walks over, bends down over a large plastic bag and fiddles inside it. It has two tin boxes, and some banana peels. He tosses the peels aside and keeps the tins inside one of his two bags. After dropping this load at home, he will take a lunch break before going back to work. "I never cook," he says. "I always eat outside, much easier." He walks away.

Decoding the secret of Modi's communication

(News Agencies)-Having been a journalist and an anchor for many decades, there is one question that many people keep asking me. "Rajat ji, who is your favourite anchor?" While most professionals compare themselves to their own earlier versions and improve over them, honestly, everyone has someone else in their profession that they like and so do I. However, it is when someone outside your profession shines in a role such as anchoring that one sits up and takes notice. In my rather short list of favourite anchors, I have a non-journalist entry — Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The latest instance of his excellent skill of holding and



moderating a meaningful conversation was seen in the Fit India Dialogue 2020. As a yogi who had become the global brand ambassador of yoga, he was fittingly the moderator of this dialogue. And as a karmayogi who has never taken a day off, he is also the epitome of fitness.

However, that is not what stood out in the conversation; it was something else.

From a young female Kashmiri footballer to a cricket superstar, from a nutritionist to a yoga guru, Modi spoke to everyone effortlessly and held forth on their respective topics with elan. The

ease with which he connects to people from many walks of life, something that I had observed long ago, was there for everyone to see.

The warmth Modi exudes also helps people connect easily with him. This breaks the ice and puts people at ease and makes them open up, forgetting the fact that they are speaking to a larger-than-life leader. For example, in the same "Fit India" interaction, he cracked a joke with Milind Soman about his age, created a phrase "Ace It Like Afshan" for the footballer, and asked Virat Kohli about the Yo-Yo test.

When it began, some people thought that Mann Ki Baat would be a monthly speech on the radio. But Modi has made it a

conversation where he, as the anchor, brings together the successes and stories of common people. Even there, he is a calm and knowledgeable anchor whenever he is speaking to people. The conversations are always engaging. An engaging conversation is possible only when people are looking to learn from one another with an open mind. This ability to think that they may have something to learn from the other person is what makes people good listeners. An important reason behind Modi's excellent conversation skills is that he sees himself as a constant learner. He may be the prime minister, but he still thinks he can look to learn something from everyone, young or old.

For first time in 30 years, Lalu Prasad to miss Bihar polls

The mercurial former Union minister is currently in jail in Ranchi on corruption charges. He was convicted in December 2017 in three separate fodder scam cases.

(News Agencies)- For the first time in three decades, an assembly election in Bihar will almost certainly be fought without Lalu Prasad, former chief minister and Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) chief whose characteristic rustic campaigning style and charisma created a solid support base among rural and backward caste population.

The mercurial former Union minister is currently in jail in Ranchi on corruption charges. He was convicted in December 2017 in three separate fodder scam cases.

Prasad has secured bail in only one of the three cases and even by the most optimistic calculations by his lawyer –

which include multiple high court decisions in their favour -- Prasad can hope to walk out of jail only after November 10, the day votes are counted.

Elections are scheduled to be held in three phases, on October 28, November 3 and 7.

"The high court has set a precedent that either the convict of fodder scam convicts will be granted bail on completion of half sentence or on merit," said advocate Sameer Saurav of the high court. Last year, Prasad got bail in one of the cases after completing half of the 3.5 years jail term. His second bail application is under consideration in the Jharkhand high court and the next date of hearing is October 9. His sentence in that particular

case is five years, and half of that term is over this month. But in the third case, the RJD chief is facing 14 years in prison – seven under Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections and another seven under Prevention of Corruption (PC) Act.

The court expressly said both sentences would run consecutively. Prasad's lawyers hope that the high court will strike down this decision, and let the two sentences run simultaneously. If that happens, half that seven-year sentence would be completed by November 10. Prasad's lawyer Prabhat Kumar said, "The high court in matters of other convicts in the same case suspended the sentence and considered maximum seven years



imprisonment for reckoning the half sentence for bail purposes. In such a situation, he is completing half custody on November 10." "We are expecting Prasad's release from jail after November 10," he added. The lawyer said Prasad's bail application in the third case will be filed in the second week of November – so it is impossible for the leader to be released from jail in time for campaigning. RJD spokesperson Mritunjay Tiwari

said, "Prasad's popular saying-- Jab tak Samosa mein rahega aalu, Bihar mein rahega Lalu--is still valid and true. He may be in Ranchi for some reason, but our workers and supporters are electrified. He lives in people's heart." RJD and other political leaders have repeatedly visited Kelly's bungalow--the official residence of Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS) director--where Prasad was temporarily shifted on August 5 due to Covid-19 threat.

'No govt ever invoked sedition after rape': Congress to Yogi Adityanath



(News Agencies)- Demanding a judicial inquiry into the Hathras rape incident either by a sitting High Court judge or a Supreme Court judge, the Congress on Wednesday termed "bizarre" the response of the Uttar Pradesh

government on the issue and alleged that it has been slapping sedition charges as if these were "pick-pocketing" cases.

Addressing a virtual press conference, Congress spokesperson Abhishek Manu

Singhvi claimed that no government ever, including that of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), in the past in Uttar Pradesh had invoked sedition charges after a rape incident as done by the Yogi Adityanath dispensation.

Singhvi's comments came on a day when the Uttar Pradesh police booked four people, including a journalist from Kerala, Siddique Kappan, on sedition and other charges in Mathura, two days after they were arrested while on their way to Hathras.

Charges under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and the IT Act have also been

filed against the four who were later remanded in judicial custody for 14 days by a Mathura court.

"The response of the Yogi Adityanath government to the Hathras incident has been bizarre and it has been coming up with a number of conspiracy theories," Singhvi said.

Over 21 FIRs have been filed against various people on conspiracy charges, outnumbering the cases against the main accused in the rape incident, he added.

Chief minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday alleged that an international conspiracy was being hatched to destabilise his

government, following its tough stand against anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protests.

"Another kind of conspiracy alleged by the chief minister is a conspiracy to destabilise and overthrow his government," Singhvi said.

"Stop blaming everyone in the world except yourself. Each time you point your finger, there are three fingers pointing back at you, which you cannot and must not ignore. And last, stop arresting all third parties around you in a 360 degree fashion and ignoring punitive action, but more importantly, punishment by conviction of the real accused of murder and rape," he added.

MP begins probe into alleged multi-crore rupee scam in govt scheme for farmers

(News Agencies)-The economic offences wing (EOW) of the Madhya Pradesh government initiated an inquiry on Tuesday into an alleged multi-crore rupee scam involving officers of the horticulture and food processing department in the purchase of agriculture implements under the Mechanisation Scheme of the central government in past eight years, an official said Wednesday.

Deputy director level officers of the horticulture and food processing department allegedly not only cleared the bills related to purchase of sub-standard

machines at much higher rate than the market rate but also transferred the amount of grant to dealers of implements instead of depositing the same in the beneficiary farmers' bank accounts through direct benefit transfer (DBT), said an official who didn't wish to be named.

Under a scheme launched in 2013, the farmers get 50% subsidy in purchase of agricultural implements from the state and central governments. Inspector, EOW, Pankaj Gautam, who is investigating the case, said, "We have asked for

details of the scheme, names of beneficiary farmers, amount transferred to their bank accounts and details of



implements purchased in the past eight years. Similarly, we have sought details how the department procures the implement and hands over the

same to farmers." "We will probe the scam which the complainant has alleged to be of Rs 100 crore in the entire period since the scheme was launched. However, the amount of scam can be ascertained during the investigation," said Gautam. A farmer Mukesh Patidar, of Richala Munha village of Mandsaur district, lodged a complaint with the horticulture

department in August saying that it provided power tillers to farmers under the Farm Mechanisation Scheme without following the rules. "Instead of transferring the

50% subsidy in the farmers' account by giving them a freedom of purchasing implements of their choice, the departments' officers transferred the amount directly to unauthorized dealers. The department handed over China-made machines in the name of power tillers to the farmers, which don't meet any specification which a power tiller should have," Patidar said. Patidar said the department purchased machines for Rs 40,000 to Rs 100,000 or more and thus the scam in the past eight years or so was of more than Rs 100 crores.

World Bank says India's GDP will contract by 9.6%, country's situation exceptional, dire

The World Bank has said India's GDP is expected to further contract by 9.6% this fiscal as a reflection of the economic slump the country has suffered due to the national lockdown induced by the coronavirus pandemic.

The World Bank has said India's GDP is expected to further contract by 9.6% this fiscal as a reflection of the economic slump the country has suffered due to the national lockdown induced by the coronavirus pandemic.

