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# County Executive Curran Announces Police Diversity Committee

**Jay Singh, a well known successful businessman and community leader appointed to the committee**

(By our staff reporter) New York - Nassau County Executive Laura Curran today officially announced the formation of the Nassau County Police Diversity Committee, which will seek to improve diversity in County police hiring through the three stages of the hiring process: recruitment, testing, and hiring. The Police Diversity Committee will assist with the implementation of County police reform recruitment and diversity initiatives. County Executive Curran is seeking recommendations from the Committee ahead of the next Police Officer Civil Service exam, which will likely be scheduled in 2022. Nassau's Police Diversity Committee will be chaired by Deputy Director for Diversity and Engagement, Bishop Lionel Harvey, and will include the following members: Theresa Sanders-President of Urban League of Long Island

>Dr. Jermaine Williams-President of Nassau Community College (NCC)

>Leslie Davis-President of Westbury NAACP

>George Siberón - Executive Director of Hempstead Hispanic Civic Association

>Jay Singh-Member of Asian American Affairs Council and Indian American Association

>Toufique Harun-Muslims for Progress

>Gabriela Castillo - Nassau County Office of Legislative Affairs

>Martha Krisel - Executive Director of Nassau County Civil Service

>Officer Shajarah Williams - Nassau County PD Community Affairs (recruitment)

The Nassau County Police Diversity Committee is being formed to improve diversity in police hiring. As part of the County's ongoing efforts to increase diversity in its police force, the Police Diversity Committee will address:

>Recruitment: Focusing on new methods and strategies

to reach more potential police officers from minority communities.

>Testing: Working with minority candidates to prepare for each facet of the police examination and hiring process in partnership with NCC where appropriate.

>Training: Supporting minority candidates in the Nassau County Training and Intelligence Center as they complete rigorous academic and physical training.

"This is a great opportunity for the County to take a concentrated look at the hiring practices of the Nassau County Police Department. I am committed and proud to take a leadership role in helping shape the diversity of our police in all aspects, including recruitment, training, testing and the all-important mentorship of young recruits of color," said Bishop Lionel Harvey, Chair of the Nassau County Police Diversity Committee.

"It is imperative to the overall success of recruitment and retention of Police Officers of Color in Nassau County that the community has a voice at the table where strategies will be developed, implemented and monitored for effectiveness. The Urban League of Long Island will serve the will of diverse community members as we work towards an inclusive police force in Nassau County," said Theresa Sanders, President of the Urban League of Long Island. "I am proud to have been nominated by the County Executive to serve on this important Police Diversity Committee. The task of ensuring that the police force reflect the community served is the overarching goal of this committee. Recruits, particularly those of color must be provided assistance, be it with test taking, mentoring, etc. I, along with my fellow

committee members will work to provide our knowledge of our communities to assist in the recruitment of eligible candidates," said George Siberón, Executive Director of the Hempstead Hispanic Civic Association. "Nassau Community College strives to support the current and future needs of the County and the communities that comprise the County. As President, I am proud of our broadly diversified institution. The College is committed to the maintenance and preservation of a community environment in which respect for the dignity and worth of each individual is demonstrated, and where diversity, equity, and



My Administration is committed to increasing diversity in Nassau's police force and will advocate for the changes we need to accomplish this goal. I thank the members of the Nassau County Police Diversity Committee for their commitment to police reform," said Nassau County Executive Laura Curran.



"A diverse mix of voices leads to better discussions, decisions, and outcomes for everyone," said Jay Singh, Asian American Affairs Councilmember and member of Indian Association of Long Island.

inclusion, as well as the free exchange of ideas can flourish.

We commend the County for forming this committee," said Dr. Jermaine F. Williams, President, Nassau Community

College. "It's great to see the County Executive taking this initiative to ensure our police department fully harnesses the rich diversity of Nassau County", said Toufique Harun of Muslims for Progress.







ਆਓ ਕਰੀਏ  
ਗੱਲ ਸਿਆਸਤ ਦੀ  
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ਗੱਲ ਸਾਂਝੇ ਸਾਰੇਕਾਰਾਂ ਦੀ  
ਆਓ ਕਰੀਏ

# ਗੱਲਬਾਤ

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# "My Second Life," Says Indian Man Freed From Death Row In UAE



*Becks Krishnan was sentenced to death by the UAE Supreme Court after he was found guilty of killing a young Sudanese boy when he recklessly drove and rammed his car into a group of children in September 2012.*

(Insider Bureau)-The 45-year-old Indian recently freed from death row in the UAE after an NRI businessman paid "blood money" arrived on Wednesday and said his release was a "second life" for him.

Becks Krishnan, who was on death row in the United Arab Emirates for killing a young

Sudanese boy in a road accident in 2012, was freed after a prominent NRI businessman and philanthropist MA Yusuff Ali helped pay his "blood money" amounting to nearly ₹1 crore.

The Thrissur resident arrived at the international airport early on Wednesday morning from Abu Dhabi. His wife Veena and son

Advaith, along with other relatives and friends, received him at the airport. "I was relieved when I heard that Yusuff Ali had intervened... This is my second life." "I am thankful to Yusuff Ali. He was holding discussions with the victim's family for many months," Becks Krishnan told the media. Meanwhile, Mr Ali in a statement, said he had deposited 500,000 Dirhams in January at the Abu Dhabi court after convincing the Sudanese boy's family to pardon Becks Krishnan. "We had to convince both the parents and the negotiations went on for several months." "It was difficult initially

because the boy's mother wanted the law to take its own course." "Convincing them to pardon Becks Krishnan was the difficult part," Mr Ali said in a statement. Becks Krishnan was sentenced to death by the UAE Supreme Court after he was found guilty of killing a young Sudanese boy when he recklessly drove and rammed his car into a group of children in September 2012.

Ever since, his family and friends had been trying hard for Becks Krishnan's release without any success, especially as the victim's family had already gone back and settled in Sudan,

putting an end to any discussion or pardon. The Becks Krishnan family then approached Yusuff Ali, Chairman of the Lulu Group, who went about getting the details of the case and got in touch with all stakeholders. Ultimately in January 2021, the victim's family in Sudan agreed to pardon Becks Krishnan. Subsequently, Yusuff Ali paid 500,000 Dirhams (Rs 1 crore approximately) as compensation in the court to secure the man's release.

Abu Dhabi-based Lulu Group that owns Lulu Hypermarkets and shopping malls, is one of the top retailers in the Middle East and North African region (MENA).

## Passports Of Students, Athletes To Be Linked With Vaccination Proof

*The new rules also said that mention of the vaccine-type as "Covishield" is sufficient and "no other qualifying entries are required", the government added, triggering questions on whether only the Serum Institute vaccine is acceptable abroad.*

(Insider Bureau)-People going abroad for education, jobs or as part of Indian contingent for Tokyo Olympic, will have to get their CoWIN vaccination certificates linked to their passport. They can also take the second dose of vaccine after 28 days, the Centre said on Monday as part of a new set of rules for vaccination. The facility shall be available to those who need to undertake international travel for the specified purposes till August 31, the government said.

The new rules also said that mention of vaccine type as "Covishield" is sufficient and "no other qualifying entries are required", the government added, setting off questions whether the Vaccine developed by the Oxford University and Astrazeneca is only acceptable abroad.

"It is clarified that Covishield, produced by the Serum Institute of India and approved by the DCGI is one of the vaccines by the WHO for use as on 3rd June 2021," read a government order

this evening. "States/UT governments shall designate a competent authority in each district for according permission for such administration of second dose of Covishield," the order added.

The Centre on Monday announced its new vaccine rules under which it will provide vaccines free of charge to people above the age of 18 and would take back control of vaccination from states. The new rules will come into effect from June 21.



## Top Indian-Origin Businessman In South Africa Arrested For Corruption

(Insider Bureau)-Iqbal Meer Sharma, once a powerful South African government official in the Department of Trade and Industry, was arrested on Thursday in a massive fraud and corruption scandal linked to the controversial Gupta family. Iqbal Sharma was charged alongside three senior former officials of the Free State government, who allegedly transgressed processes related to spending of public funds. The state alleges that Iqbal Sharma, through his company Nuland Investment, laundered over 20 million Rands which the provincial Free State Department of Agriculture paid for a feasibility study which was supposed to cost just 1.5 million Rands.

This was to determine whether the Estina Dairy Farm project would benefit small-scale Black farmers in partnership with Indian company Paras. The Estina project failed badly, with allegations that tens of millions more from the venture were

siphoned off to the Gupta family, which is accused of looting billions of Rands from a number of state and parastatal institutions.

The Gupta brothers - Ajay, Atul and Rajesh - are in self-exile in Dubai as the South African government tries through the UN to extradite them because there is no extradition treaty between the two countries.

Nuland then outsourced the study to two companies, which later over-charged the department with 24 million Rands.

"We are alleging that, in order to siphon off money, (Sharma) subcontracted another company and the other sub-company was supposed to do the same services which [another well-known company] had already done," said Sindisiwe Seboka, spokesperson for the National Prosecuting Authority's Investigative Directorate.

# Josh

## India WebTV




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# Check Out The Fancy Names Abroad For Some Of Our Favourite Snacks



It is no secret that Indian food is much loved across the globe. It comes in infinite varieties and comes with an intriguing history that has travelled to these foreign lands. Butter chicken and naan, or the naan bread as they like to call it has totally ravaged the western market in terms of food. There are a lot more dishes that have been fancy-fied too, like our haldi doodh turned into turmeric latte and the lonavala chikkis that we find everywhere go by nut brittle in the West. On these lines, here are a few of our favourite food items that have totally different names abroad:

## 1. Samosa

While most people in the West are more or less familiar with

samosa, since it is a very common appetiser in Indian restaurants, there are some who know it as a "potato-filled fried pastry". Samosa is also very similar to a dish named empanada in the States, thus many people even assume that both these dishes are close relatives. Apart from their shape, which totally gives away their differences, samosas and empanadas are both fried dough filled with potatoes, vegetables and sometimes even meat.

## 2. Pakoda

Delicious pakodas with chai is a heavenly combination on a rainy day, but if you want to order the same in the West, you might

want to go for something called "Deep Fried fritters". They are even further divided into potato fritters, onion fritters and just



vegetable fritters. These fritters are actually quite popular as junk food across the globe.

## 3. Chole Bhature

Every Indian's soul food, chole bhature actually goes by the name "chickpea curry with fried flatbreads." It is a very common

main course option across Indian restaurant in foreign countries. The people themselves have even made quite a few renditions of our beloved chole in the form of chickpea curry without the additional spices.

## 4. Chaat

Chaat is much more common in the west than you'd assume. A lot of street vendors can be seen selling these "spicy potato snacks" around London. It does have a lot of variants across the country, but the base of boiled vegetables and spices remains the same.

## 5. Poha

Planning on making poha abroad but could not find it anywhere?

That's because it was busy being "Flaked rice" or "Flattened rice" in the grocery stores. Once you search by this name, you will definitely have better luck.

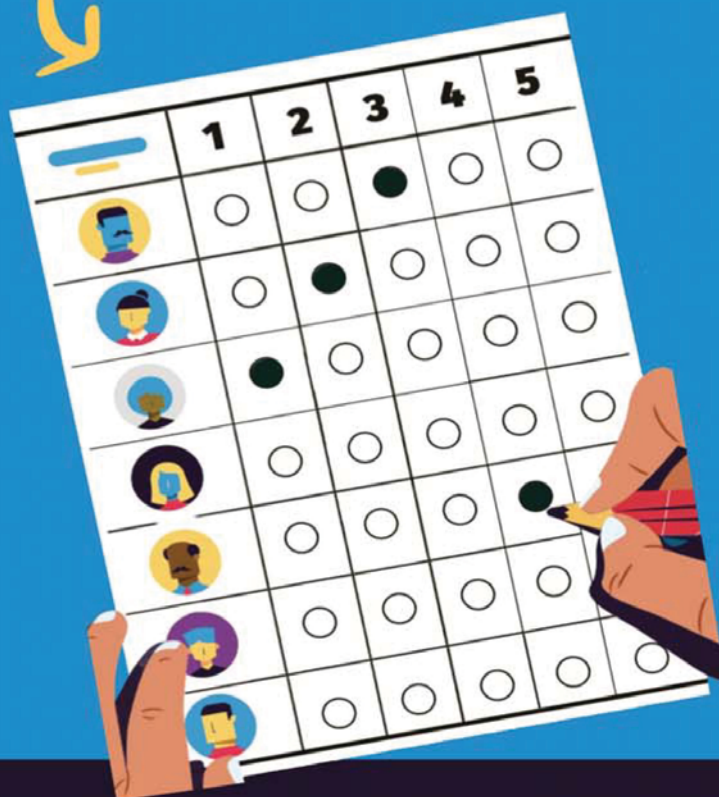
## 6. Aloo Parantha

Aloo Parantha literally translates to "potato bread" in the West, and that is how they address it. It is quite a popular dish in London and the USA and is usually served for breakfast as "spicy potato bread".

All our bhaturas, puris and naans may just be breads in foreign lands, but we love to see our beloved Indian food get so much love in the west. The classy twist on their names would surely be unrecognisable in India.

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# Indian Students 'Positive' About UK Courses Despite Lockdown

**According to UK Home Office statistics released last week, the number of study visa grants to Indian nationals in the year ending March 2021 increased by 6,391, marking a 13 per cent hike over the previous year.**

(Insider Bureau)-Indian students remain positive about taking up their courses at UK universities this year despite the coronavirus lockdown and travel constraints, official data indicates.

According to UK Home Office statistics released last week, the number of study visa grants to Indian nationals in the year ending March 2021 increased by 6,391, marking a 13 per cent hike over the previous year. It indicates that most students are keen to take up their courses as they are able to return to university since lockdown eased further from May 17.

"Welcoming our students back in person is an important milestone in the UK's COVID-19 recovery, and a positive sign for Indian students holding offers to study in the UK next academic year," said Vivienne Stern,

Director of Universities UK International (UUKi), an organisation representing 146 UK universities.

"We are grateful to our member universities, and to all students, for their incredible work, patience and resilience during this time. Throughout this time, universities have put the welfare of their students at the heart of what they do, and have been flexible to enable students to pursue their dream of undertaking higher education in the UK safely," Ms Stern said.

The UUKi said universities have done a lot of work besides switching to online learning, with a focus on students' health and wellbeing, including providing food parcels, hardship funding and wellbeing support.

International education specialists IDP Connect have been monitoring student attitudes

and motivations towards university study during the pandemic through their International Student Crossroads Reports and their April research shows that 83 per cent of Indian students with an offer to study in the UK in the autumn expect to commence their studies as planned, around September.

Asked whether they would commence their studies if it meant travelling to the UK and then having their teaching delivered through a mixture of online and face-to-face sessions, an overwhelming 94 per cent of Indian respondents said they would commence their studies under such circumstances.

"Over the last few years many thousands more Indian students have chosen to trust UK higher education to build their career paths, and UK universities are looking forward to welcoming



back their Indian students, as the country is now opening back up," said Barbara Wickham, Director, British Council India.

"As Indian students plan to travel back to the UK, we encourage them to connect with their universities; and follow the travel rules for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as applicable," Ms Wickham said. Under current rules, Indians with a valid student visa can travel to the UK but must follow the "red list" travel requirement of a compulsory 10-day quarantine at a government-approved facility as part of measures to control the

spread of the Delta variant of COVID-19. There have been calls for university accommodation to also be approved for this self-isolation purpose.

As part of several measures in place, university and health authorities have highlighted that Indian students arriving in the UK in the coming months will also be able to access vaccinations by registering with a local doctor when they arrive.

The coronavirus has so far claimed 128,075 lives in the UK, along 4,515,779 confirmed infections, according to Johns Hopkins University.

# South African Court Freezes Assets Of Gupta Family In Corruption Case



**The Indian-origin Gupta family, accused of siphoning billions from state and parastatal institutions in South Africa, are believed to be in self-exile in Dubai.**

(Insider Bureau)-A South African court on Friday froze the assets of the controversial Indian-origin Gupta family and their associate, Iqbal Meer Sharma, which included palatial homes in upmarket areas.

On Thursday, the Investigating Directorate (ID) of the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) of South Africa asked Interpol to issue Red Notice International Arrest Warrants for Atul Gupta and Rajesh Gupta, and their wives Chetali and Arti.

Meer Sharma, one of their close associates, is spending the weekend in jail, along with a senior official of the Provincial Free State Government, pending a bail application on Monday.

An ID spokesperson, Sindisiwe Seboka, earlier said they have a strong case against the Guptas and Sharma involving fraud and corruption to the tune of more than 12 million South African rand.

The Guptas, accused of siphoning billions of rand from

state and parastatal institutions, are believed to be in self-exile in Dubai, with reports that some family members are in India.

South Africa has sent extradition papers to both India and the UAE, although it has no extradition treaty with the UAE. The wanted four members of the Gupta family are the owners of the company, Islandsite, against which the High Court order was granted on Friday.

"Leave is granted to institute asset forfeiture proceedings against Islandsite and the property of Islandsite," read the order, which Sindisiwe Seboka confirmed applied to assets, including all properties in South Africa belonging to Islandsite. The court has appointed a curator who will take charge of the assets pending the outcome of criminal charges for fraud and money laundering offences

instituted against the Guptas, their company Islandsite, Sharma and his company Nulane.

"The freezing order, granted in terms of the Prevention of Organised Crimes Act, will be served on Iqbal Sharma at the Bloemfontein Bainsvlei (police) holding cells, while Islandsite will be served at its local business address," the spokesperson said.

Should they be found guilty, the assets concerned will be forfeited to the state.

The properties of the Guptas that are part of the order, include a 21 million rand mansion in the elite suburb of Constantia in Cape Town and a 12 million rand estate in Johannesburg.

Sharma's assets, include his residence in the upmarket suburb of Sandton in Johannesburg valued at more

than 12 million rand that the ID said is owned through a UAE-registered company, Issar Global, as well as other assets worth around 1.8 million rand. The Gupta family arrived from Saharanpur in India in the 1990's as democracy dawned with the release of anti-apartheid revolutionary Nelson Mandela.

The Guptas grew their business from a humble retail shoe store to a vast empire spanning information technology, mining and media.

There have been widespread allegations, including by witnesses at the Commission of Inquiry into State Capture, that the Gupta brothers used their closeness to former president Jacob Zuma to carry out a wide range of irregular deals totalling billions of rand.



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# Missing for 11 years, Kerala woman found living secretly with lover in house next door

**The woman had gone missing in 2010. Her family had filed a complaint with the police eleven years ago.**

(News Agencies)-In a strange incident, a 29-year-old woman was found 11 years after a missing complaint was filed by her family. The girl had been living inside a small room at her lover's house which was 500 meters from her family. The incident was reported in Ayalur village of Palakkad.

Sajitha went missing in 2010. Her family had filed a missing complaint, but the inquiry did not yield any result. According to the police, Sajitha left her house to live with Rehman, her lover. Since Rehman couldn't afford to rent a

house, the couple decided to stay at his house, without being noticed by anyone. They started living together in a small room. There were four other people in the house including Rehman's parents, sister, and nephew. Rehman used to get angry if anyone came near his room or tried to enter. Gradually, others in the family started avoiding Rehman and his room. Often, he won't go to work, take food inside and spend most of the time inside the room.

Rehman had created a small opening in the room through

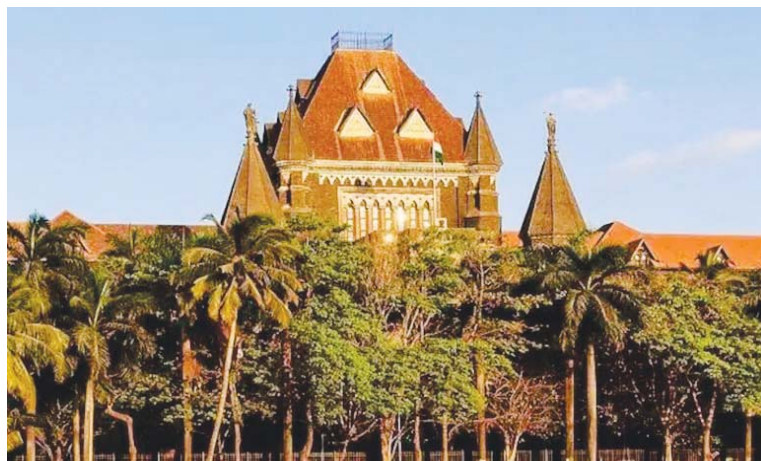
which Sajitha used to step out at night. She would take a bath and sit outside for some time. This 'hide & seek' continued for over a decade. Financial constraints too forced the couple to remain inside this small room. Rehman would pack lunch from home when he went to work. But, before leaving the premises he would keep that food packet inside for Sajitha. Since most of the other members of the family used to go out for work, she could remain unnoticed during the day. In March 2021, Rehman



went missing from his house and his family filed a police complaint. As the police inquiry was underway on June 7, Rehman was spotted by his brother at a police checkpoint which was set up as part of Covid related lockdown. As informed by his brother, Rahman was

taken to the police station for further inquiry. During the inquiry, Rahman revealed that he was living with Sajitha at a rented house nearby. On detailed questioning about Sajitha's disappearance 11 years ago, the couple unfolded this unbelievable story.

## Tortured by son during Covid lockdown, Marine Drive resident gets relief from Bombay High Court



**The upscale Marine Drive resident used to operate a travel business which he handed to his son. However, the two fell apart and the verbal and physical assaults increased over the years.**

The father told the court that he and his wife could not gather the courage to report their plight, as they did not want any serious repercussions, and also feared the social stigma in their community, till the harassment and torture at the hands of their son became 'unbearable'.

The upscale Marine Drive resident used to operate a travel business which he handed to his son. However, the two fell apart and the verbal and physical assaults increased over the years. The father said that in spite of the mother's passing away, there was no change in the son's behaviour. The two had to live to-

gether during the Covid induced lockdown since last year, which led to more suffering for him. The father also produced recorded audio conversations between them to establish the abuse that he had faced at his own son's hand. After going through the evidence and arguments, the division bench of Justice S J Kathawalla and Justice S P Tavade said, "According to us, the son crossed all limits when he made accusations against the father with regard to his sanity even before this Court. We, after talking to the father, are convinced that he is a mature person with a sound mind, who has

no motive to keep his son out of the said flat, except for his desire to spend the twilight days of his life peacefully, without being harassed by his only son."

"Despite the bad behaviour of the son, the father has shown grace by not wanting to deprive him of his tenancy rights after his demise, and has, in order to buy peace, also offered to pay an amount of Rs 25 lakhs to the son to reside elsewhere on leave and license basis," the court added. The bench concluded that the father "deserves immediate interim relief" and ordered the son to move out of the flat in the next four weeks.

(News Agencies)-During the hearing of a plea filed by an 85-year-old father against decade-long harassment, abuse and torture that the octogenarian suffered at the hands of his own son, the Bombay high court restrained the son from entering the father's residence. However, the father will have to pay Rs 50,000 per month

to the son for the time being.

The father alleged that because of the harassment and the torture inflicted by the son, including physical harm caused to him and his wife, she suffered from hypertension, brain cystitis, chronic kidney disease and ultimately lost her life on March 3, 2020.

## After Jitin Prasada's exit, can Congress rein in next round of defections?

(News Agencies)-The buzz in the Congress, social media, mainstream media and in the political circles over the next round of defection/identity of defectors has a simple answer. It depends. Rather it depends largely on the Congress high command how it deals with the internal issues and political crisis in party-ruled states of Rajasthan, Punjab, Chhattisgarh and in states such as Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand.

The usual suspect list of Sachin Pilot, Navjot Singh Sidhu, RPN Singh and many more from G-23 — the Congress leaders who demanded organisational changes in the party — is misleading. Equally fallacious is the premise that the past and future defectors are looking for

greener pastures. In fact, Jyotiraditya Scindia, Jitin Prasada, Bhuvaneshwar Kalitha, Sanjay Singh, Priyanka Chaturvedi and numerous others had secured posts



and positions in the grand-old-party. They have a seemingly bright future too. But they switched sides because they saw little or no future of the party organisation.

This story has not gotten much attention or deliberations.

Jyotiraditya Scindia and Jitin Prasada may have had easy access to the Gandhi trio — Sonia, Rahul and Priyanka. But they could not stomach the party organisation putting constant blocks in accommodating their minions or camp followers. In and around Dhaurahra — his parliamentary constituency, Jitin Prasada constantly faced a situation of district

party unit chief and other functionaries belonging to the rival, rather hostile camps. Ditto was the story of Padrauna in eastern Uttar Pradesh, considered a

turf of RPN Singh. Worse was the primacy of a staff member of Priyanka Gandhi Vadera, ideologically tilted to the Left, only merely left to the centre. The personal aide supposedly has an instinctive dim view of many young guns, aristocrats, second or third generation dynasts. The dynasts see little wisdom in sitting on high chairs at the Congress Working Committee (CWC) or at the 24, Akbar Road when their ground-level lieutenants got the boot. The All India Congress Committee's (AICC) interim chief Sonia Gandhi has sensed the disquiet. A few months ago, she had picked up the phone to talk to RPN Singh's mother Mohani Singh, widow of the former minister of state for defence in Indira Gandhi's council of ministers, way back in 1980.



# Mahatma Gandhi's great-granddaughter jailed for 7 years in Rs 3.22 crore fraud case in South Africa

(News Agencies)- Ashish Lata Ramgobin, the 56-year-old great-granddaughter of Mahatma Gandhi, has been jailed for seven years in a six-million rand (Rs 3.22 crore) fraud and forgery case. Mahatma Gandhi's great-granddaughter was sentenced by a Durban court after she was found guilty in the fraud case.

Ashish Lata Ramgobin was accused of defrauding businessman SR Maharaj after he advanced R6.2 million to her for allegedly clearing import and Customs duties for a non-existent consignment from India. SR Maharaj was promised a share of profits, PTI reported. Lata

Ramgobin, daughter of noted rights activists Ela Gandhi and late Mewa Ramgobind, was also refused leave to appeal both the conviction and the sentence by the Durban Specialised Commercial Crime Court.

During the trial, Brigadier Hangwani Mulaudzi of the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) had said that Lata Ramgobin allegedly provided forged invoices and documents to convince investors that three containers of linen were being shipped in from India.

At that time, Lata Ramgobin was released on a bail of 50,000 rand. Lata Ramgobin had met SR Maharaj, director of the New Africa

Alliance Footwear Distributors, in August 2015. His company imports and manufactures and sells clothing, linen and footwear, and also provides finance to other companies on a profit-share basis. Mahatma Gandhi's great-granddaughter had told Maharaj that she had imported three containers of linen for the South African Hospital Group NetCare.

NPA spokesperson Natasha Kara said, "Lata Ramgobin said she was experiencing financial difficulties to pay for import costs and customs and she needed the money to clear the goods at the harbour."

"She told him [Maharaj] that she needed R6.2 million. To convince him, she showed him what she



claimed was a signed purchase order for the goods. Later that month, she sent him what seemed to be a NetCare invoice and delivery note as proof that the goods were delivered and payment was imminent," the spokesperson

said. Lata Ramgobin "further sent him confirmation from NetCare's bank account that payment had been made", Kara said. Maharaj entered into an agreement with her owing to Ramgobin's family credentials and NetCare documents.

# Narendra Modi is top leader of country and BJP, says Sanjay Raut



*Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut said on Thursday said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the top leader of the country and the BJP, following a one-on-one meeting between Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and PM Modi in Delhi.*

(News Agencies)-Days after the one-on-one meeting between Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Delhi, Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut on Thursday said Modi is

the top leader of the country and the BJP. He made the statement in response to a question on whether he felt that Modi's popularity is on a downslide as media reports suggested that RSS is contemplating to project

state leaders as the face in the state elections. "I don't want to comment on this...I don't go by the media reports. There is no official statement about this... The BJP owes its success to Narendra Modi in the last seven years and currently, he is the top leader of the country and his party," Raut said. The Sena's Rajya Sabha member, who is currently on a tour of north Maharashtra, was speaking to reporters in Jalgaon. The Shiv Sena's stand has always been that a prime

minister belongs to the entire country and not a particular party, he said, adding, "Hence the PM shouldn't get involved in election campaigning as it puts pressure on the official machinery." To a question on Maharashtra BJP president Chandrakant Patil's remarks that his party would make friendship with tiger (Shiv Sena's symbol) if Modi wished, Raut said, "No one can make friendship with a

tiger. It is the tiger that decides whom he wants to be friends with." When asked about his tour of north Maharashtra, he said it was part of the Shiv Sena's efforts to strengthen the organisation. "All Maha Vikas Aghadi [MVA] allies have a right to expand their base and strengthen the parties. It is also the need of the hour. We are also holding meetings on strengthening our coordination among each other," he said.

# Will continue making efforts to bring fugitives back to India: MEA on Choksi's deportation

**India will continue making efforts to bring back all fugitives back to the country, the External Affairs Ministry said on Thursday.**

(News Agencies)-The Ministry of External Affairs on Thursday said that the country will continue to make all efforts to bring fugitives to face justice in India, in the context of the extradition of fugitive businessman Mehul Choksi. Meanwhile, the Antigua and Barbuda Cabinet briefly discussed Mehul Choksi's matter, said Lionel Max Hurst, Chief of Staff of Prime Minister Gaston Browne on Thursday.

The Cabinet held a brief discussion on the Choksi matter, on the investigation into his claim of abduction, and the decisions

rendered thus far by the Magistrate and the High Court of Dominica.

"No new information has emanated from the Dominica authorities that now hold Choksi's fate in their hands. The authorities in Antigua continue their investigation of Choksi's claim that he was abducted in Antigua. Since abductions and kidnappings are not crimes usually reported in Antigua, no effort is being spared to uncover all the facts in this supposed abduction," he said. Mehul Choksi, wanted in the Rs 13,500 crore Punjab National Bank fraud case, was denied bail

by a magistrate court in Dominica on June 2.

Dominica declares Choksi as prohibited immigrant

The Dominican government on Thursday declared diamantaire Mehul Choksi as a "prohibited immigrant" in their country, a development that is likely to strengthen the case of India. India Today is in possession of an order issued by the Ministry of National Security and Home Affairs, according to which, "in accordance to section 5(1)(f) of the Immigration and Passport Act Chapter 18:01 of the 2017 Revised laws of the



Commonwealth of Dominica, you, Mr Mehul Chinubhai Choksi, are hereby declared a prohibited immigrant. "You are, therefore, not permitted to enter the Commonwealth of Dominica

and the Chief of Police has been instructed to take all the necessary actions to have you repatriated," added the order, dated May 25, 2021, signed by Dominican minister Rayburn Blackmoore.



## India will receive a share of 80 million US vaccines through COVAX: State Dept official

(News Agencies)-India will be receiving a share of the 80 million (8 crores) unused COVID-19 vaccines through the UN-backed COVAX global vaccine sharing programme that President Joe Biden has announced, according to a senior State Department official.

On June 2, President Biden announced that the US will allocate 75 per cent - nearly 1.9 crores of the first tranche of 2.5 crore doses - of unused COVID-

19 vaccines from its stockpile through the UN-backed COVAX global vaccine sharing programme to countries in South and Southeast Asia as well as Africa.