The World Bank on Thursday said that the nationwide lockdown and the stoppage put on income household as well as industries' income due to the coronavirus pandemic has rendered the Indian economy in a situation worse than ever before. World Bank, the Washington-based global

lender, in its latest South Asia Economic Focus report ahead of the annual meeting of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, forecasts a sharper than expected economic slump across the region. The bank has said regional growth is expected to contract by 7.7% in 2020.

"India's GDP is expected to contract by 9.6% in the fiscal year that started in March," the World Bank said on Thursday. Regional growth is projected to rebound to 4.5% in 2021, it said.

Factoring in population growth, however, income-per-capita in the region will remain 6% below 2019

estimates, indicating that the expected rebound will not offset the lasting economic damage caused by the pandemic, said the World Bank.

"The situation is much worse in India than we have ever seen before," Hans Timmer, World Bank Chief Economist for South Asia told reporters during a conference call.

"It is an exceptional situation in India. A very dire outlook," he said. There was a 25% decline in GDP in the second quarter of the year, which is the first quarter of the current fiscal year in India. In the report, the World Bank said that



the spread of the coronavirus and containment measures have severely disrupted supply and demand conditions in India.

With the intent to contain the spread of Covid-19, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with effect from March 25, announced a nationwide complete lockdown that brought as much as 70% of economic activity, investment,

exports, and discretionary consumption to a standstill. Only essential goods and services such as agriculture, mining, utility services, some financial and IT services and public services were allowed to operate. World Bank says India's GDP will contract by 9.6%, country's situation exceptional, dire

Indian health platform wants to nourish mind, body and soul



The Indian start-up Cure.fit began in 2016 as a fitness app like many others, offering gym memberships and exercise classes to young adults in Bangalore. But it has since transformed into one of India's top health platforms, with meal and grocery deliveries, online workouts, mindfulness classes, appointments at its health centers and even an online store for fitness gear. The spread of coronavirus spurred the business to further reinvent itself, from one primarily reliant on physical gyms to an international online fitness platform. This summer Cure.fit announced its digital expansion into the US, where it has begun offering online fitness and therapy sessions. "Lockdown has expedited these efforts," Shamik Sharma, Cure.fit's head of international business, tells CNN Business. "When we saw the demand for our app in the United States, we launched rapidly," he adds.

Quick reaction to Covid-19

Like businesses all over the world, Cure.fit was forced to re-

strategize in response to the pandemic. It shut the doors to all of its 250 plus fitness and health centers in March, when India locked down parts of the country. So far, it has reopened 30 centers, in compliance with government regulations, with more scheduled to open in the coming months. But some centers are

expected to close permanently, says the company.

It has had to cut jobs and furlough workers - Cure.fit declined to comment on the number of staff affected, but Reuters and TechCrunch have reported that at least 800 employees have been laid off in the past few months. In the same May report, Reuters pegged Cure.fit's staff count at 5,000 across India, citing an anonymous source.

The company, which has raised more than \$400 million in funding, was at risk of coming to a complete standstill - before March, at least 60% of Cure.fit's revenues were generated by its physical fitness studios, according to the company.

Instead, lockdown has accelerated the company's pivot to online.

"When our gyms closed, we immediately knew that our customers would miss in-person classes so we created live classes through our app," says Sharma.

The Cure.fit app hosts more than 200,000 sessions daily in India, with instructor-led online classes ranging from strength to pilates, cardio and yoga. During the pandemic, this platform has thrived. Since the start of India's lockdown, the company says it has signed up 1.5 million users in the country and amassed 100,000 paid subscribers since launching a paywall in May.

In the US, the company has reported 75,000 downloads since testing for the app began in May. Cure.fit currently offers its live sessions there for free, but plans to introduce a subscription model by the end of the year.

India's healthcare apps

While the virus has prompted more interest in healthcare apps, India already had a well-developed market. Pre-pandemic, the market for such apps was projected to grow in value from 27 billion rupees (\$360 million) in 2018 to 138 billion rupees (\$1.8 billion) by 2024, according to a report from Netscribes, an India-based technology and market research firm.

Mukesh Ambani tops Forbes India richest list for 13th year with net worth of \$88 billion

Reliance Industries Chairman Mukesh Ambani has once again topped the Forbes India richest list of 2020. Among the 100 richest individuals and families in the country, Mukesh Ambani is ranked number one with a net worth of \$88 billion. Mukesh Ambani is followed by Adani Group's Gautam Adani with a net worth of \$25 billion. Mukesh Ambani has been reigning on the top of Forbes India richest list for the past decade and this is his 13th year on Rank 1. According to the Forbes India report, Mukesh Ambani has added a net worth of \$37.5 billion to his net worth. The Forbes article

has said despite a "tumultuous year for the global economy, India's richest preserved their wealth." "Mukesh Ambani remains the wealthiest Indian for the 13th year in a row, adding \$37.3 billion to

his net worth; vaccine maker Cyrus Poonawalla entered the top 10 at rank 6 as all eyes remain on the antidote, while Biocon's Kiran Mazumdar Shaw became the highest wealth gainer in



percentage terms and all the pharmaceutical billionaires on the list saw their wealth rise. Fewer billionaires saw their wealth erode this year than they did in 2019," read the Forbes India report.

Reliance Industries Ltd has raised Rs 1.65 trillion (\$22.43 billion) over the past few months through stake sales at its digital unit Jio Platforms and its retail arm Reliance Retail Ventures.

In September, Reliance announced a \$755.1 million investment from KKR & Co Inc in its retail arm, giving it a pre-money valuation of Rs 4.21 trillion (\$57.28 billion).

Majority of generic drug ingredients produced in Asia - study

Two thirds of the active ingredients needed to make generic drugs are manufactured in Asia.

Two thirds of the active ingredients needed to make generic drugs are manufactured in Asia, a study showed on Wednesday, the latest evidence to underscore Europe's reliance on foreign imports for its medicines. Europe was rattled at the start of the coronavirus outbreak when India, one of the biggest producers of drug ingredients, banned exports of certain products relevant to the pandemic, prompting concerns about a shortage of medicines. Although those fears were largely unfounded, European Union health ministers have vowed to boost local drugs production to

safeguard against future supply disruptions.

Price pressure and lower regulatory requirements have led to a shift in drugs manufacturing from Europe to Asia over the past two decades, the study by German generics lobby Pro Generika found.

The study analysed the global production of 565 active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) and found 63% of the quality certificates, which grant them suitable for use in medicinal products, were held in Asia, up from around 31% in 2000. More than 80% of Asia's certificates are held by

manufacturers in India and China where the majority of producers are concentrated in just a few states and provinces, the study found. For more than half of the APIs, there are only a handful of manufacturers worldwide.

German Health Minister Jens Spahn said the pandemic had made "painfully" clear the risk of having a strong dependence on one region or country, citing shortages of medical protective masks. He said Europe must first define which drug ingredients are system relevant as well as which incentives would best help boost local production. He hoped the European Commission would have



proposals ready by November at the latest so decisions could be taken in the first half of 2021.

Dual Sourcing

Europe holds 31% of API certificates, down from 59% in 2000 with producers mainly in Italy, Germany, Spain and France focussing on ingredients with low sales

volumes that are complex to manufacture.

France has pledged 200 million euros (\$236 million) to bolster domestic production of medicines, while Austria is also investing funds in an antibiotics plant owned by Swiss drugmaker Novartis's Sandoz division in Tyrol.

These 3 facial yoga exercises will give you plump and glowing skin in no time

Facial yoga can be extremely beneficial for those who want glowing, youthful skin. Here are 3 exercises you can begin with.



designed specifically for the skin and facial muscles. Facial yoga works in two key ways to ensure that you always have healthy skin: 1) Our face is made of muscles that sag with age. Facial yoga strengthens these facial muscles, thus ensuring our skin stays firm.

2) It enhances blood circulation which results in glowing skin that looks fresh and plump.

What's more? Facial yoga doesn't take up a lot of time or energy. You can practice it anywhere and anytime. All you need is 15 minutes out of your daily schedule to start seeing the benefits.

Here are three facial yoga exercises you need to try out right away:

1. The big 'O'

Sit straight and widen your eyes along with stretching your lips out into the shape of 'O'. Hold this for as long as you can. You can start off with 10 seconds and slowly increase that time to 30 seconds. This exercise is perfect to increase blood circulation to provide your skin with a healthy glow while keeping the appearance of fine lines at bay.

2. Pout and smile

This one is fairly simple! Start by pouting and then smiling wide afterwards. Do the pout-and-smile exercise as fast as you can. You can keep at it for as long as you wish. However, try to go for 10 repetitions

minimum, if you want to start seeing the benefits. Not only will this enhance blood circulation, but will also strengthen your jaw muscles for that perfect jawline.