The move is part of his administration's framework for sharing 80 million (8 crores) vaccines globally by the end of June.

According to a White House fact sheet, nearly 19 million vaccines will be shared through COVAX. "I

don't have the specific details on when the shipment of vaccines will be arriving in India. Of course, India will be in receipt of a share of those 80 million vaccines and through COVAX, I believe there were some six million vaccines destined for the region," State Department Spokesperson Ned Price told reporters at a news conference on Wednesday.

COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access, abbreviated as COVAX, is a worldwide initiative



aimed at equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines directed by Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, and the World Health Organisation. We know that India has suffered tremendously with this pandemic and as we have done in the case of these vaccines, but also as we did even prior to this vaccine sharing announcement. We have demonstrated our commitment to work closely with our partners in India to help see the way out of this epidemic," he said.

In recent weeks, the US has so far supplied seven plane loads of life-saving supplies worth approximately USD 100 million. "This is also in addition to the tremendous generosity that we have seen from the private sector and the diaspora here in this country that has donated some 400 million additional dollars. So, that's half a billion dollars that the United States government and the people here in the United States have committed to help our friends and to help our partners in India recover from this pandemic," Price said.

## Shivsena is with us, says NCP Chief Sharad Pawar

(News Agencies)- Speaking at the party's 22nd Foundation Day, NCP Chief



Sharad Pawar reminded Uddhav Thackeray of how his father Late Balasaheb Thackeray kept his word. "In 1977 when the entire

political scene was against Indira Gandhi, there was one person who stood by her, and it was Bal Thackeray. He promised her that he won't field any candidate against her party, and he stood by his words. Similarly, Shivsena is with us in the power. Those who are raising questions about Shivsena changing their stand after that meeting are living in a different

paradise," Pawar said. "In spite of the talks after the Thackeray-Modi meet, we are confident that our government will

continue for 5 years. We will continue to work for the betterment of people in the forthcoming Lok Sabha and Assembly polls as well," he said.

This is Sharad Pawar's first reaction after the meeting. The statement is seen as both a clean chit to Uddhav and a reminder of keeping his word.

## Armed men loot Rs 1.19 crore from HDFC branch in Bihar in broad daylight

(News Agencies)- Armed robbers struck at a private bank in Bihar's Hajipur in broad daylight on Thursday and ran away with Rs 1.19 crore from the Jaduha branch,

1.19 crore in sacks, and fled. Police said the miscreants were caught on camera, carrying bags of money on their shoulders as they left the bank.



police said. The incident reportedly took place near the residence of Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai on Thursday morning -- soon after the HDFC bank's branch in Jaduha opened for the day. Five bike-borne men entered the bank, threatened employees to get money from the cash room and stuffed Rs

A senior police official added that CCTV footage is being scrutinised to ascertain the identity of the five. The borders, meanwhile, have been sealed and a manhunt is on, police added. Last week, two armed men robbed a bank of Rs 65,000 in Muzaffarnagar. The accused robbed the cashier of the bank near railway road at Khatoli town at gunpoint, police added. According to circle officer RK Singh, the two miscreants came on a bike and took away cash from the bank.



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### News Analysis & Commentary



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# Kamala Harris is in a really tough spot

This week, Vice President Kamala Harris learned that three little words can cause a lot of damage. On her first vice presidential trip abroad, Harris stoked controversy when she spoke at a news conference in Guatemala and told potential migrants, "do not come."

She warned that would-be migrants would be turned back at the US' southern border, adding, "So let's discourage our friends, our neighbors, our family members from embarking on what is otherwise an extremely dangerous journey."

"It is a shame that Harris' comments overshadowed the point of her trip, which was to examine the root causes of unauthorized Central American migration to the US. She needs to be better prepared to discuss migration, and to sell President Joe Biden's policies to the American public. And this will be no easy task, given that the GOP -- and by extension, conservative media outlets -- often rely on simplistic views of a complex situation. There's no denying that Harris

was wrong to tell Central Americans not to come here. By law, asylum-seekers are required to be present in the US when they make their case. This is as true now as it was when Donald Trump was president. So advising people simply to stay home is brushing aside what could be legitimate fears of persecution in their own countries.

New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez criticized Harris' remarks, saying "This is disappointing to see... the US spent decades contributing to regime change and destabilization in Latin America. We can't help set someone's house on fire and then blame them for fleeing." Similarly, when Harris warned about how perilous the trip north is, she was stating the obvious -- at least for people in Central America. They do not need to be told of the dangers involved in trekking to the border; the risks are well-known throughout the region. People undertake the trip out of fear and desperation.

(Contd on page 40)

# Covid-19: A man-made pandemic? New study breaks out!

By Susmita Ghosh

Covid-19 has caused nearly 4 million deaths from every affected countries on Earth in 18 months. Even though it has changed our lives entirely but the annoying Questions yet not changed -- where did it come from? Is it from bats, freezing meat, rats, laboratory or a sort of heavenly punishment?

There are several researches going on to backtrack and find the origin of the SARS-CoV-2 virus worldwide. Among them, a new study, conducted by British professor Angus Dalglish and Norwegian scientist, Dr. Birger Sorensen, claims that the virus was created in a lab and has 'no credible natural ancestor.'

Various news agencies referred to the study and reported it as a creation of Chinese scientists who were on a "Gain of Function" project in the Wuhan lab.

The research sheds some light on the controversial Covid-19 origin story. As per the report, the scientists worked with a natural coronavirus 'backbone' from the Chinese cave bats and spliced onto it a 'new spike.' The result of this step turned into the deadly Covid-19.

The duo created paper is going to be published in the scientific journal 'Quarterly Review of Biophysics Discovery'. Here, they have collected work evidences of the Chinese scientists,

who, functioned with some American universities, built the tools to create the pandemic.

In their new research, Dalglish and Sorensen said that the Chinese scientists inside the Wuhan lab were 'altering' the naturally occurring viruses. It was an attempt to make them more virulent and test their potentially devastating effects on humans thereafter. They covered their tracks through 'retro-engineering' of the virus versions to make it appear, evolved from an animal.

Reasons of their work, taken quite seriously on the origin story, are not far to seek. Professor Dalglish is world acclaimed for his breakthrough in creating the first-ever working 'HIV vaccine.' Likewise, scientist Sorensen is a virologist and Chair of a pharmaceutical company, Immunor, which has recently developed a coronavirus vaccine candidate called BIOVACC-19.

It is also claimed that Chinese scientists and whistle blowers first came to know of the virus leak. It was even before the Chinese government had presented a 'very virulent virus' had spread before the world. However, most of them were initially silenced or had disappeared.

(Contd on page 40)

# America's tax system is rigged to protect the rich and powerful

The US tax system is rigged, and it is breaking the country in more ways than one. Much of the Republican Party lives and breathes to protect the rich and powerful from paying taxes, and Democrats like Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia too often side with them. Meanwhile, public opinion -- strongly supporting higher taxes on wealthy Americans and corporations -- counts for little because the rich have undue influence over the political class. But the severity of the problem cannot be overstated. Between 2014 and 2018, Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon, saw his wealth grow \$99 billion (to the level of \$191 billion today) while paying a pittance in income taxes, according to an investigation published by ProPublica, which revealed several of America's best-known billionaires paid similarly little in taxes. (Bezos' personal and corporate representatives declined to receive detailed questions on the ProPublica story.)

Not only is our tax system not collecting taxes from America's richest individuals -- it's designed not to do so. Suppose that in a given year Bezos' shares rise by \$20 billion and, instead of selling those shares, he borrows \$1 billion against them to fund his luxurious consumption. He won't owe or pay a penny of income tax.

At a conceptual level, Bezos' income in this example is \$20 billion, measured by the change of wealth. Yet according to the tax code, his taxable income is \$0, because his rise of wealth is counted as taxable income

only when he sells the shares. But why should he sell them when he can pay for his \$500 million superyacht and other toys by borrowing -- and thereby escape income taxes altogether?

By the way, if Bezos actually sells some shares after owning them for more than one year, he would pay a "long-term capital gains tax" of 20%, below the 22% marginal tax rate on wage income paid by an individual earning \$41,000! There are actually four interconnected ways that the tax code is designed by and for the rich. The first is the case just noted, by which the richest Americans amass and spend great wealth while paying little or no tax. The applicable rules are that "unrealized capital gains" (that is, price increases on unsold assets) are generally not taxable income, and that long-term capital gains are taxed at a low rate.

The second problem is when companies park their assets and international profits in tax havens. As of 2018, according to the US Bureau of Economic Analysis, American multinational companies held an astonishing \$1.3 trillion of corporate assets in Bermuda and another \$1 trillion in a few tiny British islands in the Caribbean, including the British Virgin Islands and the Cayman Islands. Notably, these tiny places have a 0% corporate tax rate. How can more than \$2 trillion of corporate assets and some \$159 billion of net income end up in these British islands when US companies hardly operate, produce, manufacture or export from them?



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# Talking to the Taliban

*The move is a reflection of the growing realisation in capitals around the world that Taliban will be part of the next ruling dispensation in Kabul*

For more than two years, in the backdrop of America's plans to draw down its military presence in Afghanistan, there has been an intense debate in India's strategic community about the utility of engaging some elements of the Afghan Taliban. When the debate gained currency in early 2019, there was hesitation about engaging with a force which had been so hostile to Indian interests. But the reluctance was also linked to domestic political constraints. Engagement could well have triggered questions about the government's anti-Pakistan, anti-terror hardline security stance and its unwillingness to engage with

Kashmir's local formations when it was willing to talk to Taliban. In fact, the Kabul-Kashmir link played out in a different way. One of the reasons the government pushed ahead with constitutional changes in Jammu and Kashmir was to preempt the possible impact of radicalised militants shifting focus to the valley. India also wanted to see how far the US would go with its plans. As it became clear that the Joe Biden administration intended to push ahead with the withdrawal plans, the debate got renewed. As this newspaper reported, New Delhi has begun reaching out to Afghan Taliban factions and leaders,

especially those who are outside Pakistan's sphere of influence. There have also been positive feelers seeking engagement from within the Afghan Taliban leadership. The move is a reflection of the growing realisation in capitals around the world that Taliban will be part of the next ruling dispensation in Kabul. Retired diplomats and experts also pointed to the heterogeneity within Taliban, and that the Afghanistan of today was not the same country of the mid-1990s. Despite the precarious position of the elected government, there are elements in Kabul that strongly believe the post-2001 generation



which won't be willing to accept an authoritarian regime and that even the Taliban apparently realise this. For India, an outreach to the Taliban will be an intense game of playing catch-up as other players such as China, Russia and Iran have already started formal dialogue with the group. But despite the delay, the move is well-considered. It represents an opportunity for India to make it

clear, directly to Taliban, that the gains of the past two decades cannot be squandered away, and convey its core security redlines. It is also a signal that Pakistan cannot be sole arbiter of Afghanistan's future. India must continue to engage, cautiously, while the onus rests on Taliban to prove it is not the same inimical force of the past, beholden to Rawalpindi.

## Will Trump be held accountable-this time?

It looks like former President Donald Trump was willing to go even further than we knew in his war against leaks. According to the New York Times, prosecutors in the Justice Department obtained, via subpoena from Apple, information from the accounts of at least two members of the House Intelligence Committee-- Representatives Adam Schiff of California and Eric Swalwell of California-- and also looked into the metadata of their aides and family members (including at least one minor).

The administration was consumed with discovering the sources of leaks that the media was reporting on about contacts between associates of Trump and Russia. This story comes on top of recent revelations that this spring, the Justice Department notified reporters at CNN, The Washington Post and The New York Times that records had been seized in different investigations.

Trump's Justice Department had pursued what appears to be a national security leak investigation that aimed to sweep up tens of thousands of a CNN reporter's email logs, as well as phone records, from 2017.

These new reports are another



reminder of the extreme exercise of presidential power that took place under Trump. Although it is easy to dismiss his four years in office as defined by a lot of loud Twitter noise and vicious political invective, this period also witnessed the aggressive deployment of presidential authority, sometimes conducted in secret, and in ways that threatened our fragile balance of power and the rights of American citizens.

The unfolding story about the Justice Department follows on many other well documented instances of abuse of power between 2017 and 2021.

During Donald Trump's first impeachment the world witnessed the former president's willingness to use foreign aid as leverage for obtaining "dirt" about a political opponent. Trump repeatedly used his Twitter bully pulpit to go after institutions-such as the media-and specific political opponents who were causing him trouble, even ultimately inciting a mob that attacked Congress and attempted to prevent the peaceful transfer of presidential power, based on fraudulent claims of a stolen election.

His invocation of national emergency powers to obtain

funding for a border wall, despite bipartisan congressional opposition to spending money on this project, showed that he would let few things stand in his way. And in more familiar fashion, Trump turned to executive power to roll back initiatives meant to stop climate change, as well as workplace regulations and more that had been put into place by Democratic administrations. How has this all happened? The former president was a product of two long-term trends that converged during his administration. The first has been the ongoing expansion of presidential power. Over the

course of the twentieth century, the power, staff and regulatory authority accorded the president has vastly expanded.

During the Cold War and then in the "war against terror," the growth of the national security apparatus handed the inhabitant of the Oval Office unprecedented resources with which to take action without congressional oversight. Even the elevation of the bully pulpit in the 20th century meant that the president, through his words, could affect public opinion in dramatic fashion.

The second trend was the triumph of smash-mouth partisanship within the GOP, creating a mentality at the highest levels of leadership that it was now permissible to do whatever was necessary to maintain power. This was a style that started to take hold with Congressman Newt Gingrich in the 1980s, accelerated with the Tea Party in the 2010s and culminated with the Trump presidency. It placed partisanship above the needs of governance or the health of political institutions. There was no longer a need for elected officials to balance all three responsibilities, according to this logic: every process and procedure could be weaponized when necessary.



# In UP, BJP = Yogi Adityanath. The Party Takes A Tough Call

Despite a significant chunk of senior leaders in Uttar Pradesh conveying their dissatisfaction with Yogi Adityanath to the BJP's decision-makers, the party is clear that the next state election, now less than a year away, will be contested without any change to his status. The view within the party, sources say, on the condition of anonymity, is that it's best to wait for the election result. If it is not commanding, the party can then justifiably "cut him down to size". All of last week, representatives of the BJP and its ideological mentor, the RSS, travelled to UP to survey the increasing criticism of Yogi Adityanath, age 49. The resentment against him had been growing for a while with critics alleging that he consults them for neither decisions nor feedback, but it peaked as the invidious second wave of Coronavirus spread through India's most populous state. The mission to gauge Yogi Adityanath's standing has reportedly found truth in the charges of disenchantment with him, but, as evidenced from a tweet by BL Santosh, General Secretary of the BJP, on June 1, Yogi Adityanath is secure. For



in any real way right now would be seen as an admission of a mistake. There's also the fact that his centralised control can work to the BJP's advantage. In 2017, when it won more than 300 of a total of 403 seats, the gigantic vote was undeniably for Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The party decided that such a strong result could be consolidated into effective governance only by a decisive leader who would also epitomise the commitment to Hindutva. So, Yogi Adityanath, five-time MP from Gorakhpur in the

announcement of his name. There was no dispute on this name and he was the consensus choice. In a sprawling state with competing factions among the party, the BJP believed that Yogi Adityanath would be the firm and tough binding force.

While Yogi Adityanath's administrative credentials were doubted - and his deliverables are not seen as particularly impressive, his Hindutva icon status has provided a strong cover. "He is not a UP leader anymore. He is a Hindutva icon who has mass appeal across the country. Even state units from the south want him to come and campaign," said a senior BJP leader from UP.