3. Puffer fish face

Fill your mouth up with as much air as possible. Puff up your cheeks to accommodate more air. You can also place two fingers on your lips to keep the air from escaping. Now, shift the air from one side to the other with as much speed as possible. Practise this for a couple of minutes every day to achieve glowing skin and fuller cheeks.

So, include these facial yoga exercises into your daily workout routine and see the results within weeks!

Children use make-believe aggression, violence to manage bad-tempered peers. Here's why

Children are more likely to introduce violent themes into their pretend play, such as imaginary fighting or killing if they are with playmates whom peers consider bad-tempered, new research suggests. Academics believe that the tendency for children to introduce aggressive themes in these situations - which seems to happen whether or not they are personally easy to anger - maybe because they are 'rehearsing' strategies to cope with hot-headed friends. The research is published in the British Journal of Developmental Psychology. The finding comes from an observational study of more than 100 children at a

school in China, who were asked to play with toys in pairs. Children whose play partners were considered bad-tempered by their peers were 45 per cent more likely to introduce aggressive themes into their pretend play than those whose partners were reckoned to be better at controlling their temper.

Importantly, however, a child's own temperament did not predict the level of make-believe aggression. Instead, children often appeared to introduce these themes specifically in response to having an irritable playmate. This may mean that in certain cases aggressive make-believe play actually helps children's

social and emotional development. The paper's authors stress, however, that further research will be needed before they can provide definitive guidance for parents or practitioners.

Dr Zhen Rao, from the Centre for Research on Play in Education, Development and Learning (PEDAL), at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, said: "If children have a friend who is easily angered, and particularly if they haven't coped well with that behaviour, it's possible that they will look for ways to explore it through pretend play. This gives them a safe context in which to try out different ways of handling difficult situations next

time they crop up in real life." Aggressive pretend play has been the subject of considerable wider research, much of which aims to understand whether it predicts similarly aggressive real-life behaviours. Most of these studies, however, tend to focus on whether these associations are linked to the child's own temperament, rather than that of the children they are playing with. The Cambridge study aimed to understand how far aggressive pretend play is associated with a play partner's anger expression. It also distinguished between aggressive pretend to play and its 'non-aggressive, negative'

variant: for example, pretend play that involves imagining someone who is sick or unhappy. The research was carried out with 104 children, aged seven to 10, at a school in Guangzhou in China, as part of a wider project that the team were undertaking in that region. Participants were asked to organise themselves into pairs -- many of them, therefore, picking friends -- and were then filmed playing for 20 minutes. The toys they were given were deliberately neutral in character (for example, there were no toy weapons), and the children could play however they wanted.

Space is becoming too crowded, Rocket Lab CEO warns



In 1978, NASA scientist Donald Kessler warned of a potential catastrophic, cascading chain reaction in outer space. Today known as "Kessler Syndrome," the theory posited that space above Earth could one day become so crowded, so polluted with both active satellites and the detritus of space explorations past, that it could render future space endeavors more difficult, if not impossible. Last week, the CEO of Rocket Lab, a launch startup, said the company is already beginning to experience the effect of growing congestion in outer space.

Rocket Lab CEO Peter Beck said that the sheer number of objects in space right now — a number that is growing quickly thanks in part to SpaceX's satellite internet constellation, Starlink — is making it more

difficult to find a clear path for rockets to launch new satellites. "This has a massive impact on the launch side," he told CNN Business. Rockets "have to try and weave their way up in between these [satellite] constellations."

Part of the problem is that outer space remains largely unregulated. The last widely agreed upon international treaty hasn't been updated in five decades, and that's mostly left the commercial space industry to police itself.

Rocket Lab set out to create lightweight rockets — far smaller than SpaceX's 230-foot-tall Falcon rockets — that can deliver batches of small satellites to space on a monthly or even weekly basis. Since 2018, Rocket Lab has launched 12 successful missions and a total

of 55 satellites to space for a variety of research and commercial purposes. Beck said the in-orbit traffic issues took a turn for the worst over the past 12 months. It was over that time that SpaceX has rapidly built up its Starlink constellation, growing it to include more than 700 internet-beaming satellites. It's already the largest satellite constellation by far, and the company plans to grow it to include between 12,000 and 40,000 total satellites. That's five times the total number of satellites humans have launched since the dawn of spaceflight in the late 1950s. It's not clear if traffic from its own satellites has also caused frustrations for SpaceX. The company did not respond to a request for comment.

Orbital junkyards

Researchers have warned for decades that congestion in outer space could have devastating consequences. Kessler's warning said that if space traffic becomes too dense, a single collision between two objects could set off a disastrous chain reaction that effectively turns the space around Earth into an extraterrestrial wasteland. One piece of debris would hit a satellite, and that impact —

much like a car crash, except at orbital speeds upwards of 17,000 miles an hour — could generate hundreds, if not thousands, of new pieces of debris in its own right. Those new pieces could hit other objects in orbit, which would hit other objects, and on and on, until low Earth orbit would be saturated with an increasing amount of uncontrollable projectiles. And any one of them could knock out a satellite, a launching rocket, or even an orbiting space station with humans inside. Kessler Syndrome was central to the plot of 2013's "Gravity," in which satellite shrapnel caused a cascade of disastrous satellite collisions. The question is whether it will remain fiction. Some experts warn areas of low-Earth orbit have already reached a critical mass of congestion. SpaceX has said that it is determined to be a responsible steward of outer space. The company says it has equipped its Starlink satellites with the ability to automatically maneuver out of the way of other objects in orbit. SpaceX's constellation also orbits at lower altitudes than the most crowded areas, which NASA and international partners estimate is about 400 to 650 miles high. That's an

ideal area for observation satellites that monitor the environment and is also home to swarms of debris.

But Moriba Jah, an astrodynamicist at the University of Texas at Austin and a leading expert in space traffic, said most of Earth's orbit below about 750 miles is becoming a danger zone.

Jah created a database to help track potential collisions in space, and an online chart uses dots to show how many objects are expected to pass within six miles of each other every 20 minutes. Over the past year, the dots have grown too dense to count. Jah hopes that more satellite operators and rocket companies, including SpaceX and Rocket Lab, will share real-time location data of their rockets and satellites to make the predictions more precise. Neither company has done so. Though there haven't been any collisions this year, Jah warns, it could be only a matter of time. Even if SpaceX can manage to keep its area in space clean, there's a line of other companies waiting to build their own giant constellations. Amazon and UK-based OneWeb plan to build their own telecom ventures also using hundreds of their own satellites.

How smart tech could help save the world's honey bees

Global honey bee populations are in decline, putting the world's food supply under pressure. But new technologies could help beekeepers counter the threat. You might think of beekeepers as mere honey producers, but they are part of a growing trade where they lease their hives to farmers who need bees to pollinate their crops.

The commercial bee industry provides pollination services worth tens of billions of dollars, and is key to the production of a huge range of crops, including almonds, broccoli and apples. California, for example, produces 80% of the world's almonds, and for that to happen, pollen needs to be transferred between trees. Each year, more than 2 million bee hives are required to do the job.

Climate change, intensive agriculture, and the use of pesticides and fungicides in farming is ravaging the world's bees. Commercial beekeepers in

the United States lost 44% of their managed colonies in 2019, according to research from the University of Maryland.

Now, technology startups are developing smart devices that give beekeepers access to detailed information about the state of their hives, aiming to reduce losses and improve bee health.

Among them is Ireland's ApisProtect, which has just launched a sensor that alerts beekeepers if there is a problem in their hives. The small internet-connected sensor is placed under the roof of the beehive and measures a number of metrics including temperature, humidity, sound and movement. Data from the sensor is sent via the cloud to ApisProtect's HQ in Cork, Ireland, where the data is processed, analyzed and then sent back to the beekeeper.

"Using our device, beekeepers are going to be able to keep many, many more hives for the same amount of workers, and the

same amount of spend on things like feed and treatments," says the company's founder and CEO, Fiona Edwards Murphy. "They're going to be able to dramatically increase the amount of pollination and honey output that they've got in their operation." Since receiving \$1.8 million in funding from international investors in 2018, the company has been working with 20 beekeepers across the United States, Ireland, the United Kingdom and South Africa to monitor the activity of up to 20 million honey bees.

The information collected from the 400 smart sensor units is creating a database of global bee health, powering the algorithms that analyze its data.

Bee tech

With bees in demand for a booming pollination industry, there are a number of other startups promoting new technologies, including Pollenity in Bulgaria, Arnia in the United Kingdom and BeeHero in Israel.