Till April this year, those within the party and those in opposition who found the Chief Minister wanting relied mainly on charges of him favouring the Thakurs or upper castes for key roles and appointments. He was also seen as inaccessible to everyone except his key aides and uninterested in including senior ministers in processes.

Then, the second wave erupted, with indicting pictures of dead bodies floating down the Ganga, and of village after village submerged with mass cremations. The administration and the Chief Minister insisted that there was no fudging of data to disguise the extent of the crisis. But the pictures spoke for themselves, contrasting the implausible claims of a situation well under control. And its mismanagement made sure that the dam of patience broke.

In itself, the mishandling of the second wave was not what triggered BJP leaders. But it provided them with an entry point

to voice the frustration that had been assembling within them for the last couple of years. Leaders had also just witnessed the PM accepting feedback from MLAs in Uttarakhand who were railing against the Chief Minister there; he was quickly replaced in a rare mid-term change. This incentivised the UP brigade to make their own complaints known. But UP is no Uttarakhand. And in any case, the shuffle in Uttarakhand had hardly been seamless. The new Chief Minister, Tirat Singh Rawat, has made a series of statements, including on ripped jeans and the US 'ruling India', that have been awkward for his party. And his handling of Covid after the Kumbh Mela has been startling. Yogi Adityanath was not at a meeting held less than two weeks ago on the electoral strategy for Uttar Pradesh. The PM, Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP chief JP Nadia and several RSS officials, including Dattatreya Hosable, discussed how to correct missteps in India's politically most vital state. The mood at this meeting was clear - that UP leadership needs an Uttarakhand-like overhaul - only more dramatic and drastic. A general consensus was built that structural changes could be made to the state BJP unit and the UP government. It was after this that BL Santosh, BJP General Secretary, was rushed to Lucknow to meet party functionaries and take 'feedback'. Yogi Adityanath wasn't present in Mr Santosh's meeting with workers at the party office, but they did meet separately.

There was speculation that one of Yogi Adityanath's two Deputy Chief Ministers, Keshav Maurya,

will be asked to serve as BJP state president. And a former senior bureaucrat, AK Sharma, known for holding the confidence of the PM, will replace Keshav Maurya as Deputy Chief Minister. AK Sharma was recently made a member of the Legislative Council in the state, and he has been entrusted with fixing the Covid situation in Varanasi, the PM's constituency. This Delhi-dictated elevation of Mr Sharma has been a huge irritant for Yogi Adityanath. Among the conflict zones, sources say, has been AK Sharma's presence at official meetings led by the Chief Minister on Varanasi. Reports of AK Sharma's role being conflated with a PM-vs-Yogi problem have multiplied. Today, sources said that the PM had called Yogi Adityanath to wish him on his birthday; this was made known to reporters after speculation over why the PM had not wished Yogi Adityanath on Twitter. Sources said the PM has, during the second wave of Covid, not wished any leader on Twitter, once customary of him. After BL Santosh returned to Delhi and shared his report with the BJP's top leadership, nothing has changed. The BJP will go to the polls with Yogi Adityanath as its face and Swatantra Dev Singh as the party state president. But the party cannot ignore that the protests were so loud that a Union Minister wrote a letter to talk of the difficulties faced by his constituency in having basic Covid needs addressed. And MLAs and party workers created enough pressure for the PM and the entire Sangh establishment to take note. Party leaders privately admit that the present impasse reflects poorly on both the Chief Minister and the central party leadership. But the hope is that the last few weeks have signalled to Yogi Adityanath that his role is being questioned; rather than forcing some form of compliance from him, the party hopes he will have a change in attitude. For the Chief Minister, the landscape is clear - a poor result will mean a reconfiguration of his place in the scheme of things; a strong result could bring him even bigger stature in his party, and make him the outright runner-up to the BJP's biggest face for any election, the Prime Minister.



now.

In five weeks, @myogiadityanath's Uttar Pradesh reduced the new daily case count by 93% ... Remember it's a state with 20+ Cr population . When municipality CMs could not manage a city of 1.5Cr population , Yogiji managed quite effectively .

- B L Santhosh (@blsanthosh) June 1, 2021

Not acting against Yogi Adityanath should be considered the BJP's UP compulsion. In virtually every BJP campaign for states ranging from Bihar to Bengal, he has been given the status of a star campaigner. So, to downsize him

eastern part of the state, was given the job.

The decision was unconventional. Yogi Adityanath, a saffron robe-wearing priest, does not have the organisational discipline or credentials of belonging to the Sangh. He drew his influence from his standing as the top priest of the Gorakhnath math or sect on his home turf. And his Hindu Vahini, a youth organisation, was both feared and instrumental in the politics of the region.

This enabled his appointment as Chief Minister at a meeting of the BJP's elected candidates, where the party's central observers made the surprise





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# BJP Deals Setback To Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's 'Mission UP'



Jitin Prasada, senior Congress leader, today joined the BJP, a move that is not surprising considering that he began talks with BJP leaders ahead of the 2019 general election. At that time, things did not materialize and he contested the election unsuccessfully. Then, this year, he was given the responsibility of the West Bengal election by the Congress high command, but he failed to deliver. For the past few years, he tried to project himself as a tall Brahmin leader of central Uttar Pradesh, constantly flagging alleged Brahmin atrocities in the state through his social media platforms. A few years ago, he launched a non-political platform dedicated to Brahmins called Brahma Chetna Parishad. Last year, he wrote a letter to Yogi Adityanath, asking

him to restore the public holiday of Parshuram Jayanti which was cancelled by Yogi when he came to power. By roping him in, the BJP has tried to send a message to the powerful Brahmin community in the state that it has acknowledged their uneasiness and allegations of neglect and that as Chief Minister, Yogi Adityanath favours the strong Rajput lobby in the state. There are reports that some senior Brahmin leaders of the BJP feel sidelined. Senior leaders belonging to this community Kalraj Mishra and Kesrinath Tripathi were appointed governors and another senior leader and former state president Laxmikant Vajpayee was sidelined after he lost the election.

The BJP cannot afford to ignore

the powerful Brahmin community which has supported the party since 2014. With a significance presence, constituting around 10% in the state, they play a major role in the formation of governments. Till 1989, they supported the Congress, but the Ram Mandir movement sought them shifting their support wholeheartedly to the BJP. After that, though, Kalyan Singh's constant tussle with Atal Bihari Vajpayee annoyed the community. In 2007, many of them surprised political pundits by choosing Mayawati who had chosen many Brahmin candidates to knit together a unique Brahmin-Dalit base. With the emergence of Hindutva mascot Narendra Modi at the centre, the Brahmins returned to the BJP fold. In 2017, Yogi Adityanath was not projected as the Chief Ministerial candidate; it was the PM who was responsible for the BJP's lavish result. Yesterday, by appointing seasoned retired bureaucrat Anup Chandra Pandey as Election Commissioner and today, by inducting Jitin Prasada, the BJP's Brahmin outreach is clear.

The problem is that. Jitin Prasada does not have a pan-UP appeal; nor can he claim to be a leader

of the entire Brahmin community. He lost the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections, as also the 2017 assembly election. Recently, his sister-in-law, Radhika Prasad, lost the panchayat poll to a BJP leader. A senior BJP leader from UP told me that the Jitin Prasada's arrival serves to demonstrate that the Congress party is losing ground and even senior leaders of the party do not believe in the Gandhi leadership. There were four young Congress leaders who were considered very close to Rahul Gandhi - Jyotiraditya Scindia, Sachin Pilot, Jitin Prasada and Milind Deora. Now, two of them, Scindia and Prasada, have joined hands with the BJP, while Pilot tried to dislodge Ashok Gehlot last year in Rajasthan. Deora has praised BJP leaders on social media. According to the BJP leader who spoke to me, Rahul Gandhi attacks PM Modi everyday on Twitter for mishandling Covid, but his own party leaders praise the leadership of the Prime Minister. This, says the source, is a clear indication that Rahul Gandhi has failed to read the writing on the wall and together with his sister, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, he has failed to revive the party in crucial states. The

party continues to face internal problems in states where it is in power, like Punjab and Rajasthan. Prasada is one of the 23 senior Congress leaders who wrote to Sonia Gandhi demanding changes in the party's functioning; his exit demonstrates that the crisis is very deep within the party and in the coming days, other leaders may head out.

It is also a setback to Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's 'Mission UP', a state where she has been constantly trying to strengthen the grassroots base of the Congress. She has been attacking Yogi Adityanath for his alleged failure in tackling the Covid pandemic even as the Congress contemplates a Brahmin leader like Acharya Pramod for the post of PCC chief. With this change, the Congress was hoping to become an alternative for the upset Brahmin community but Prasada's departure may have damaged that. There is a talk that the Samajwadi Party is considering fielding a large number of Brahmin candidates to tap their anger. That is why it was important for the BJP to move swiftly.

## Jitin Prasada's Move Reflects Worse On BJP Than Congress

One consequence of doing political commentary in an age when the government does not take kindly to criticism is that it becomes difficult to speak truth to power. Far easier, then, to speak truth to the powerless. So each time an Opposition party faces a crisis or suffers a setback, the TV channels and commentators are at it again. Aren't things in a terrible way? Who do we blame for this latest problem? Shouldn't heads roll? And so on. Fortunately for the media, the Congress is always ready with a crisis or two so that the Commentariat can stay in business. And the old questions about the future of young leaders, about the increasing irrelevance of the Congress, about the evils of dynasty, etc. are tiresomely recycled day after day, night after night.

The announcement that Jitin

Prasada is joining the BJP should raise as many questions about the BJP as about the Congress. After all, Prasada's exit is no surprise. He had been on the verge of a similar journey two years ago. And while he is a bright, decent, personable and competent person, his exit will not have an earth-shattering effect on the Congress.

On the other hand, that the BJP should choose to gleefully welcome him raises several questions. Prasada is from a political family. His father was Political Secretary to Rajiv Gandhi. His upbringing has been full of privilege: he is what the BJP would normally describe as a key member of the 'Lutyens Elite.' This may have been fine when he was in the Congress, where none of these things matter. But how does the BJP reconcile his arrival with its own professed hatred of dynasty

and its campaign against what it calls the 'Lutyens Elite'? And how about the air of privilege that surrounds such men as Prasada, Jyotiraditya Scindia and Sachin Pilot, who the BJP also tried so hard to recruit?

It could be that the BJP has decided that dynasty is not such a bad thing after all. And that there is much to love and admire about what it once regarded as the privileged Lutyens class. It is instructive that when Prasada was welcomed into the BJP, his Doon School background was mentioned in favourable terms. So perhaps this is the new BJP, a party that genuflects before privilege. But if this is indeed the case, then I think we should be told.

There is another factor. The BJP, unlike the Congress, which has always been all things to all people, has focussed on preserving a distinct identity.



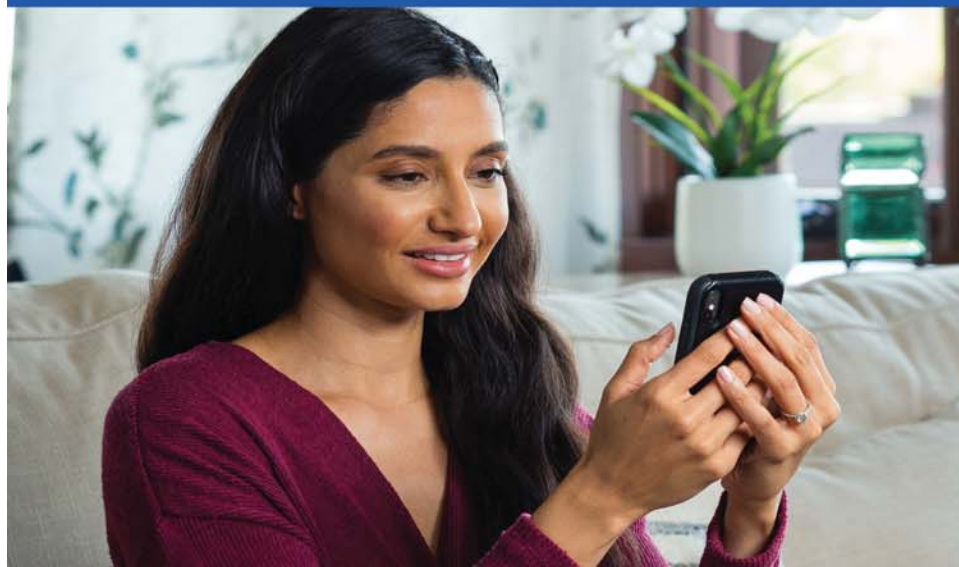
When it starts accepting defectors from other parties, especially those who have previously attacked the Hindutva project, it risks losing that identity. We saw this in West Bengal where wholesale purchases were made of large chunks of the Trinamool Congress. In the process, the BJP's loyal, long-time workers were demoralised, and voters began to wonder how different the BJP really was if it was

willing to embrace the very people it had once attacked. The result was a humiliating election defeat.

As far as the Congress is concerned, Prasada's exit is a sideshow. It has been clear for the last two years that the model of leadership chosen by Rahul Gandhi had failed. Rahul had surrounded himself with people like himself: young, Western-educated, smart, dynasts; the sons of older Congress leaders.



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# A year of internal and external challenges

**Irrespective of the reasons, the images of China in Ladakh and farmers at Delhi's borders have tested the State's strength and democratic credibility.**

This week marks a year since India and China began formal military talks to resolve the standoff in eastern Ladakh. It has also been a year since the Centre promulgated three ordinances on agriculture. This means that it has been a year since India has been grappling with its most serious external security challenge in over two decades (since Kargil), and the most serious internal political mobilisation against the Centre in a decade (since the India Against Corruption movement, though the farm protests have much deeper social roots). In both cases, a resolution remains elusive and India's capacity has come under the scanner. Take the Ladakh situation first. After many rounds of political,



diplomatic, and military talks, there was a breakthrough with both sides disengaging in the Pangong Tso area. It was a

testament to the Indian Army's ability to stand up to the People's Liberation Army, occupy strategic heights in the

Kailash range, and the ability of diplomats to leverage it to push back China. But using the leverage has meant that India's

ability to now force, or persuade, China to restore status quo ante in other areas - Hot Springs, Gogra, Depsang - is limited. Status quo is extracting a military and strategic cost, but breaking the status quo won't be easy. The farm protests are a product of the Centre's unilateral push on a sensitive issue, and then a maximalist position adopted by farm leaders - which, then, resulted in protests during a pandemic, refusal to negotiate with a spirit of give-and-take, and unacceptable violence on January 26. Irrespective of the reasons, the images of China in Ladakh and farmers at Delhi's borders have tested the State's strength and democratic credibility.

## Correcting the vaccine course

**In an address to the nation on Monday evening, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi declared that the Centre would take over the responsibility of procuring 75% of the vaccines (from the current 50%), and provide them free to the states for all those above the age of 18 (and thus relieve states of the responsibility of procuring and paying for vaccines) from June 21**



the complexities of the vaccination process and asked for a reversal to the older system, citing it as the basis for Monday's shift. But the truth is more complex, for it involves the fundamental issue of inadequate supplies, although the PM did speak of how, going forward, more

vaccines will be available in the country. India did set up an expert group on vaccines last April, but did not place any advance orders for vaccines, Indian or foreign. The resulting supply crunch, most evident in May, caused the Supreme Court to criticise the government for its "arbitrary and

irrational" vaccine policy. Still, the Centre has done the right thing now. Taking ownership of vaccine procurement, providing doses for free, while leaving distribution to states and allowing the private sector to continue to serve those willing to pay is a better model.

## The dynastic turn in TMC

With the appointment of West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee's nephew, Abhishek Banerjee, as the party's all-India general secretary, yet another regional party in India has formally taken the dynastic route to political leadership. Mr Banerjee, a Member of Parliament, has been the de facto number two in the Trinamool Congress (TMC) for some years now; he also played a key role in the election campaign of 2021, bringing in consultant Prashant Kishor to the aid of the party after the 2019 Lok Sabha election debacle. But the de facto has now

become de jure - and the line of succession in the TMC is clear. Ms Banerjee's chosen heir is Mr Banerjee. The episode throws up a larger question about the resilience of dynastic politics - where the bloodline determines political leadership. This is not just true for the Congress nationally, but the entire gamut of regional parties. In the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, MK Stalin succeeded M Karunanidhi. In Shiv Sena, Uddhav Thackeray took forward Bal Thackeray's legacy, though he has moved it in a different direction. In the Rashtriya Janata Dal, Tejashwi

Yadav has emerged as the clear leader with his father, Lalu Prasad, out of political action due to corruption cases and ill health. In the Samajwadi Party, Akhilesh Yadav fought a bruising battle with his uncle and even engaged in shadow-boxing with his father, but established his control. In the Bahujan Samaj Party, Mayawati's nephew is assuming a greater role. The Abdullahs control the National Conference, and in Peoples Democratic Party, the Mufti's death saw his daughter Mehbooba Mufti take over the party.

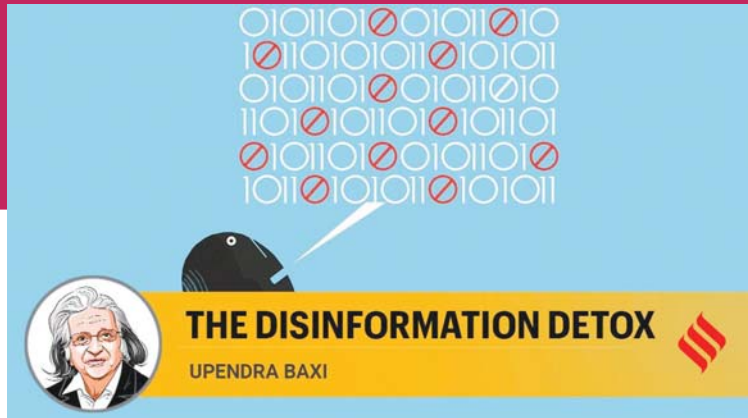
In an address to the nation on Monday evening, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi declared that the Centre would take over the responsibility of procuring 75% of the vaccines (from the current 50%), and provide them free to the states for all those above the age of 18 (and thus relieve states of the responsibility of procuring and paying for vaccines) from June 21. The Centre and the states, he said, would together work out the guidelines. The Centre also imposed a ₹150 cap on the service charge on each dose that will apply to the remaining 25%

of vaccines which can be sourced and distributed by the private sector. The new framework is a much-needed correction in the vaccine policy. The PM's announcement marks yet another dramatic shift in the country's vaccine policy. Mr Modi said that the arrangement between January 16 to April 30 - which was based on a phased rollout for priority groups, with the Centre procuring vaccines - was altered from May 1 due to the demand of states and other stakeholders for greater decentralisation. He claimed that states then began understanding



# How to protect human rights in the digital era

**Upendra Baxi writes: Despite the threat of information disorder, human rights-friendly governance is both possible and doable.**



speech, press, and media platforms.

The UNHRC report specifically speaks of "information disorder" that arises from disinformation which is "politically polarising, hinders people from meaningfully exercising their human rights, and destroys their trust in governments and institutions". Human rights provide a "powerful and appropriate framework" to "challenge falsehoods and present alternative viewpoints". It justifies utilitarianism of human rights: Because freedom of opinion and expression enables governance and development; further, "civil society, journalists and others are able to challenge falsehoods and present alternative viewpoints". Human rights friendly governance is both possible and doable; it is also desirable, as it protects political power against itself.

Recalling the UNHRC's condemnation of inherently "disproportionate" and "blanket" internet shutdowns, the report asserts that "reactive content moderation efforts" are unlikely to make any worthwhile difference in the "absence of a serious review of the business model that underpins much of the drivers of disinformation and misinformation". Problems of "inconsistent application of companies' terms of service, inadequate redress mechanisms and a lack of transparency and access to data" re-emerge constantly. Furthermore, "although the platforms are global businesses, they do not appear to apply their policies consistently across all geographical areas or to uphold human rights in all jurisdictions to the same extent". Internet shutdowns do "not curb

disinformation but, rather, hamper fact-finding and are likely to encourage rumours", and are manifestly contrary to rights against discrimination when "aimed at silencing minority voices and depriving them of access to vital information".

The report unequivocally maintains that disinformation "endangers the right to freedom of opinion and expression". It "poses a threat not only to the safety of journalists but also to the media ecosystem in which they operate" and forces the "legacy media to divert precious resources from reporting to dispelling and debunking lies". Bemoaning the lack of legislative and judicial clarity on the twin concepts of "disinformation" and "misinformation", it emphasises that the intention to harm is decisive to the former.

Two very critical human rights events occurred recently. The Supreme Court of India (SC) further warned against any "clampdown" on "free speech". And the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) Special Rapporteur Irene Khan submitted her report on "Disinformation and Freedom of Opinion and Expression", which is slated for discussion between June 21 and July 9. Justices Dhananjay Chandrachud, L Nageswara Rao and S Ravindra Bhat declared that any "clampdown on information on social media or harassment caused to individuals seeking/ delivering help on any platform will

attract a coercive exercise of jurisdiction by this Court". The SC mandated not just the registrar (judicial) to place this "order before all district magistrates in the country" but also directed the central and state governments to notify "all chief secretaries/director generals of police/commissioners of police". Suo motu "coercive action" action for contempt of the court may also spill over to other types of criminal proceedings. Although tethered to the Covid-19 context, the SC reinforces past precedents enshrining the principle that abuse of public power may not unreasonably or arbitrarily curb the freedom of

## A favor from Russian ransomware hackers

When President Joe Biden meets with Russian President Vladimir Putin later this month, he will undoubtedly bring up -- as he should -- the matter of repeated ransomware attacks against US targets by Russian-based hackers. Putin could surely do more, something, to rein in the cybercriminals. The Kremlin has a history of working with hackers, and many experts believe the cyberattacks would not be happening without some measure of consent from Putin. Given the strained relationship between both countries, one can easily picture Putin's sporting his self-satisfied grin at the sight of the United States even mildly hobbled, looking vulnerable as the result of actions by clever Russian computer aces, as happened last month when Russian hackers struck the Colonial Pipeline, causing gasoline shortages and panic buying across the US Southeastern seaboard.

Biden should demand action from Putin, and he should take steps to make sure hackers who target the US, and the governments

who facilitate their work or turn a blind eye to it, pay a price. Anything else will result in ever-escalating assaults on America's ability to function.

And yet, the hacks and the ransomware attacks -- in which cybercriminals demand money in exchange for releasing a computer network -- are serving a useful purpose for the United States. They are warning the country about a growing danger, and helpfully pointing out precisely where the vulnerabilities lie.

The future of conflict is here. Whether a full-on war or low-grade clashes, cyberattacks are sure to play a major role in any significant battles for the foreseeable future.

The Biden administration has caught on to that inescapable fact and seems ready to tackle it.

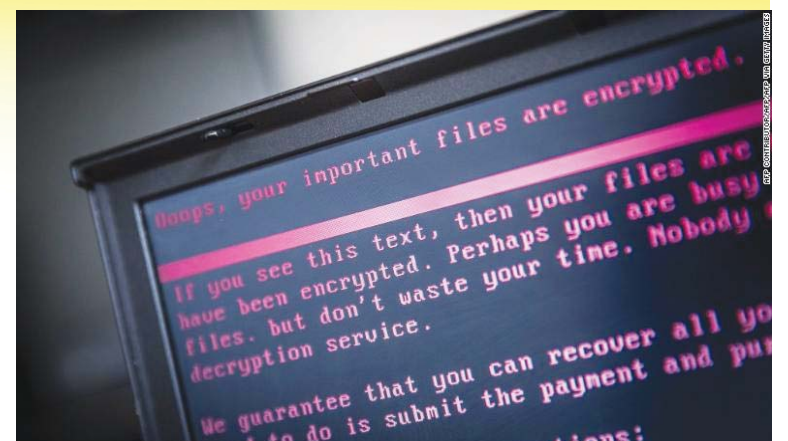
The Justice Department has raised investigations into ransomware attacks and similar hacks to the same priority as fighting terrorism, and not a moment too soon.

What we have seen so far has

been disturbing, but it's only a taste of what could come. Among the hacks we know about are the ransomware attacks on the Colonial Pipeline, JBS -- the world's biggest meat producer -- the New York City subway system, a local California police department and on the city of Atlanta.

Imagine what else hackers could target, and what damage they could inflict. Hackers are targeting major infrastructure, with the potential to cause mayhem and inflict a great deal of pain.

FBI Director Christopher Wray, who likened the challenge of the threat to 9/11, told The Wall Street Journal, "The scale of this problem is one that I think the country has to come to terms with." Fortunately, we're getting the first salvos to help the US and other countries build up defenses (The US isn't the only country struggling with this problem; just last month, Ireland's health services suffered a serious cyberattack). The Biden administration has instructed private companies to bolster their



cybersecurity as it designs the government's strategy.

Under the new plan, all information about ransomware and other assaults by cybercriminals will be centrally coordinated and investigated by a new task force. It's an effort to "connect the dots," a term heard often after the 9/11 post-mortem showed that bits of information pointing to a major attack had been scattered across a network of security agencies that did not share information effectively. This time, Washington is trying to solve the problem before the disaster.

Sure, when Biden meets with

Putin he should bring up the matter with the seriousness it deserves. Will Putin do anything? The Kremlin is already deriding the FBI director's comments that single out Russian actors as the source of many ransomware attacks by calling it an "emotional" response. But whether or not Putin cracks down on hackers is not the most important part. What matters is sending a message that there's a price to pay for the attack; punishing the perpetrators and their enablers and creating a system that will start blocking the assaults on the US and other countries.



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# Can't blame the gods: Discovering free will during Covid-19



*For individuals to be held accountable is not only very new for Indian society, it goes against the most dominant grain in the history of thinking and decision-making in the Indian subcontinent.*

Social media may manage to do something which governments and courts could not. Ever since Twitter tagged Sambit Patra's tweet on the alleged Congress toolkit as "manipulated media", it would seem that enforcing "good behaviour" is now part and parcel of the job of social media managers. This is an entirely new phenomenon. Much like a global school teacher who enforces good behaviour on wayward children. The most surprising thing is that people are accepting such disciplining.

Even the gods, exasperated parents' last choice of authority in earlier times, have found their role eroded. "God will punish you if you do wrong" is a phrase that

has gone missing from the present-day parents' lexicon.

Come to think of it, people have stopped holding the gods responsible for most things. Perhaps for the first time in decades, even centuries, people have increasingly assumed responsibility for what is happening to them instead of blaming it on the gods. The devastating waves of Covid in India were blamed, depending on your mood and political predilections, variously on Narendra Modi, Kumbh, elections, etc. Not a single god got blamed. Gods weren't invoked even for finding a way out of the pandemic. Rather, the focus was on ensuring social distancing, inoculation, wearing of masks

and, some efforts on the part of the government to reach relief to those in distress.

To me it seems that this is a new development in our society, with people exercising moral choices more consciously. Which, in turn, will also result in greater stresses for an individual. Especially if we remain a society where success matters, kids are judged on whether they have topped the class, and we continue to differentiate between our young people on the basis of how well they perform in highly structured tests rather than in real life. This business of creating a society where individuals are held accountable for their failures is not just very new, it also goes against the most dominant grain in the history of thinking and decision-making in the Indian subcontinent. Free will isn't the dominant theme in India. Obedience and its inverse, disobedience, is. The Mahabharat, the largest compendium of moral tales in India, places the argument for free will in the mouth of Draupadi, the

one who has been most wronged. She exhorts her husband Yudhishthira to pick up arms in the Aranyaka Parva. The good fellow that he is, Yudhishthira refuses. Instead, he counsels patience and faith in God. Anger, he says, is the root of all evil. Draupadi's exhortations to exercise free will in favour of justice get rejected. Even Krishna comes across similar inaction from Arjuna. Krishna's entire discourse in the Bhagavad Gita, is about multiple arguments to convince Arjuna to pick up arms, perform action. Finally, he has to resort to a direct order. When all else fails, he commands Arjuna to surrender himself to God and blindly obey the directions of a superior being to fight for a good cause. Given that such a social paradigm underlies Indian belief systems, it is a vast and refreshing change to notice that people today refuse to bemoan the gods and an evil fate for the pandemic. The numerous recriminatory discussions on social media about oxygen

plants, vaccine production, Modi's responsibility and tricks to survive the pandemic - these are new trends. How best to beat the virus through human effort - this is a new thing.

While more and more people accept responsibility for their fate, the counter trend that we see is of ever stronger social orthodoxies being dictated by new corporates. Till a few years ago, the worst that might happen to an individual, apart from natural disasters, was to be fired from a job, fail to get a promotion, or to have your spouse abandon you. Today, the greatest calamity that might befall an individual is to be banned from social media platforms for what is deemed to be an offensive post. To be banned from social media means an end to your virtual social existence. Donald Trump experienced it, as has Kangana Ranaut. And the ban need not be for people who were using social media to bring about some sort of counter-revolution.

## The media is still mostly failing to convey the urgency of the climate crisis

The TV newsman Bill Moyers likes to tell the story of how Edward R Murrow, the pre-eminent US broadcast journalist of his time, insisted on covering what became Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939. Murrow's bosses at CBS News had other priorities; they ordered Murrow's reporters to cover dance competitions in Hamburg, Paris and London, explaining that Americans needed some happy news. Murrow wouldn't do it. "It'll probably get us fired," he told his colleagues, but he sent his correspondents to the German-Polish border; they arrived just in time to witness Hitler's tanks and troops roar into Poland. Suddenly, Europe was at war. And Americans heard about it because journalists at one of the nation's most influential news outlets defied convention and did their jobs. Today, all of humanity is under

attack, this time from an overheated planet - and too many newsrooms still are more inclined to cover today's equivalent of dance competitions. The record heatwaves and storms of 2020 confirmed what scientists have long predicted: climate change is under way and threatens unparalleled catastrophe. And because carbon dioxide traps heat in the atmosphere for centuries, temperature rise and its effects are only getting started. As one scientist said as wildfires turned San Francisco's skies orange last September, "We're going to look back in 10 years, certainly 20 ... and say, 'Wow, 2020 was a crazy year, but I miss it.'"

A handful of major newspapers are paying attention. But most news coverage, especially on television, continues to underplay the climate story,

regarding it as too complicated, disheartening or controversial. Last month, we asked the world's press to commit to treating climate change as the emergency that scientists say it is; their response was dispiriting.

We created Covering Climate Now in April 2019 to help break the media's climate silence; Bill Moyers talked about Murrow at our inaugural conference. Since then, Covering Climate Now has grown into a consortium of hundreds of news outlets reaching a combined audience of roughly 2 billion people, and the climate coverage of the media as a whole has noticeably improved.

But that coverage is still not going nearly far enough. To convey to audiences that civilization is literally under attack, news outlets should play the climate story much bigger,



running more stories - especially about how climate change is increasingly affecting weather, economics, politics and other spheres of life - and running those stories at the top, not the bottom, of a homepage or broadcast. News reports should also speak much more plainly, presenting climate change as an imminent, deadly threat.

This message is muted at best today, and the result is predictable. In the United States,

only 26% of the public is "alarmed" about climate change, according to polls analyzed by the Yale Project on Climate Change Communications (a member of the CCNow consortium). One reason? Less than a quarter of the public hear about climate change in the media at least once a month.