Pollenity was founded in 2015 by Sergey Petrov and has raised \$1.2 million in funding. Its Beebot smart sensor device is aimed at small and hobbyist beekeepers, and it is also working with six universities from across Europe on an EU-funded research project called HIVEOPOLIS. The project aims to improve the welfare of bees by reinventing hives using a number of technologies, including a robot bee capable of "dancing" to direct the hive's swarm. "The robot bee will tell the other bees where to go to find nectar and pollen,"

Petrov says. "Not only will this direct them to certain fields for pollination but also navigate the bees away from dangerous areas, like where pesticides are being used." Petrov says there are also plans to build technology to detect whether a bee has been poisoned by coming into contact with pesticides. For him, securing the future of the honey bee is one of the world's greatest challenges. "If we don't harvest the technology to work in our favor, we might as well just give up," he says, "and I'm not giving up."

Rani Mukerji shone in gold at Umang 2020, Diet Sabya wants her to fire her stylist. Here's what we think



It was 1998 when everyone including Rahul (SRK) fell in love with the ease with which Tina (Rani Mukerji) sashayed into college and gave fashion heebie-jeebies the coolest gangs. Cut to 2020, we're still wondering if certain questionable '90s fashion has got stuck in a loop. Do you think Dormammu would consider bargaining on this one? As a girl growing up in the nineties in a country like ours, Bollywood fashion was most of what we wanted to follow and learn from,

at least most of it. Rani Mukerji, most recently seen in Mardaani 2 as a tough cop, has experimented with a variety of styles over the years. She is someone who definitely likes to keep things simple but at the same time, eases herself into high-fashion labels namely Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Dior and others. For her traditional wear, it's mostly been her friend and celebrated fashion designer Sabyasachi Mukherjee, who styled her a decade and more ago too for films such as Baabul.

The saree fashion donned by the actor in the film still remains a fond memory, especially the midnight blue saree she wore with a parrot green brocade blouse for a song sequence. In 2020, when the style game is defined by who you're wearing, how far your popularity is reaching in the virtual world, who you've been styled by, and turning your 'passion' of playing dress-up into a full-time profession, Rani Mukerji chooses to be different. She is famous for being totally hands-on with her fashion

choices and even the makeup she wears. Even though her hair is nearly the same in all her looks, we don't mind that, because great hair, no judgment. While the change has happened over a period of time, it's only the last decade (2010-2019) when this pattern has changed, giving rise to influence in more ways than the good ol' Bollywood films, or the new-age TV shows.

Last night, popular Instagram fashion police DietSabya, called out Rani Mukerji's stylist through three stories they put up. It was about the look Rani Mukerji sported on the red carpet for Umang 2020, held in Mumbai on Sunday night. We tried reaching out to the DietSabya team for a comment on this development too but we're yet to hear back from them. Speaking about Rani's look, the head-to-toe glitter (gold) was a tad disturbing to our senses. It's not because pantsuits are a wrong choice, but Rani Mukerji could work with a simpler silhouette and definitely a different texture. Imagine a dull-toned glitter ensemble blended in a gossamer texture that would add charm to the actor's overall look, just the way we've liked it

in the last few years. This pantsuit is from UK-brand P.A.R.O.S.H, a favourite with Meghan Markle as well. This look has also been seen in a baby pink aside from the gold we saw on Rani Mukerji.

What was on point: Rani Mukerji's natural choice for a foundation with smokey eyes and a rust-red lipstick.

What went wrong: There is a thing called 'extraaa' but one needs to measure it regardless. The pantsuit seemed like the perfect thing to wear when you wanted to go unburdened with jewellery. To match the look were pointed heels in, no guesses, gold. How to fix it, probably: We miss seeing the bong beauty in sarees and traditional patterns, and choosing to go minimal. Simpler textures and silhouettes could also be given a try. In an interview with Rajeev Masand in early 2018, the actor was quoted saying, "Change is inevitable in everybody's life, change is the only constant that you're dealing with. You can't just get stuck in time..." As avid fans of the actor's craft, it's also her fashion we would like to see change.

Janhvi Kapoor trolled for wearing a dress that is allegedly copied from Balmain

Janhvi Kapoor's new magazine cover shoot for Cosmopolitan India's January 2019 issue includes an uncharacteristic pop of colour and extra sparkle in the form of an electric blue dress by Mumbai-based designer label, Purple Paisley. While Janhvi's bold look — complete with an unusual wig with messy bangs — certainly marks a departure from the Dhadak actor's trademark sweet and unapologetically feminine style, the colour and design of her sparkly dress is curiously close to that of Balmain's. Diet Sabya, the anonymous Instagram account that airs the fashion industry's dirty laundry, has accused Purple Paisley of ripping off a dress from Balmain's fall 2018 collection. Take a look at the shimmering Balmain dress in question and Janhvi Kapoor's sequined dress by Purple Paisley below, and decide for yourself: As beautiful as the blue is, you

can't deny the similarities in the two dresses. Might it be an unfortunate coincidence? Social media was not having it. After Diet Sabya, a self-appointed fashion watchdog known for policing plagiarists, called out Janhvi Kapoor's dress, many on Instagram targeted the actor's overall look. Some even questioned the team of stylists behind Janhvi's look. One Instagram user commented on Diet Sabya's post, writing, "This shows how poorly study and research has been done by the stylist. Better wear something which is not high fashion or luxury than wearing it's copy. This type of behaviour has always put Indian magazines at the bottom of the list in world ranking." Another user wrote about Janhvi Kapoor's look, "All i see is fake everything... hair to dress... oh forgot to mention the fake fruit in her hand." One more user commented, "What's with the apple pose... Is that a fake too?"

Janhvi Kapoor's look from a magazine cover shoot has been called out by Diet Sabya. The fashion whistle-blowing sensation posted side-by-side pics of Janhvi's dress by a Mumbai-based label and the original Balmain design. Get the full details here.



Over 30 models accuse TFM talent agency of non-payment of dues racking up to almost Rs 1 crore. Here's the whole story

From unpaid dues from 2018, to threats of 'gundas', models who have worked with Ashish Soni-owned TFM/360 India have several sorry tales. Here is everything from the allegations made by the models, to the response given by TFM and designer-owner Ashish N Soni.



The Indian film and modelling industry has quite a reputation, both good and bad, with people sharing experiences of lifelong friendships and burnt bridges that made, or ended their careers. However, over the past few months, over thirty models who worked with Mumbai-based talent agency TFM/360 India, owned by designer Ashish N Soni, have alleged that the company owes them lakhs of rupees (more than Rs 70 lakhs) in unpaid dues for shows, events and shoots that in some cases took place years ago and that the company has no intention to pay.

The incident was first brought to light when several models took to their social media handles and shared their experiences working with TFM, sharing how they hadn't been paid for months on end, some have even claimed they were threatened with 'gundas' by upper management when they said they'd make the issue public. The incident was picked up by self-appointed Instagram-based fashion industry watchdog, Diet Sabya, which shared a post which revealed another side of the glamorous modelling industry. The post elaborated how TFM had deprived its talent of their rightful payment since 2018, often discrediting the model by claiming breach of

contract, misbehaviour as a cause of non-payment. The post read, "Over the last couple of months, we've gone back-and-forth between 20+ creatives (models, make-up artists etc) and their talent agency, TFM. Mumbai-based agency, TFM allegedly owes them lakhs of rupees in unpaid dues. Multiple rounds of clarifications later the fact remains unchanged: Money is still owed! The bitter industry truth is that modelling/talent agencies are notorious for withholding money and TFM has been pulling this stunt since 2018 (shocking!). The models have finally had it and are no longer willing to wait for their own money. TFM agents did give us multiple reasons/ explanations for the delay citing Covid economy, breach of contract, models misbehaving etc etc. Most of these explanations seem to be just excuses to buy time. Moral of the story? It's a messy, and incredibly heartbreaking situation for these creatives, who are dependent on agencies for their livelihood. Discuss!!" Since then, several models came forward with similar stories, and Diet Sabya has also shared videos of models that have worked with TFM and are still awaiting payment. While Diet Sabya has always been a page that calls out copycats and

'gandi' copies, over the past few months the page has racked up a new reputation for calling out companies, brands and employers for the mistreatment of employees, as well other social issues like colourism. Several models, in their testimonies, shared that given that they had their own bills and weren't getting paid, they had to



end their contract with the agency, which states that they cannot work with another agency during the three months after their contract with TFM is terminated, however, the contract allows them to work independently.