Good journalism leads the conversation, and there is certainly plenty of climate news worth covering these days.





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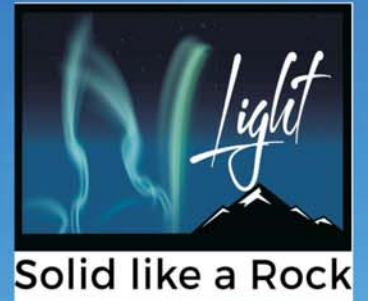
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# Jeff Bezos' bad billionaire example

Jeff Bezos seems to have run out of things to colonize here on Earth. His company, Amazon, now commands almost half of America's online retail purchases, according to one estimate. Amazon has acquired Whole Foods, a major grocery chain, and the powerhouse Hollywood studio MGM. Bezos has also bought The Washington Post and is now the richest person in the world. So, with little left to acquire on this planet, he's turning his sights to outer space.

Bezos announced Monday that he'll be joining the first manned flight of Blue Origin, his space company, next month, along with his brother. Media coverage quickly focused on the fact that Bezos will beat out other male billionaires like Elon Musk and Richard Branson in entering outer space first. But, from a moral perspective, Bezos should really be spending more time looking down rather than up.

According to the World Bank, 689 million people are living in

extreme poverty, which is defined as less than \$1.90 per day. Half of them are children. The coronavirus pandemic has demolished two decades of progress, pushing an additional 120 million people into extreme poverty -- a number that is only expected to rise by the end of the year.

With an estimated net worth of \$187 billion, there's a whole lot Bezos could do to change that -- especially given the time he'll now have on his hands since he's stepping down from his role as Amazon's chief executive.

For example, a gift of just \$58 to a nonprofit like the International Rescue Committee -- an organization I support despite a net worth far below that of Bezos, and hope you will too -- can send a child to school for an entire year. Just imagine what could be done with \$1 billion -- the amount Bezos once said he was investing each year in his rocket development. In fact, the Brookings Institution calculated that billionaires who are worth far

less than Bezos could singlehandedly lower the poverty rates in their countries significantly.

In the United States, one-third of wealthy American households stepped up their charitable giving to organizations helping others meet their basic needs last year in recognition of the vast challenges spawned by the pandemic, according to Bank of America and the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. One might have expected Bezos to focus more on the good he could do, considering how richly he profited off of the pandemic: Amazon saw a nearly 200% increase in profits as Americans shopped online during the pandemic.

With \$187 billion, the reality is that Bezos doesn't have to choose between helping others and building his own space enterprise. And he does make significant charitable contributions -- notably, the single-largest charitable contribution in 2020 came from



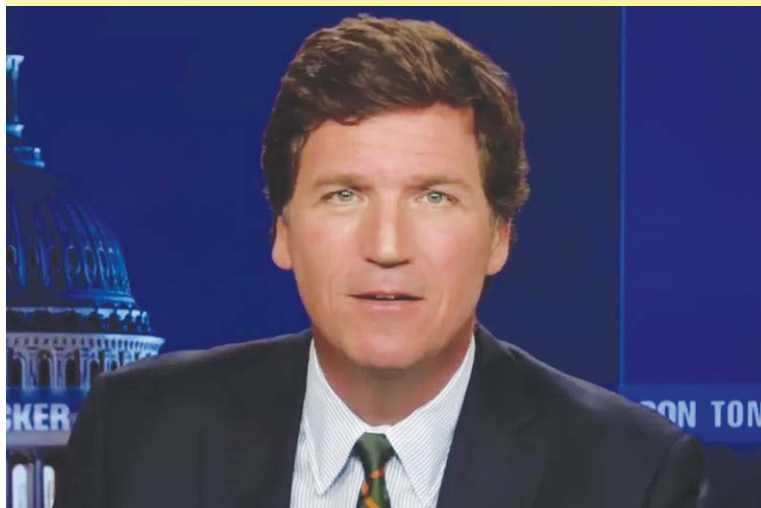
Bezos, according to The Chronicle of Philanthropy (a \$10 billion gift aimed at fighting climate change). But for Bezos to throw his money so wantonly into the solar system is a bit of a sickening choice at a time in the world when people have been dying of Covid in India due to lax of oxygen.

For a better model of what to do with his money, Bezos might look at his ex-wife, MacKenzie Scott -- who, along with her new husband, Dan Jewett, has signed the Giving Pledge, promising to donate the majority of their wealth. In 2020, Scott gave away

almost \$6 billion. Recently, she has focused on supporting historically Black colleges and universities, proving that she has the ability to empathize with people whose experiences are different from her own.

Meanwhile, Bezos has been making global headlines for the lavish lifestyle he's enjoying with girlfriend Lauren Sanchez, spending \$255 million on luxury Los Angeles mansions last year while the world was ravaged by a pandemic, and investing in a new yacht believed to cost about \$500 million. But it's not just about Bezos's spending.

## Mainstream media thinks Kamala Harris is a god, Latin America disagrees



Two years ago, during the Democratic presidential primaries, Kamala Harris appeared on CNN to explain where she stood in the race. At that moment, Harris had just been memorably humiliated by Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii during a televised debate, and she was trying to explain what had happened. "I'm obviously a top-tier candidate," Harris said. "And so I did expect that I would be on the stage and take hits tonight." Now, if you were following the race at that moment, you chuckled.

Kamala Harris was not a top-tier candidate, not then, not ever. Not

since the day she actually announced. On paper, she'd seemed like a serious contender. She was a U.S. senator from the country's biggest state, a former prosecutor, who enjoyed nearly universal support among Washington Post reporters and MSNBC anchors. It seemed for a while like it could work. The problem was, actual voters found her repellent. We don't need to guess about this, we have the numbers.

The more Kamala Harris they got, the more repelled they became. By December, Harris was losing to Andrew Yang in her own state. The majority of California

Democrats said they wanted her to drop out of the race. Harris was even getting crushed in Iowa, a tiny state where she'd spent virtually all of her money. So, even in a business famous for rewarding falseness, Kamala Harris was just too phony to win. She was too fake for politics. So how did Kamala Harris wind up effectively in charge of the entire country? That's a question that historians of democracy will ponder for decades - democracy being, you'll remember from school, a system in which citizens get to choose their own leaders. Yet apart from a few handlers around Joe Biden, no one really chose Kamala Harris. It's a pretty amazing story, actually. It's frustrating, as well as deeply amusing. So, take a moment once in a while, just a pause, a respite, to enjoy the pure absurdity of Kamala D. Harris. You'll find it refreshing.

This is a fully vaccinated person who recently kissed her fully vaccinated husband, while both of them were wearing surgical masks, and then pretended it was entirely normal. Just like you do at home. Kissing your husband

with a surgical mask. This is the daughter of two college professors who tells you with a straight face she grew up poor and oppressed under Jim Crow in California.

This is a person who can't stop lecturing you about American values, what this country stands for, despite the fact she didn't grow up here. Harris went to high school in Montreal. Yet even in French-speaking Canada, she now tells us, quote "many generations" of her Indian and Jamaican family somehow celebrated Kwanzaa, a holiday that was invented in Los Angeles in 1966. And we could go on.

But let's summarize it for you: How fake is Kamala Harris? Let's put it this way: She can't even decide how to pronounce her own first name. We've heard her say it at least two different ways with maximum confidence.

Imagine being her. What would your life be like? Among other things, you'd be terrified at any moment of being pulled off-script, because once you're off the script, what would you say? How would you know? You don't even know who you are. Something like that just happened, when

Harris spoke to her friends at NBC News.

HOLT: Do you have any plans to visit the border?

HARRIS: At some point, you know, we are going to the border. We've been to the border. So this whole thing about the border. We've been to the border. We've been to the border,' she repeated.

HOLT: You haven't been to the border.

HARRIS: And I haven't been to Europe. (laughs) And I mean, I don't understand the point that you're making.

"I don't understand the point that you're making." Of course, she doesn't understand the point. No one ever asks her real questions. When was the last time that happened? Tulsi Gabbard may have been the last person to do it. In the years since Harris has continued to ascend. How did she do that? Purely on the basis of how she looks. Meanwhile, because it is so improbable that someone this unimpressive has become so powerful, the people in charge are forced to assure us, almost with hysteria, that she is brilliant and impressive.



## Nepal stops distribution of Coronil kits gifted by Patanjali, cites lack of proof on efficacy



Patanjali should register the product here under the Department of Drug Administration, added the spokesperson of the Nepalese health ministry.

Officials from the department also cited the observations made by the Indian Medical Association (IMA) recently against Coronil where they had challenged Ramdev to prove its efficacy.

Nepal is the second country after Bhutan to stop the distribution of Coronil kits. Bhutan's Drug Regulatory Authority had stopped the distribution of Coronil in the kingdom. Ramdev had recently claimed that allopathy is a "stupid science" and medicines such as remdesivir, faviflu, and other drugs approved by the Drugs Controller General of India have failed to treat Covid-19 patients. His remarks were protested by the IMA and its Uttarakhand branch had lodged police complaint and sent a Rs 1,000 crore defamation notice to the yoga guru.

(News Agencies)-Nepal on Monday stopped the distribution of Coronil kits, gifted by yoga guru Ramdev's Patanjali Group, citing lack of proof of being effective in dealing with the Covid-19 virus.

According to reports, Nepal's Department of Ayurveda and Alternative Medicines in an order said the proper procedure was not followed while procuring the 1,500 kits of Coronil that Patanjali claims are useful in dealing with Covid-19 infection.

The latest order of the Government of Nepal reads,

"Tablets and nasal oil that are part of the Coronil kit are not equivalent to medicines to defeat Covid-19 virus." However, the health ministry clarified that there is no formal ban on Patanjali products. "Nepal's government has not issued any formal ban order against Patanjali's Ayurveda-based Coronil in the country", a health ministry spokesperson said on Tuesday. The spokesperson added that there is no official ban on distribution of Coronil kits, provided a certain procedure for distribution of medicines is followed.

## Boris Johnson, Imran Khan discuss Sindh train crash, Afghanistan situation

(News Agencies)-British Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke to his Pakistani counterpart Imran Khan on Monday to discuss the current situation in Afghanistan and reiterated the UK's efforts to use diplomatic and development tools at its disposal to support the region. During the call, the two leaders

began by expressing his condolences following the tragic loss of life in the train crash in Sindh," said a Downing Street spokesperson.

"The leaders discussed the current situation in Afghanistan. They agreed on the need to ensure a long-term future of peace and stability in the country. The

Prime Minister reiterated that the UK would continue to use the diplomatic and development tools at our disposal to support the government of Afghanistan," the



covered a range of issues, from the tragic train crash in Sindh that killed at least 50 people on Monday morning to the Pakistan-hosted World Environment Day event with the United Nations over the weekend.

They also covered the fight against coronavirus and resolved to work together to defeat the pandemic globally.

"The Prime Minister [Johnson]

spokesperson said. The two leaders also covered the need to "take action to cut carbon emissions and protect biodiversity" ahead of the UK-hosted COP26 Summit in Glasgow in November. The leaders also discussed the shared fight against coronavirus and resolved to work together to defeat the pandemic in our countries and around the world," the spokesperson added.

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The first signs of global warming are now clearly visible. We urgently need to limit greenhouse gas emissions. Nothing and no-one will be spared from climate change. This warning is therefore to all people, all countries and, in particular, to the Belgian Council of Ministers who, on the weekend of March 20 and 21, will have to decide what action to take regarding essential measures linked to the Kyoto Protocol.



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## FATF's regional body retains Pakistan on 'enhanced follow-up' for sufficient outstanding requirements

(News Agencies)-The Asia Pacific Group on Money Laundering has retained Pakistan on "enhanced follow-up" status for outstanding requirements, and Islamabad will continue to report back to it on the country's progress to strengthen its implementation of anti-money laundering and combating financing terror measures, according to a media report on Saturday. Pakistan was put on the grey list by the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in June 2018 and the country has been struggling to come out of it. The Asia Pacific

Group (APG) is a regional affiliate of the FATF. The second Follow-Up Report (FUR) on Mutual Evaluation of Pakistan released by the APG also downgraded the country on one criteria. The report said Pakistan was re-rated to 'compliant' status on five counts and on 15 others to 'largely

compliant' and on yet another count to 'partially compliant'.

Dawn newspaper reported that overall, Pakistan is now fully 'compliant' with seven recommendations and 'largely

The reporting date for this evaluation was October 1, 2020, which means Islamabad may have made further progress since then that would be evaluated at a later stage.

"Pakistan will move from enhanced (expedited) to enhanced follow-up, and will continue to report back to the APG on progress to strengthen its implementation of anti-money laundering and combating financing terror (AML/CFT) measures," the APG said. Pakistan submitted its third progress report in February 2021 which is yet to be evaluated.

"Overall, Pakistan has made notable progress in addressing the technical compliance deficiencies identified in its Mutual Evaluation Report (MER) and has been re-rated on 22 recommendations," the APG added.



compliant' with 24 others. The country is 'partially compliant' with seven recommendations and 'non-compliant' with two out of a total 40 recommendations. All in all, Pakistan is now compliant or largely compliant with 31 out of 40 FATF recommendations.

## Nepal reports 10 black fungus cases, 1 death

(News Agencies)-Nepal has reported its first death from mucormycosis or "black fungus", the highly deadly infection affecting thousands of coronavirus patients in neighbouring India.

Health ministry spokesman Krishna Prasad Poudel told AFP that there are now at least ten

nose and lips showed mucor," said a statement by the Seti Provincial Hospital on Thursday.

The man had however tested negative for coronavirus, the hospital said.

Previously very rare, mucormycosis is highly aggressive and surgeons sometimes have to remove patients' eyes, nose and jaw to stop it reaching the brain. The death rate is over 50 percent.

Thousands in India have caught the fungus in recent



cases in Nepal, which like India has been hit by a huge Covid-19 surge.

The 65-year-old man who died was being treated at the intensive care unit at a hospital in western Nepal after being diagnosed with temporal lobe encephalitis.

"He died on 3 June 2021... after a nasal swab test showed fungal hyphae and a biopsy test of

weeks in a wave of infections blamed on excessive use of steroids to treat the country's millions of Covid patients.

Nepal began recording a sharp rise in coronavirus cases in early April that peaked in mid-May at more than 9,000 infections a day. The daily rises have declined slightly but the healthcare system remains under pressure.

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# Latest photos of Kim Jong Un trigger speculation over North Korean leader's health

**North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's slimmer appearance triggered speculation about his health. Photographs that have emerged online show a slimmer Kim Jong Un after he emerged from a lengthy absence last weekend.**

(News Agencies)-When Kim Jong Un emerged from his lengthy absence last week, he looked noticeably slimmer. Photographs that emerged on social media showed a thinner Kim Jong Un, which triggered speculations that the weight loss might be a sign of deteriorating health. In images of Kim Jong Un, published by KCNA last weekend, the North Korean leader was seen addressing a ruling party

politburo meeting his first public appearance for a month.

Seoul-based news site Daily NK carried out a detailed analysis of Kim Jong Un's latest images. It compared the pictures of the North Korean leader from November-December, 2020, to April, 2021, and June, 2021.

In one of the images of Kim Jong Un, the North Korean leader was seen wearing an IWC Schaffhausen Portofino watch,

which, as per the website, suggested that Kim, who is believed to be 37, had tightened the strap on his favourite watch, reportedly worth \$12,000.

The photos also appeared to show that his left wrist is considerably thinner than in similar images taken in November 2020 and March this year.

his, however, isn't the first time the North Korean leader's health has been speculated about. Last



year, Kim Jong Un remained out of the limelight for 20 days, during which, he missed the birthday celebrations of his late grandfather and state founder Kim

Il Sung. Experts earlier assessed that Kim Jong Un was at high risk of cardiovascular disease with his family also having a history of heart issues.