Diet Sabya, models get blocked by Ashish Soni, TFM on Instagram

In an interview with MidDay, model Arlette Grao, who was at TFM from 2016 to 2018, claimed that the company owes over Rs 70 lakh to the models, and that she didn't receive any payment for all the assignments she did during her time there, which

racks up to Rs 8 lakhs. "I have bank statements to support this." She went on to add that she ended up quitting the agency and after the contractual cooling-off period (three months) was complete, she began to freelance, "Once I started freelancing, I realised there are multiple models whose payments are stuck with the company." Arlette mentioned that make-up artist Donald Simrock who worked for Lakme Fashion Week two years ago is waiting on a payment, which according to Diet Sabya's post comes up to Rs 9 lakhs. The model also added that in her case TFM cited breach of contract as the reason for non-payment of dues, "When I haven't breached any clause. They are putting similar false allegations on my other colleagues."

Another model, Shivani Bafna, who also worked with TFM, took to her YouTube channel and shared her experience working with TFM. She spoke of her time at the agency in 2018, and having to wait on payments for months in 2018, she added that she clarified with her manager as well as one of the 'owners' Rishy Bartariya, that she needed to be paid. After months of polite following up and not getting anything except excuses,

Shivani got exasperated and decided to share her experience with other models via a group text on WhatsApp. This however, did not sit well with Rishu, who allegedly threatened Shivani saying that if she puts anything on social media, or speaks up she would send 'gundas' after her. They even discredited everything Shivani said by saying she had breached her contract which is why she wasn't paid. However, after filing a lawsuit, and a lot more persistence, Shivani got her payment of Rs 5 lakhs. Ashish Soni and TFM's side of the story - There are

several such instances, and many models have already filed police complaints and sent legal notices to the agency, or are planning to. A written statement mailed to LiveWire by TFM stated, "Ashish Soni, on behalf of TFM/360 India, reassures everyone that TFM/360 India shall clear its dues as soon as possible as has also been done in the past."

MidDay reached out to Soni, who said that the firm has been running in losses since it was set up five years ago, on account of which the foreign partner, who was the parent company, decided to pull out leaving Soni, a 40% investor in TFM, struggling to keep the company afloat. He added, "They wanted to shut it down. I took on their debt and ensured that the models' income stays afloat. It was a liability and I have been running it for two years. Company records that are public will tell you that I haven't drawn a single salary from the company. I hope to find an investor with deeper pockets for this agency. Till March, we had a regular cash flow but the business has been affected due to COVID. People are not in a position to pay up. To malign someone (for that), is out of line. I am willing to open this up for audit and if to prove my integrity, if I have to take a loan, I will do so."

According to the written statement by TFM to Livewire, TFM/360 India has paid Rs 2.65 crore to several models in payments. The statement added that when the foreign partner pulled out TFM tried to recover as much as it could, but "due to the fact that TFM/360 India was owed a great deal of money and such money was not recovered within a considerable amount of time, the financial and economic health of the company worsened." The statement also added that TFM's management was never in Ashish Soni's purview and that there were other people running the show, and in some instances clients also failed to pay the company on time. The statement also went on to say that now Soni is "taking steps to mitigate the damage caused by earlier mismanagement".



The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor's Return to the Shadows

"CPEC has been a chastening experience for China in the context of the BRI."

By Andrew Small

In the five years since the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) was launched, it's been beset by the winds of local politics and the waves of geopolitics alike. In a new report, titled "Returning to the Shadows: China, Pakistan, and the Fate of CPEC," Andrew Small catalogues the grand promises and countless pitfalls of CPEC. In an interview with The Diplomat, Small, a senior transatlantic fellow with the German Marshall Fund's Asia Program, explains the significance of CPEC to the China-Pakistan relationship, the contours of its highs and lows, and what the fate of the grand scheme means for China's broader Belt and Road Initiative. What's the significance of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to the China and Pakistan bilateral relationship? CPEC was supposed to act as a vehicle to upgrade the China-Pakistan partnership. Some Chinese analysts used to describe the relationship as a "stool with two legs": While security and political ties have been strong for decades, economic ties had always been extremely weak. Even this characterization somewhat overstates the breadth of the relationship - it was almost entirely confined to military and intelligence matters, and managed by a very small cast of individuals on the two sides. China was never a factor in day-

to-day economic or political life in Pakistan, and its strong approval ratings in opinion polls reflected its unimpeachable reputation as the "all-weather friend" rather than any deeper affinity among the Pakistani public.

That narrowness of relations also made it difficult for China to embrace Pakistan too openly - despite being arguably Beijing's closest partner, virtually anything the two sides did together was always viewed through a security

This was a risk that Beijing was willing to take. China wanted its relationship with Pakistan to be a "model to follow": Close, trusted military ties that nonetheless fell short of the commitments of a formal alliance, underpinned by a comprehensive Chinese immersion in the country's economic life. If CPEC succeeded, other countries would look to replicate it.

For Pakistan, the logic was even more compelling. CPEC was an opportunity to draw China into a



prism, and China had to tread carefully to avoid eliciting alarmed reactions in New Delhi or further afield. CPEC was a way of changing that narrative. China could make a big public push to enhance the relationship while selling it as an economic and development matter. There was also a gamble involved: CPEC was dubbed the "flagship" of the BRI, which tied its fate closely to the reputation of the entire initiative, and even to Xi Jinping himself.

deeper level of political, security, commercial, and financial commitment to the country, in a highly visible way, at a juncture where U.S. support was being tapered back on all fronts, and international investors were very wary of the security situation. For both sides, the optics are therefore almost as important as the substance. China and Pakistan have a strong incentive to put a good face on CPEC whatever is actually happening in

practice. The Khan administration's interest in modifying CPEC made headlines back in 2018. Since then, as you note in the report, CPEC first slowed then gradually sped up again. But in the interim, did the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government have any success in pushing for its desired changes? CPEC was already slowing down even before the PTI took power - by late 2017 Pakistan's economic situation was weakening and political uncertainties were growing as Nawaz Sharif and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)'s struggles with the army intensified. Imran Khan was known to be skeptical about CPEC - seeing it as too closely tied to the PML-N's agenda, a poor fit for his own priorities, and almost certainly corrupt too. Prominent figures in the PTI, such as the commerce minister and leading industrialist, Abdul Razak Dawood, were also public critics of CPEC, representing sections of the Pakistani business community that saw the benefits as too tilted to Chinese firms, and had themselves missed out on the explosion of CPEC contracts. Beijing was ready to be accommodating to the new government's priorities. Its position had always been that the PTI just didn't understand that they could be beneficiaries too if they spelled out clearly

enough what they wanted. In practice though, the model that Imran Khan was proposing was precisely the kind of economic relationship that China had always sought to avoid with Pakistan: In his first trip to Beijing after taking office, he asked for a bailout to address the country's weak financial position, and support for socio-economic projects, in other words, aid.

Initially, China tried to figure out some way to rebalance CPEC around the PTI's priorities. As one Chinese official put it to me in the early months after the elections: "We can do peanut projects instead of mega projects, if that's what they want." They looked at making Pakistan a test country for China's new aid agency, as well as some agriculture and green energy projects, and they talked about renegotiating the terms of existing investments. But Beijing quickly grew fed up with the new government - particularly after the open criticism that CPEC received early in its tenure - and decided that they needed to go straight to the army instead, which they increasingly believed was running the show anyway. The result of that has been a slowed down and slimmed down CPEC but not necessarily a CPEC that bears the imprimatur of the PTI the way that its conception reflected the PML-N's infrastructure and energy-centered agenda.

The SSR Mega Serial



One of the most hilarious memes last week showed actor Ajit (that famous villain of the past) saying: "Mona Darling chalo News dekhtey hain. Arnab Rhea ko jeeney nahi dega aur Rajdeep Rhea ko marney nahi dega." Ajit's words summed up the gnawing hilarity we are witnessing now-mega serials with unfolding family dramas have now shifted from entertainment to news channels thanks to Sushant Singh Rajput's suicide and

Rhea Chakraborty's alleged hand in it. It's a whole new(s) story, but with all the predictable ingredients the addicts of mega serials are used to-a suicide morphing into a suspected murder, a lover bailing out just before the incident, distraught parent and sisters, fight over money, a drug angle, mental illness, conspiring villains and even an unproven connection to a powerful politician. Entertainment channels that used to pause the day's episode with a suspenseful

twist were unable to keep pace with the evolving conspiracy theories and inside stories of the police interrogation that news channels have been churning out. Even the wildest script writer will struggle to come up with such a racy storyline. And if you thought your Whatsapp chats were secure because they are encrypted, sorry to disappoint. All the channels had "exclusive" screenshots of juicy chats between Rhea and Mahesh Bhatt, and the pros and

Mega serials with unfolding family dramas have now shifted from entertainment to news channels thanks to Sushant Singh Rajput's suicide and Rhea Chakraborty's alleged hand in it

cons of party drugs, and where one can find the best weed. It appeared no secrets were sacred-everyone had an inkling. Friends, cooks and house help of the deceased star became important characters and soon became household names-just as the key players of a mega serial. The ultimate barometer of TV channels-TRP ratings-further justified the hype and drama surrounding a routine probe into the death of a film star. News channels peddling the SSR mega serial notched the highest numbers even as other important issues like COVID-19, the border standoff with the Chinese and even IPL got pushed to the backburner. Only briefly did the death of

former President Pranab Mukherjee take precedence over the obsession with SSR. While most channels continued to paint Rhea Chakraborty and her gang as the villain, one English news channel finally decided to get her side of the story. Soon others joined the 'interview Rhea' bandwagon. Left behind in the race were the bunch of entertainment channels-most of them were replaying old episodes as shooting of new episodes had come to a standstill. No wonder the SSR mega serial, with one new angle by the hour and a new villain every day, was putting the original family dramas to shame.