# China's highest producer inflation in over 12 years highlights global price pressures



**China's producer price index (PPI) increased 9%, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said on Wednesday, as prices bounced back from last year's pandemic lows.**

(News Agencies)-China's May factory gate prices rose at their fastest annual pace in over 12 years due to surging commodity prices, highlighting global inflation pressures at a time when policymakers are

trying to revitalise COVID-hit growth.

Investors are increasingly worried pandemic-driven stimulus measures could supercharge global inflation and force central banks to tighten

policy, potentially curbing the recovery.

China's producer price index (PPI) increased 9.0%, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said on Wednesday, as prices bounced back from last year's pandemic lows.

The PPI rise in May - the fastest on-year gain for any month since September 2008 - was driven by significant price increases in crude oil, iron ore and non-ferrous metals, the NBS said. Analysts in a Reuters

poll had expected the PPI to rise 8.5% after a 6.8% increase in April. Shortly after the inflation data, the National Development and Reform Commission said China will closely monitor price movements of commodities and step up price forecasts to maintain market order.

"The worry is PPI may hover at an elevated level for an extended period of time, which would create economic headaches if the mid- or downstream firms fail to absorb higher costs," said Nie

Wen, chief economist at Hwabao Trust.

The PPI surge has yet to substantially feed through to consumer inflation, meaning the People's Bank of China is unlikely to worry for now.

Consumer prices rose 1.3% in May - the biggest year-on-year increase in eight months - but came in below expectations for a 1.6% gain. Consumer inflation remained well below the government's official target of around 3%.

# Child labour swells for first time in two decades: UN

**The world has witnessed the first rise in child labour in two decades and the Covid pandemic threatens to push more youngsters toward the same fate, the United Nations said.**

(News Agencies)-The world has marked the first rise in child labour in two decades and the coronavirus crisis threatens to push millions more youngsters toward the same fate, the United Nations said Thursday.

In a joint report, the International Labour Organization and the UN children's agency UNICEF said the number in child labour stood at 160 million at the start of 2020 -- an increase of 8.4 million in four years.

The hike began before the pandemic hit and marks a dramatic reversal of a downward

trend that had seen child labour numbers shrink by 94 million between year 2000 and 2016, it said. Just as the Covid-19 crisis was beginning to pick up steam, nearly one in 10 children globally were stuck in child labour, with sub-Saharan Africa the worst affected. While the percentage of children in child labour remained the same as in 2016, population growth meant that the numbers rose significantly. And the pandemic risks worsening the situation significantly, the agencies said. They warned that unless urgent action is taken to

help ballooning numbers of families plunging into poverty, nearly 50 million more kids could be forced into child labour over the next two years.

**LOSING GROUND**

"We are losing ground in the fight to end child labour," UNICEF chief Henrietta Fore told reporters, stressing that "the Covid-19 crisis is making a bad situation even worse."

"Now, well into a second year of global lockdowns, school closures, economic disruptions, and shrinking national budgets, families are forced to make heart-



breaking choices." If the latest projections of poverty increases due to the pandemic materialise, another nine million children will be pushed into child labour by the end of 2022, the report said. But

statistic modelling shows that number could potentially be more than five times higher, according to UNICEF statistics specialist Claudia Cappa, who co-authored the report.



# US to announce recovery of millions of dollars from Colonial Pipeline ransomware attack

**The US Justice Department is to announce the recovery of millions of dollars worth of cryptocurrency from the Colonial Pipeline Co. ransomware attack.**

(News Agencies)-The U.S. Justice Department will announce the recovery of millions of dollars worth of cryptocurrency from the Colonial Pipeline Co. (COLPI.UL) ransomware attack during a news conference at 3:15 p.m. ET (1915 GMT) on Monday, a law enforcement official familiar with the matter said. The department said U.S. Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco and other officials will speak on last month's hack that led to

massive shortages at gas stations along the East Coast just as the summer driving season began.

Last month, a cyber criminal group that U.S. authorities said operated from Russia penetrated the pipeline operator on the U.S. East Coast, locking its systems and demanding a ransom.

The hack caused a shutdown lasting several days, leading to a spike in gas prices, panic buying and localized fuel

shortages in the U.S. Southeast. Colonial Pipeline said it paid the hackers nearly \$5 million to regain access.

The White House urged corporate executives and business leaders last week to step up security measures to protect against ransomware attacks after the Colonial attack and later intrusions that disrupted operations at a major meatpacking company. U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina



Raimondo said on Sunday the topic would be on the agenda when President Joe Biden meets with Russian President Vladimir Putin this month. Biden administration was looking at all options to defend against ransomware attacks and that the

# Man slaps French President Emmanuel Macron in the face, yells 'Down with Macron'

**An onlooker slapped French President Emmanuel Macron in the face on Tuesday during his visit to Drome region in south-eastern France.**



(News Agencies)- French President Emmanuel Macron was slapped in the face on Tuesday by a man in a crowd of onlookers while on a walkabout in southern France, video of the incident showed.

Macron's security entourage quickly intervened to pull the man to the ground and move Macron away from him. Two people were arrested in connection with the incident, broadcasters BFM TV and RMC radio reported.

French Prime Minister Jean Castex said the incident was an affront to democracy.

The incident took place while Macron was on a visit to the Drome region in south-eastern France, where he met restaurateurs and students to talk about how life is returning to normal after the Covid-19 epidemic. In video circulating on social media, Macron, dressed in shirt sleeves, could be seen walking towards a crowd of well-wishers who were behind a metal

barrier. The French president reached out his hand to greet one man, in a green T-shirt, with glasses and a face mask. The man could be heard shouting out "Down with Macronia" ("A Bas La Macronie") and then he delivered a slap to Macron's face.

Two of Macron's security detail tackled the man in the green T-shirt, while another ushered Macron away. But Macron remained in the vicinity of the crowd for a few more seconds, and appeared to be talking to

someone on the other side of the barriers.

The presidential administration said there had been an attempt to strike Macron, but declined further comment.

The identity of the man who slapped Macron, and his motives, were unclear. While slapping the president, he could be heard shouting "Montjoie Saint Denis," which was the battle cry of the French armies during the French Revolution, when the country was still a monarchy.

# Joints for Jabs: Free marijuana for vaccinated adults in US state

**As part of Washington state Liquor and Cannabis Board's "Joints for Jabs" program, licensed marijuana outlets can give away a single pre-rolled joint to anyone over 21 who gets a vaccine shot by July 12.**

(News Agencies)- 12. The board has already licensed marijuana stores in Washington state can offer free joints to promote on-site Covid-19 vaccine clinics, officials said Monday.

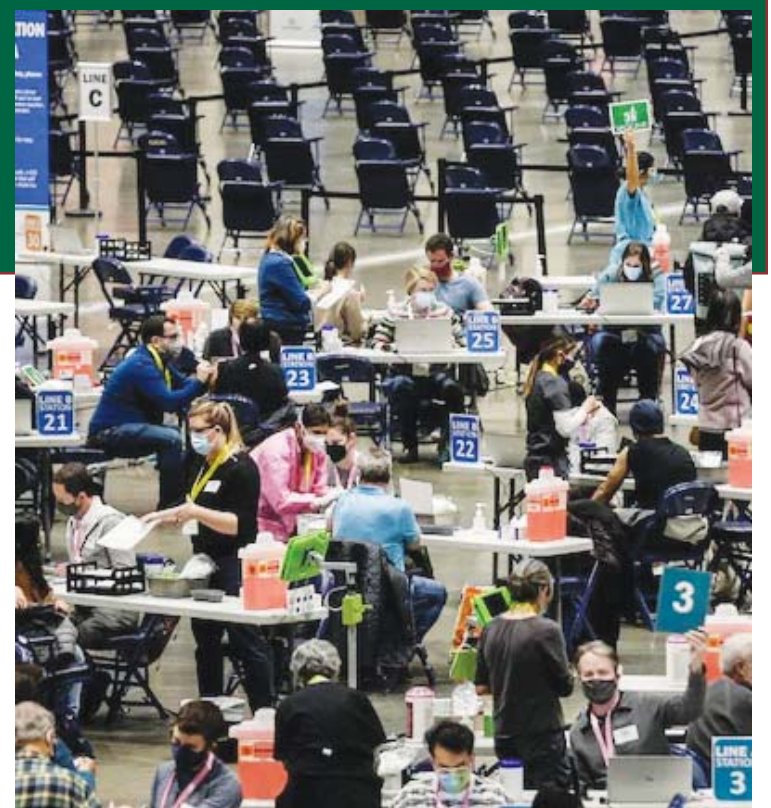
The state Liquor and Cannabis Board is calling the effort the "Joints for Jabs" program. The board says licensed adult-use marijuana retail shops can give away a single pre-rolled joint to anyone over 21 who gets a shot at an on-site vaccine clinic held by July

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# Back in public eye, Trump takes aim at Fauci & China over Covid; teases 2024 presidential run

**Advisers say Trump, who faces a potential indictment in New York over his business dealings, has been discussing the possibility of another presidential campaign.**

(News Agencies)-Former US President Donald Trump on Saturday sharply attacked infectious disease expert Anthony Fauci over his handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, demanded reparations from China and denounced an investigation into his finances in a speech in North Carolina. Speaking in Greenville, North Carolina, at the state's Republican Party convention, Trump joined a chorus of Republican politicians who are criticizing Fauci for asking Americans to wear masks to guard against the virus and who at times has been sceptical of a theory that the virus escaped from a laboratory in Wuhan, China.

Trump called Fauci "not a great doctor but a great promoter" for his frequent television

appearances. "But he's been wrong on almost every issue and he was wrong on Wuhan and the lab also," Trump said.

The origin of the virus remains hotly contested and remains under study by US intelligence agencies.

Trump's own handling of the pandemic, in which nearly 600,000 people in the United States have died and he himself was infected, was a factor in his loss to Democratic President Joe Biden in the November 2020 election. Trump called on China to pay \$10 trillion in reparations to the United States and the world for its own handling of the virus, and he said nations should cancel their debt to Beijing. 'FIVE-YEAR WITCH HUNT'

Trump's appearance had all the hallmarks of his signature

campaign rallies complete with a musical playlist heavy on Elton John standards.

North Carolina Republican Party chairman Michael Whatley introduced Trump as "our president," a nod to the former president's baseless claims that the 2020 election was stolen from him through voter fraud, which Trump called "the crime of the century."

Trump said a criminal investigation launched by the New York attorney general's office is "the ultimate fishing expedition," and said it was the latest attempt by Democrats to bring him down after two impeachment sagas when he was president.

"It's been a five-year witch hunt, hoax after hoax," said Trump. "They'll never stop until November of 2024."



New York Attorney General Letitia James has been investigating whether the Trump Organization falsely reported property values to secure loans and obtain economic and tax benefits.

TRUMP 2024?

Trump vowed to help Republicans in 2022 congressional elections and endorsed US Representative Ted Budd for a US Senate seat in North Carolina after his daughter-in-law, Lara Trump, said she would not run. He appeared to dangle a possible run himself for

president in 2024, saying he was looking forward to that year. Advisers say Trump, who faces a potential indictment in New York over his business dealings, has been discussing the possibility of another presidential campaign.

Trump emerged from seclusion for the Saturday event, the first in a planned series of speaking engagements this summer.

"The survival of America depends upon our ability to elect Republicans at every level, starting with the midterms next year," Trump said.

## If Covid-19 trends continue, it could be years before virus is controlled: US Health Organisation

**There were almost 1.2 million new cases and 34,000 deaths in the region last week, and four of the five countries with the highest death counts worldwide are in the Americas.**

(News Agencies)-If the spread of COVID-19 continues at current rates it will be years before the virus is controlled in the Americas, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) said on Wednesday, as it called for countries to share excess vaccine doses.

There were almost 1.2 million new cases and 34,000 deaths in the region last week, and four of the five countries with the highest death counts worldwide are in the Americas, PAHO Director Carissa Etienne said during the organization's weekly news conference.

"If current trends continue, the health, social and economic disparities in our region will grow even larger, and it will be years before we control this virus in the Americas," Etienne said. Infections are higher in many places in the region than at any other point during the pandemic, she said, and the emergence of new more easily transmitted variants has added new complexities to epidemiological surveillance. Just

10% of the population of Latin America and the Caribbean have been fully vaccinated, with a particularly acute situation in Central American and the Caribbean. PAHO is thankful to the United States, Spain and Canada for promises to donate millions of doses or funding, but more needs to be done, the director said. "We hope other countries - particularly those with excess doses - and global financial institutions will follow in

their footsteps to provide the support we need," Etienne said. "Vaccine donations are essential in the short-term." Ahead of the kick-off of the Copa America soccer tournament in Brazil on Sunday, Ciro Ugarte, PAHO's Director of Health Emergencies, said countries hosting mass events should consider postponing if COVID-19 risks cannot be controlled. Venezuela still owes \$10 million in funding



for vaccines via the COVAX vaccine sharing program, Ugarte said.

COVAX supply for Venezuela will likely not be ready soon because of global demand, but PAHO hopes Venezuela

and other regional countries will be given priority because they have not yet received COVAX doses.

Hospitalizations in Haiti are stretching oxygen supplies there, Etienne said.

## Senior monk among 12 killed in Myanmar military plane crash

(News Agencies)-A well-known senior Buddhist monk was among at least 12 people who died when a plane belonging to Myanmar's military crashed on Thursday in the country's central Mandalay region, state media reported. Army-run Myawaddy TV said a boy was one of two survivors on the flight from the capital, Naypyitaw, to Pyin Oo Lwin, also known as Maymyo. The other person taken to a hospital was reported

to be a member of the military, but several other unconfirmed reports said he later died. The



plane was carrying six military personnel in addition to two monks and six devotees to Pyin

Oo Lwin for a ceremony to lay the foundation for a new monastery, the report said.

The senior monk who died was the abbot of Zay Kone Monastery in Pyinmana, a satellite town of Naypyitaw. He was believed to be in his nineties and hosted the head of the country's current ruling junta, Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, for a visit on Feb. 2, the day after the army ousted the country's elected leader, Aung

San Suu Kyi, and seized power. The crash occurred when the plane was making its landing approach to Pyin Oo Lwin's Anisakhan airport, reported Myawaddy TV, which said there was bad weather at the time. The plane that crashed appeared from photos to be a Beechcraft 1900, a model used by the air force. Five people died in February 2016 when an air force Beechcraft 1900D crashed shortly after takeoff from Naypyitaw.



# Climate change is rapidly transforming the Arctic: Why everybody should care

world, even by people who will never see it in person, for its spectacular landscapes and wildlife.

For the last couple of decades, though, climate change has been transforming practically everything about the Arctic that matters to people both inside and outside of the region. That's because the Arctic as a whole has been warming two to three times faster than the rest of the world. The accumulating effects of this extreme warming are now manifesting themselves in a multiplicity of ways, some of them creating new economic opportunities, but practically all of them creating major physical, socioeconomic and management challenges for the region. And, of greatest importance for rest of the world, the rapid pace of climate change in the Arctic is influencing the pace and impacts of climate change elsewhere. It even threatens to undermine the ability of society's emissions reductions to stop warming worldwide at a level that avoids wholly unmanageable consequences.

A major factor in the rapidity of Arctic warming is what climate scientists call "the snow-ice albedo feedback." Albedo simply means the fraction of incident sunlight that is reflected rather than absorbed. A warming atmosphere reduces snow cover, replacing highly reflective snow with highly absorptive dirt and vegetation, thus magnifying the initial warming.

Similarly, when sea-ice cover on

the Arctic Ocean is reduced in consequence of a warming environment, incoming sunlight strikes highly absorptive water where it previously struck highly reflective ice; again, the result is magnification of the initial warming.