In surge, Pakistan sees 12 new deaths from coronavirus

Figure is 2nd highest single-day tally in several months, after lockdowns lifted



Twelve people died from coronavirus in Pakistan over the past 24 hours, the second-highest single-day tally in the last several months, the Health

Ministry said on Wednesday. The fresh casualties raised the total number of deaths from the novel virus to 6,535 since March. Another 625 people were tested

positive for coronavirus during the last 24 hours, bringing the total number of cases to 326,352, the ministry said. Some 301,288 patients have so

far recovered.

COVID-19 cases have dropped considerably in Pakistan in recent months, prompting the government to completely lift a longstanding lockdown.

The number of cases dropped from nearly 7,000 per day to about 400, with daily fatalities hovering in the single digits.

However, additional cases doubled over the past two weeks after schools reopened last month, forcing the government to reimpose the lockdown in several parts of the commercial capital Karachi, and Lahore, the country's second-largest city.

Pakistani-administered Kashmir also reimposed lockdown measures on Sunday to help curb surging infections, as well as violations of health

guidelines.

A study by Pakistan's leading blood disease institute suggested last month that there was a slim chance of a second wave in the country of the virus, further backing the government's policy of reopening businesses. The cross-sectional study done at the National Institute of Blood Diseases (NIBD) in Karachi was published by Oxford University Press' Journal of Public Health. The study by a team of microbiologists, hematologists and pathologists led by Dr. Samreen Zaidi included nearly 1,700 people from healthcare, community, and industrial workers. According to Zaidi, Pakistan has "almost" achieved herd immunity, indicating that there are low chances of a second wave of the pandemic.

The internal drivers of China's Ladakh offensive

Xi is using the Ladakh standoff in his internal political campaign of silencing critics who are cautioning him against hostility towards India and other neighbours, while the principal challenge is to confront the US.

The India-China standoff in Ladakh persists even after multiple rounds of commander-level talks and two ministerial meetings between the defence and foreign ministers of the two countries. This amounts to India living with the Chinese encroachments since May. That there was no reference to reverting to the status quo ante in the joint statement after the foreign ministers met in Moscow suits China well.

China's military obduracy in the Himalayas reflects its assertion as an emerging Asian hegemon and expansionist power. Many of its neighbours have experienced the effects of this. However, the Ladakh situation is not just about China asserting its dominance. The Aksai Chin region has a strong strategic value for China. In the late 1950s, when it first transgressed into Aksai Chin, the then Chinese premier, Zhou Enlai made a proposal to accept India's hold over Arunachal Pradesh (then called North East Frontier Agency) in return for Chinese

control over Aksai Chin. This region of Ladakh was critical to China to shield its turbulent periphery of Tibet and Xinjiang. China also, subsequently, deepened its links with Pakistan, which handed over parts of Indian territory under its occupation to China. This partnership has only grown, with Beijing now having invested billions of dollars to consolidate its strategic outreach. China's officially blessed commentators often highlight the significance of Aksai Chin, and the centrality of Pakistan in the region.

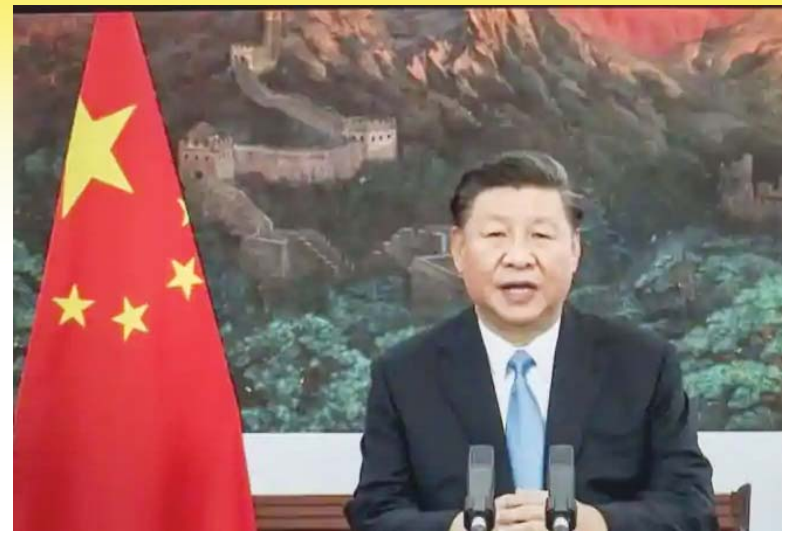
It was in this backdrop that India's stated intent to recapture Aksai Chin rattled the Chinese. Union home minister Amit Shah's statement in Parliament, in September 2019, after changing the status of Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir to Union Territories, may be recalled: "Kashmir is an integral part of India. When I talk about Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and Aksai Chin are included in it... We will give our lives for this

region". China strongly questioned this statement and has refused to endorse the new status of Jammu and Kashmir. The fate of mutually-agreed non-escalation between India and China will depend on the Chinese side. China will try to sustain the standoff by all means possible.

Diplomatically, Beijing is keenly awaiting the outcome of the United States (US) presidential elections and hopes that a Joe Biden victory will open a window of opportunity to soften US hostility.

China is also preparing to further pacify the Japanese approach towards it under Prime Minister (PM) Yoshihide Suga. Japan has heavy economic stakes in keeping the peace with China and Suga, unlike his predecessor Shinzo Abe, may also like to steer clear of the deepening US-China rivalry.

This may sound speculative at the moment, but geopolitics often shifts radically. China's success with the US and Japan



will be bad news for India. An internationally-emboldened China could be far more aggressive towards India. In China's perception, India is asserting itself against Chinese moves in the Himalayas only because it is backed by the US and its allies. India has to carefully monitor and adequately respond to such developments. PM Narendra Modi's conversation with PM Suga, in this context, is a welcome initiative.

The theories that the Ladakh moves are primarily led by the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which is not comfortable with President Xi Jinping and the

Chinese political establishment, are untenable. Xi is the chief of China's military command and the massive movement of troops in Ladakh by PLA could not have taken place without his endorsement. Xi, at the Seventh Central Symposium on Tibet (August 18-29), also made a strong policy move on Tibet, asking for developing a "new socialist Tibet", where its Buddhism must conform to the "Chinese context". This, in Xi's approach, would be done by taking the Tibetans away from the Dalai Lama, changing their Lamaistic religious and social practices, and integrating them closely and ethnically with mainstream China. This approach aims to control Tibet in three principal ways. One, to cut off its external linkages and deflect international pressure on Tibet; two, change its demographic composition, and; three, institutionalise mass surveillance. This will be on the lines of similar repressive moves in Xinjiang. The massive military movements and deployments of Chinese forces in Ladakh and the projection of a so-called Indian military threat will help in this repression. The standoff is thus in China's internal political interests of stability in Tibet. One wonders if China is doing this out of enhanced confidence that it can control Tibet or a lurking sense of vulnerability in the context of a post-Dalai Lama Tibet. Xi is also using the Ladakh standoff in his internal political campaign of silencing critics who are cautioning him against hostility towards India and other neighbours, while the principal challenge is to confront the US. The official media has also projected the Ladakh conflict as an answer to India for the so-called setback in Doklam.

Being a Dalit woman in modern India

To say don't make the Hathras incident about caste is ignorance and privilege. But the systemic oppression of Dalit women isn't new

Two nine-year-olds were fighting over something inconsequential in district Patna, Bihar. As the fight showed no sign of flagging, the elders of one of the boys, dominant caste as it turned out, decided to get involved. The Dalit boy, after all, had to be shown his place.

The men from the dominant caste caught hold of the Dalit boy's mother. They stripped her and paraded her through the village. The woman's mother and daughter tried to intervene and were thrashed. Finally, the village sarpanch stepped in and a bystander offered the woman a shawl. An FIR was filed, but the accused got bail. This story was narrated by the woman's husband at a conference organised in New Delhi by the All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch a few years ago. But the reality of living as a Dalit woman in India hasn't changed. Tucked inside the newspapers - if at all - it filters through stories of everyday, routine indignities.



Somewhere a sarpanch is denied a chair on the podium during a Republic Day function. A bride's palanquin takes the long route home so as to not pollute the roads that dominant castes tread on. Shopkeepers fling purchases made by Dalit customers. Temples and common water sources are barred. Just another day in the life of a Dalit. The outrage over Hathras is justified and necessary. But there is nothing new about the systemic oppression of Dalit women aided

by State-backed institutions: The police who won't file FIRs, lawyers who urge rape survivors to compromise, a legal system that exhausts the patience of the most stoic victim, and a media that finds no merit in these stories. To say, "don't make this about caste" is ignorance and privilege. Of course, it is about caste. Of course, there is a power dynamic. Would there have been mere outrage and not a raging lynch mob if four Dalit men had attacked a Thakur woman in a similar

fashion? Would the police have locked an upper caste family inside their home and denied them access to their daughter's cremation? Caste is modern India's dirtiest little secret. It has a grip so insidious that parents will kill their own daughters for falling in love with men from the "wrong" caste; a grip so normalised that in 2014, India's biggest caste survey found one in four Indians freely admitted to practising some form of untouchability. Of all the ghastly visuals that emerged from Hathras, the one that broke my heart is the one where the sister-in-law of the 19-year-old Dalit girl is running behind the district magistrate's official white car as he leaves the village in a plume of dust. An Indian citizen, guaranteed equality by the Constitution, is chasing India's new rulers like a supplicant in a feudal autocracy, begging for the most basic human right - dignity in death. Or at least an answer. Of course, the car does not stop.

Serious Men movie review:

Nawazuddin Siddiqui's new Netflix film is one of the finest of 2020, furious and fabulous

Serious Men movie review: Nawazuddin Siddiqui completes a hat trick of Netflix hits. His latest, a sharp satire directed by Sudhir Mishra, is one of the finest films of the year.

Serious Men

Director - Sudhir Mishra

Cast - Nawazuddin Siddiqui, Aakshath Das, Shweta Basu Prasad, Nasser, Indira Tiwari

While Netflix India has been busy projecting Radhika Apte as some sort of mascot, it should really have been paying attention to Nawazuddin Siddiqui, an actor who has consistently delivered top-tier content for the streamer. His latest, *Serious Men*, completes a hat-trick of Netflix hits for the actor, after *Sacred Games* and *Raat Akeli Hai*. More of this, please.

Based on a novel by Manu Joseph, the film tells the story of Ayyan Mani, a Dalit personal assistant to a Brahmin scientist. After a lifetime of being called names such as 'moron' and 'imbecile', he decides to channel his anger at the world by conning it. Ayyan begins a journey of upward social mobility by convincing everybody that his 10-year-old son is, in fact, a genius.

It's interesting to observe how director Sudhir Mishra's perception of the common man has changed since *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro* in 1983. While the

two protagonists of that film were naive do-gooders with modest ambitions, the following four decades have made the common man angrier, it would seem, deserving of an equally enraged movie.

Ayyan is a complicated fellow. On one hand, his fury is justified - he has been systematically oppressed by a nation that would prefer he remain at his socio-economic station - but on the other, he is hard to like. *Serious Men* is, in many ways, a jail-break movie. Ayyan is trapped in the metaphorical prison of Mumbai, the towering high-rises surrounding his chawl like bars on a cell.

As wickedly funny as the film is, and as perversely enjoyable Ayyan's schemes are to watch, *Serious Men* would not have worked if there had not been a collective rage directed at the establishment. It's a movie that captures what it is like to live in India, circa 2020. It's a time capsule that, like so many satirical movies that were released in the post-Emergency era, captures the mood of the nation.

This is a stunning film, one of those rare experiences where it seems as if every department - costumes, sound, lighting - is in a jazz-like groove. This is ironic, considering how the film is also about how everybody these days seems to exist in echo-chambers.

While bigger stars boast about physical transformations and surviving six-month boot camps, Nawaz effortlessly slips into his characters without so much as a change in hairstyle. How he is able to seemingly alter his physical stature, simply through body language, continues to baffle me. Here is a man who is neither diminutive nor imposing, but through sheer performance can convincingly pull off both.

Serious Men gives Nawaz the opportunity to exercise both the submissive and the dominant aspects of Ayyan's personality. That's the thing about class structures - you're rarely at the top or at the bottom. There is always someone above you, waiting to pounce, and someone below, prepared to be pounced at. It



takes four generations, Ayyan sermonizes to his wife in an early scene, for a man to summit the social ladder. He tells her that they belong to the second generation, which he likes to call '2G'. It is a generation that is incapable of having a good time.

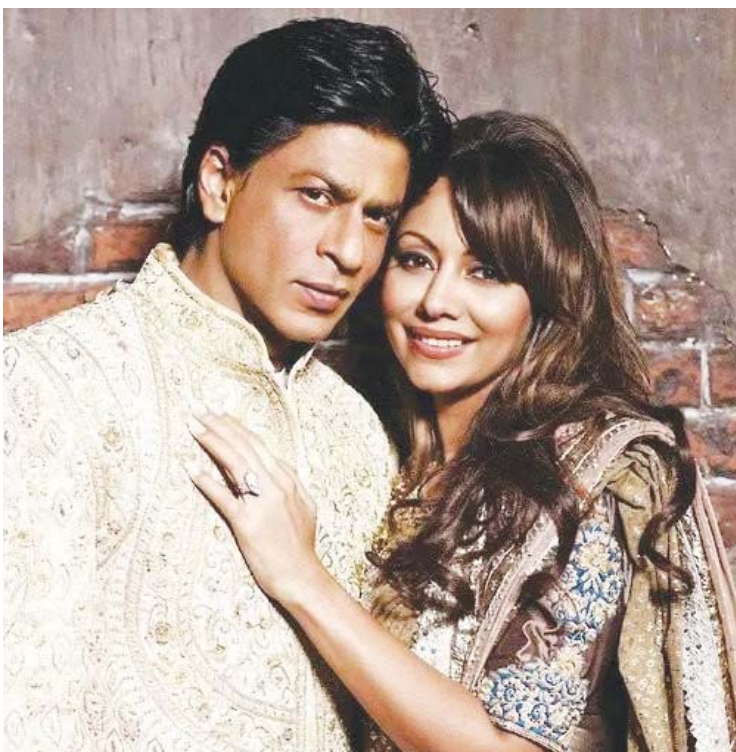
Their child will belong to the third generation - highly educated and capable of pondering life's bigger questions, like why some condoms have dots on them. And his child, Ayyan's grandchild, will have nothing to work for, and indeed, no reason to work.

But the odds, Ayyan realises, are stacked against him. Society has set up roadblocks around every corner for men like Ayyan, almost deliberately, it seems. And so, Ayyan figures, he must take short cuts. Why must he

play by the rules of a system that values neither him nor his son? *Serious Men* is also a critique of the broken Indian education system, as rote as the curriculum it prescribes, and a takedown of that age-old Indian tendency of parents projecting their unfulfilled dreams upon their children. After a point, it seems like Ayyan isn't continuing his grand con for the sake of his son's future, but to vent out his own frustrations. It's a tricky tightrope to walk. One false step and Ayyan becomes irredeemable.

But Mishra and his team of four writers don't put a foot wrong. In an industry that routinely finds it difficult to produce tonally consistent films, and often views poverty through a romanticised lens, *Serious Men* is sharp from start to finish.

Happy birthday Gauri Khan: Did you know Shah Rukh Khan's love did not waver even when her brother threatened him with a



Shah Rukh Khan and Gauri Khan's journey from childhood sweethearts to Bollywood's favourite power couple is what dreams are made of. Did you know that even being threatened with a gun could not change his love for her? On Gauri's 50th birthday, let us look back at how she and Shah Rukh overcame every obstacle before getting married.

In the book, *King of Bollywood: Shah Rukh Khan and the Seductive World of Indian Cinema*, journalist Anupama Chopra shared details of the hurdles faced by Shah Rukh and Gauri before they tied the knot. He was already an established actor at the time,

having become a household name after the success of the television show *Fauji*.

Gauri's father, Ramesh Chibba, objected to Shah Rukh's acting career more than his religion. Ramesh, while working with former President of India, Zakir Hussain, rubbed shoulders with film stars and viewed the industry as a bed of vice.

Savita Chibba, Gauri's mother, 'hated' Shah Rukh as a prospective son-in-law even though she loved watching him on screen. She even consulted an astrologer for advice on how to break them up but to no avail. Gauri's older brother Vikrant was not too happy with her choice of partner either. "Vikrant had a reputation of

being a goonda (thug). He threatened Shah Rukh with a gun, but the posturing didn't scare his sister's suitor," the book says. Shah Rukh and Gauri got married on October 25, 1991 and have been going strong for nearly three decades. They have three children - Aryan, Suhana and AbRam. Gauri is an interior designer with a successful business - Gauri Khan Designs. She is set to turn author with a coffee-table book tentatively titled *My Life in Design*. The book, which will come out next year, will share details of her journey as an interior designer and feature never-seen-before pictures of her projects, family and house.

Warner Bros shares new release dates: Dune arrives October 2021, The Batman in May 2022

Warner Bros said late Monday it is delaying the release of Dune and The Batman movies, another setback for the entertainment industry hit by Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns and social distancing measures that have closed theaters worldwide.

Dune, a sci-fi movie directed by Canadian director Denis Villeneuve, is now scheduled to open in October 2021, instead of December. The release of The Batman, starring Robert

Pattinson, has been moved to the spring of 2022 from October next year. Movie releases have been getting delayed even after restrictions were eased, with people still wary of stepping into cinema halls, and many theaters still not operational. On Monday, the world's second-



biggest cinema chain, Cineworld, decided to temporarily close its UK and U.S. movie theaters in an attempt to survive a collapse in film-making and cinema-going. Credit rating agency Fitch promptly downgraded the company. "Our base-case forecasts indicate that, the company's current liquidity levels may only be sufficient until November to December 2020, assuming no revolving credit facility (RCF) extensions," Fitch said in a statement. Earlier, the filming of The Batman was also shut down for two weeks after a member of the production - widely reported to be Pattinson - tested positive for the new coronavirus. Filming resumed in Britain last month and Warner Bros never confirmed or denied

reports about Pattinson's old Timothée Chalamet, who was diagnosed. Chalamet was nominated for an Academy Award for his role in the 2017 film Call Me by Your Name.

WARNER BROS. RELEASE SCHEDULE

 DUNE OCTOBER 1, 2021	 THE MATRIX 4 DECEMBER 21, 2021	 THE BATMAN MARCH 4, 2022
 THE FLASH NOVEMBER 4, 2022	 SHAZAM 2 JUNE 2, 2023	 BLACK ADAM TBD, IN PRODUCTION 2021

Taapsee Pannu is a strident voice in turbulent times, says Anupama Chopra

At the end of the trailer of Aaron Sorkin's upcoming Netflix period drama, The Trial of the Chicago 7, activist Abbie Hoffman (played by Sacha Baron Cohen) hesitates before answering a question in court.

He says to the lawyer examining him, "Give me a moment would you, friend? I've never been on trial for my thoughts before." This scenario, where you are on trial for your thoughts, plays out daily on social media, except that you can't ask trolls for a moment. The hate is vicious, furious and relentless. Which is why I admire artists who speak their minds, among them Taapsee Pannu. Taapsee is very much a mainstream Bollywood

actress. In the last five years, she has deftly carved out a niche in Hindi cinema. Starting with Pink in 2016, she has become a propeller for films with limited budgets, driven by strong messaging - think Naam Shabana (2017), Mulk (2018), Saand ki Aankh (2019) and, most recently, Thappad. She has endorsement contracts and millions of followers on social media platforms. But like Ayushmann Khurrana, her brand is unique. Taapsee is an actor on the rise. In the current cultural climate, it would be more prudent for her to express as few opinions as possible.

Neha Kakkar's picture with Rohanpreet Singh surfaces online, is it from their roka ceremony?



The clues pointing towards Neha Kakkar's purported October 24 wedding to Rohanpreet Singh keep coming in. A new unseen picture has surfaced online and shows the two with his parents. The photo, shared by an Instagram fan account, shows Neha and Rohanpreet sitting on a sofa with their hands entwined, joined by a man and a woman on either side. One look at

Rohanpreet's Instagram profile shows that they are his parents. Neha, though dressed in casuals, is seen sitting with a large, decorated gift bag in her lap.

Neha and Rohanpreet sparked relationship rumours when they shared a video of themselves lip-synching to the song Challa. In the video, Rohanpreet puts a ring on Neha's finger. "#DiamondDaChalla With Most Beautiful DOLL I've Never Seen Such a Beautiful Soul in my life Amazing Song by One and Only The @nehakakka #ReelKaroFeelKaro #ReelItFeelIt," he wrote.

Taapsee Pannu





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Vol. 19

Issue 32

Friday 11 October to 17 October 2020

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US Election 2020

Five takeaways from the only vice presidential debate



(Sai Bureau)-Wednesday night's matchup between Vice President Mike Pence and Democratic challenger Senator Kamala Harris opened without the fireworks that marred last week's chaotic debate between President Donald Trump and former Vice President Joe Biden. But Trump's Covid-19 infection, and his and Biden's advanced age, makes this perhaps the most consequential U.S. vice presidential debate in living memory.

COLORING INSIDE THE LINES

Following last week's chaotic, insult-laden debate

between Biden and Trump, moderator Susan Page warned both candidates that she would strictly enforce rules designed to ensure decorum. "We want a debate that is lively. But Americans also deserve a discussion that is civil," she said. Both candidates were on their best behavior at the outset and wrapped up their statements when warned by Page. "Senator Harris, it's a privilege to be on the stage with you," Pence said - after Harris said that the Trump administration's coronavirus response was "the greatest failure of any presidential

administration in the history of our country."

DINGING BIDEN ON PLAGIARISM

Candidates typically show up with a quiver of prepared one-liners, and Pence loosed one early.

He accused Biden of copying the Trump administration's plan to fight the coronavirus, dredging up charges of plagiarism that helped sink Biden's first presidential run in 1988. "It looks a little bit like plagiarism, which is something Joe Biden knows a little bit about," he said.

OUTSIZED IMPORTANCE

(Contd on page 26)

Hathras: UP is on the wrong track, again



(Sai Bureau)-- There is now a growing opinion - including among some in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) - that the Uttar Pradesh (UP) government has handled the Hathras case poorly. This could be due to political patronage to members of a caste group deemed loyal; it could be due to administrative incompetence; it could be due to the patriarchal mindset that governs both social and institutional attitudes towards women; it could be due to the prejudice with which Dalits are viewed in this country; or it could be due to all these factors. What the UP government needed to do was ensure correctives - both in the immediate context to hold perpetrators as well as

(Contd on page 26)

Republic TV, Arnab Goswami in dock for TRP scam: What you need to know



(Sai Bureau)- The Mumbai Police on Thursday claimed that its Crime Branch has busted a Television Rating Points (TRP) manipulation racket. Owners of two TV channels, Fast Marathi and Box Cinema, were arrested for TRP fraud and the owner of the third channel, Republic TV, was yet to be summoned. Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh told reporters at a press conference that news anchor Arnab Goswami, the promoter of Republic TV, will soon be questioned in the case of TRP fraud. The ratings of Republic Media's Republic Bharat had shot up exponentially raising suspicions of a foul play.

Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC), the body that gives rating points to TV channels in India, had earlier suspected Republic TV of manipulating the system. Hansa Research, the

(Contd on page 26)

End the conspiracy theories, now

(SAI Buearu)- The forensic team of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) has, according to media reports citing the doctor leading the team, concluded that Sushant Singh Rajput died by suicide. While the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is proceeding with its own enquiries, the AIIMS finding should put an end to the unfortunate and almost absurd drama that came to accompany Rajput's tragic death.

As this newspaper has argued, Rajput's suicide should have been a moment to have a serious conversation in this country about mental health. Instead, elaborate conspiracy theories were constructed - placing the blame on either a set of powerful Bollywood figures or on Rajput's partner, actor Rhea Chakraborty, or both. Television



channels were at the forefront of declaring that Rajput's death was, in fact, murder. Politicians, especially in Bihar, and of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, jumped into the fray - the former with an eye on the upcoming state elections and the latter with possibly a desire to send a message to cultural and movie figures to fall in line. The Maharashtra and Bihar police fought with each other. The judiciary stepped in. Drug and money

laundering investigations were kicked off. And Ms Chakraborty was arrested. All of this was premised on the belief that Rajput was either murdered - it is now clear that there was no murder - or driven to suicide, all on the basis of almost non-existent evidence and an outright ignorance of mental health issues. India's news television channels owe their audience an apology; politicians who stepped into the fray should introspect and pull back; and investigative agencies should learn to focus on their core job.

As this newspaper has argued, Rajput's suicide should have been a moment to have a serious conversation in this country about mental health. Instead, elaborate conspiracy theories were constructed