The area covered by sea ice in the Arctic in summer is now barely more than half of what it was in 1979, when accurate

natural gas involves costly and perilous operations in an unforgiving environment, in pursuit of carbon-rich fuels the world needs to be burning less of, not more, if climate change is to be reined in. And as for Arctic Ocean fisheries, the magnitudes and sustainable yields of the resource are largely unknown.

At the same time, the shrinkage



satellite measurements began. The decline in sea ice opens the possibility of summer trade and tourism routes that have been impractical until now, as well as expanded access to sub-seabed resources and Arctic Ocean fisheries.

Most of these opportunities are mixed blessings, though. Expanded ship travel through the Arctic poses major pollution risks in a fragile region - and would require significant investments in capabilities for monitoring ship traffic and for search and rescue. Extracting Arctic resources of oil and

of the Arctic sea ice carries large physical and biological liabilities. Iconic marine mammals that are important for subsistence livelihoods in the region - whales, walruses, seals, polar bears - depend on sea ice for feeding or breeding. Additionally, the retreat of sea ice from shorelines exposes them to storm waves that the ice previously kept at bay. This results in heavy damage to the coastal communities where most of the Arctic's Indigenous people live. Some of these communities have little choice now but to relocate inland, even

though the costs of doing so are extremely high.

Other major impacts of rapid climate change on the residents of the Arctic include the thawing of the permafrost - frozen soil - that underlies most of the land in the Arctic; and the striking expansion of wildfires in the region. Thawing permafrost results in subsidence, causing buildings to crack, roadways to collapse and pipelines to fail. King salmon populations that are important economically and for the subsistence of Indigenous people are in decline across most of Alaska. Heat, drought and increased lightning have led to increased wildfire all across the Arctic. In Alaska, the average annual area burned has more than doubled since the 1980s. Wildfires destroy vegetation and wildlife, emit large quantities of carbon dioxide, accelerate the thawing of permafrost and spread toxic smoke across huge distances, in some cases reaching down into the mid-latitudes.

The biggest impacts of Arctic climate change outside of the region are:

1. The contribution to global sea-level rise from shrinking glaciers and the Greenland Ice Sheet. Annual losses from the Greenland Ice Sheet to the ocean have increased six-fold since the 1980s, becoming the largest single contributor to global sea-level rise.

2. The contribution to the pace of global climate change by greenhouse-gas emissions from thawing permafrost.

The contributions of thawing permafrost to the atmospheric burden of heat-trapping carbon dioxide and methane have been growing. Permafrost soils contain more than twice as much carbon as the atmosphere currently holds. There is considerable scientific uncertainty about how much of this gigantic total will be released as carbon dioxide and methane over the coming decades. It could be enough to significantly accelerate global warming and, indeed, to render unattainable the Paris Agreement's targets for stabilizing the Earth's temperature. Understanding rapid climate change in the Arctic, then, is important for understanding the scope of the climate challenge globally - and critical for fashioning badly needed adaptation strategies in the region. Increased international efforts in Arctic science have been underway for some time, but they need to be expanded. People and policymakers everywhere need to recognize the importance to all of us of what is being learned - and lost - in the Arctic. John P. Holdren, Ph.D., is the Teresa and John Heinz professor of environmental policy in the Kennedy School of Government, professor of environmental science and policy in the Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences, and affiliated professor in the Environmental Science and Engineering Division of the John A. Paulson School of Engineering and Applied Science, all at Harvard University.



# Joe Biden heads overseas as his prospects darken at home

His bipartisan effort to forge an infrastructure deal with Republican Sen. Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia finally expired on Tuesday. The setback followed Democratic West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin's announcement that he would not vote to outlaw filibuster rules or to pass a huge voting rights bill. Each blow put a new hole in soaring progressive ambitions that always seemed a leap ahead of reality.

Previously, Republicans — using that 60-vote filibuster supermajority rule — blocked a Democratic bid to set up a bipartisan, independent commission into the January 6 insurrection.

Swelling liberal frustration, the Washington impasse is coinciding with an aggressive push by Republicans in the states and conservative judges to cement hardline right-wing orthodoxy on access to the ballot, gun rights and abortion, which is enshrining Trump values even with a Democrat in the White House.

Suddenly a presidency built on an already-passed multitrillion-dollar Covid-19 relief plan and a vast federal jobs and families plan is looking a little shaky.

"If the second two planks don't make it, that would be a big disappointment for the President," former Obama administration strategist and CNN political commentator David Axelrod said on Tuesday.

Still, the overall picture is complex and not all discouraging for the White House.

The Senate did pass a bipartisan bill on Tuesday equipping US industry and the tech sector to meet the challenge from China. And a push for police reform in the wake of George Floyd's murder may be about to deliver after tortuous bipartisan talks. Negotiators hope to announce a deal next week, a source told CNN's Manu Raju. If it pans out, the police effort may be a sign that even in a Congress as bitterly divided as this one, patience and dogged negotiating could be a template for progress. Where next for Biden and Schumer?

An emerging question is how much the President and Senate

Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, can salvage from an agenda that was being hailed as the most fundamental reordering of the US economy and society in decades. While there are tactics, including using the budgetary device of reconciliation, to pass bills opposed by Republicans, there are no easy routes to political wins in Congress and some issues are unsuitable for such maneuvering.

The series of reversals for



Democrats in Congress poses a fierce test of Biden's powers of persuasion and the capacity for legislative improvisation that he refined over a half century in Washington. The current unpromising prospects for passing major legislation also threaten to curtail the record that Biden will take into midterm elections that are already dominating Republican tactics. Yet at the same time, the current difficulties are not all Biden's fault and may be manageable for a President who has both portrayed himself as pragmatic fixer of the nation's problems — like the pandemic — but has also advanced proposals that drew comparisons to Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson. For instance, his infrastructure bill redefined the term, packing social and child care spending into a package normally considered as limited to transportation spending.

Many progressive Democrats advocate an almost limitless application of power to enact the most liberal agenda possible while they narrowly control the levers of power in the White

House and Congress. But the President actually ran as a moderate in 2020 and his centrist appeal helped peel away some suburban voters who had previously backed Trump.

For all the declarations by progressives of a bold new political era dawning, the left wing of the party failed to amass a majority in Congress for its lofty program. And were it not for Manchin's ability to hold a seat in a state Trump twice won with nearly 70% of the vote,

Democrats would not even control the Senate. So it is not certain that a more modest legacy would spell disaster for Biden's presidency. While the President made no secret of his desire to rebalance the economy in favor of working Americans, the

multitrillion-dollar scale of his program did surprise many observers. It's just possible the brakes being applied by Manchin and other Democratic senators on the right of the party may spare Democrats the kind of overreach that could hurt them in the 2022 midterm elections. After all, voters last year paired a Democratic President with an evenly balanced Congress — not a combination that looked conducive to fundamental political change.

'Time to move on'

The White House said on Tuesday that the President would keep in touch with Washington machinations from the other side of the Atlantic Ocean during a weeklong trip to the United Kingdom, Belgium and Switzerland.

Schumer has now moved to a two-track strategy on infrastructure — working with an expanded group of bipartisan senators, but also preparing for an effort to pass a bill on the issue with only Democratic votes.

Several prominent Democrats declared that the time for working

with Republicans is over and it is time for the party to forge ahead with their radical, transformational agenda alone. Senate Budget Chairman Bernie Sanders, a Vermont independent who caucuses with Democrats, on Tuesday began the work of packaging a \$2.3 trillion American jobs plan and a \$1.8 trillion American families plan in a nonbinding resolution that could be passed with a simple majority with no Republican votes. Democratic Sen. Mazie Hirono of Hawaii said she believed Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Kentucky Republican, when he said he wanted to thwart Biden's major priorities.

"I've been ready to move on from bipartisanship for major priorities for the Biden administration for quite a while now," Hirono said. That's a position shared by many progressive Democrats. But it doesn't change the harsh facts in the Senate. There are no guarantees that there are 50 Democratic votes for big-spending liberal legislation either. Manchin has already expressed concerns. Democratic Sen. Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona shares Manchin's views on the filibuster and is another moderate Biden will need to keep on his side.

Other Democrats, like Sen. Maggie Hassan of New Hampshire, who has a tough reelection bid next year, could expose themselves politically by backing multitrillion-dollar liberal spending bills easily misrepresented by Republicans as a massive "socialist spending spree."

With this in mind, it is significant that both Sinema and Manchin are in a new bipartisan group of 20 senators discussing infrastructure — even though big hitters in both parties have doubts the process can work.

"I think that there is a possibility here to get something meaningful done," said Democratic Sen. Jon Tester of Montana on CNN's "The Lead with Jake Tapper."

"Is it going to be everything that I would want? No. Is it going to include some things that potentially some Republicans might be uncomfortable with?

Yes."

Any deal would likely be a shadow of the original \$2.2 trillion splash envisaged by Biden. The President, seeking a deal, has already come down by more than \$1 trillion on the price tag. But intractable differences on paying for the bill that could have reversed parts of Trump's tax overhaul scuppered the previous effort. The symbolism of a deal may be as important for Biden as its exact terms, however, given his brand-defining promise to Americans to try to repair splintered national unity by forcing common solutions with Republicans where possible.

As always in Washington, a move toward one faction brings the risk of shattering another part of a coalition for a bill. CNN's Lauren Fox reported that progressive Democrats warned they will not just blindly back any bipartisan infrastructure package that emerges from the new talks. "A group of four or five people don't get to carry 50 Democratic votes on their back," one Democratic senator said.

Republican Sen. John Barrasso of Wyoming, who took part in Capito's original infrastructure compromise effort, twisted the knife by saying he doubted that the new configuration in the Senate would attract the 60 votes needed for passage because it would alienate more liberal Democrats.

Still, any deal that did unite 20 senators — a fifth of the chamber — would be a powerful statement and liberal Democrats would come under extraordinary pressure to cave and offer Biden a much-needed victory.

If the deal ultimately fails, Biden could tell Manchin and his fellow travelers he had done everything he could for a bipartisan product and plead for their backing.

A bipartisan deal on infrastructure might also give senators like Manchin and Sinema the political cover to caucus with fellow Democrats on a partisan drive to enact other aspects of Biden's jobs and families plan, though it would still be unlikely to get them to budge on filibuster abolition, which is critical to liberal hopes of counteracting GOP restrictive voting bills in the states.



# Psychological effects of the pandemic may be felt in young people for a long time to come



A survey by the American Psychological Association (APA) from 2020 found more than 7 in 10 Generation Z individuals reported symptoms of depression and reported the highest level of stress compared to other age groups. "Life cannot be lived in social networks or video calls. We need people around us to make sense of ourselves," a Dutch student tells The Guardian. "My mental health deteriorated so badly. I had to start antidepressants," an undergraduate student from the U.K. told the Guardian.

A recent study published in The Lancet Psychiatry surveyed people in Iceland ages 13 to 18 in 2016, 2018 and 2020. The researchers found an increase in depressive symptoms and worse mental well being during the pandemic along with greater use of substances like cigarettes, electronic cigarettes and alcohol. These outcomes were worse in adolescent girls than in boys, according to the authors.

A similar study of 500 people in the age group above at 18 to 25 years old found similar results that suggested women were more impacted than men. The young women showed increased rates of depression and anxiety symptoms. "Although certain public health measures were important in controlling the spread of the virus, the benefits of social support and interaction, which often act as buffers against

the effects of stress, have also been reduced due to the

## Keeping each other safe and connected is everyone's responsibility



Physical distancing is not social isolation



Together we can beat COVID-19  
#covid19

pandemic," said senior author James MacKillop in a press release.

"Collectively, these results indicate the importance of critical thinking and considering population subgroups when it comes to COVID-19's psychological impacts," MacKillop said in the press release. "Rather than uniform increases or decreases, it's increasingly clear that subgroups will show very different patterns, including both negative and, in some

cases, positive changes." Another subgroup is LGBT youth. In a survey, 73 percent of them reported anxiety symptoms, 67 percent reported depression symptoms and 48 percent reported serious thoughts of suicide, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation. This group was already at increased risk for depression, suicidal ideation and substance use before the pandemic. The APA survey also highlighted that some of the reasons for stress among Gen Z individuals include current events, such as widespread sexual harassment or assault reports in the news, rise in suicide rates or change in

abortion laws. Nearly 80 percent of Gen Zers said the future of the nation was a significant source of stress.

"I feel constantly anxious," said a 23-year-old student in Estonia to the Guardian. "It's the uncertainty about the future that hurts the most." Researchers will need to continue to study the ongoing effects of the pandemic to understand the potential long-term implications. "This is a very bleak mix of mental health, economic and social impacts," Mascherini told Guardian. "In previous recessions, those who suffered most, in terms of the labour market, bore the scars in later employability. They never caught up."

## A tale of two states, two parties

under fire. In Punjab, it was more friendly fire and in UP, while there was criticism from within, this was supplemented by visible discontent among a section of citizens. Both states also go to the polls in early 2022, and, at least till earlier this year, both CMs, Punjab's Amarinder Singh and UP's Yogi Adityanath were expected to help their parties return to power. Yet, the management of the political dynamic in the two states could not have been more different. Punjab has seen a strange situation of a popular 79-year-old CM having to explain himself to a



party that is such a pale shadow of its former (and glorious) self that it should be grateful to have leaders that can deliver it states. Based on media reports, including in this newspaper, it

appears that at least some of those arrayed against Mr Singh have the support of the party high command, despite the possibly adverse implications in the polls. Indeed, Punjab's Opposition, all

at sea a few months ago, must be cheering the happenings in the Congress camp. In some ways, this is not very different from the way the Congress treated Bhupinder Singh Hooda, who might have well delivered it Haryana in 2019 had things played out differently. In contrast, in UP, where the CM has come under fire for his handling of Covid, including by some of his own party leaders, and where the old Thakur vs Brahmin identity politics seemed to be raising its ugly head again, the BJP has acted quickly.



# What's the price today? FBI phone app reaped secrets of global drug networks

cellphone called ANOM that operated on a closed network. "They have already got a few packages in," Baris Tukel told buyer Shane Geoffrey May, according to US court documents.

As proof, Turkel texted pictures of the pouch bound and stamped "Valise Diplomatique Francaise" and another shot of tightly wrapped drug packs.

"They can do it weekly," he wrote.

Little did they know that ANOM was produced and distributed by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation, and every one of their messages-and those of thousands of other criminals around the world-were being copied directly to an FBI server.

27 million messages

Others had the same sense of security. They bickered over prices, and explained smuggling strategies.

Using ANOM, "Ironman" texted "Real G" on how they could get volumes of cocaine into Hong

Kong, where they had no one in customs to shepherd it through. The answer? "Real G" sent "Ironman" a photograph of drug packages layered in between bananas in a shipping crate. First, he said, they would have to send some legitimate banana shipments to ease the way.

Their messages were some of 27 million that the FBI and law enforcement partners in Australia and elsewhere scooped up and decrypted, exposing global criminal networks to an unparalleled extent.

The US Justice Department said "Operation Trojan" Shield reaped a "staggering" amount of intelligence that has led to 800 arrests.

It turned one of the biggest challenges for law enforcement today, widely available, unbreakable encryption apps on cellphones, to law enforcement's advantage.

Officials on three continents announced Tuesday that they had seized 38 tons of cocaine, marijuana, methamphetamine

and precursor chemicals; 250 firearms and currencies worth \$48 million in the operation.

Some 50 clandestine drug labs were shut down and more than 100 potential murders disrupted. Law enforcement officials themselves seemed in awe at the result of "Trojan Shield".

FBI Special Agent Suzanne Turner said they were stunned at how openly traffickers exchanged information on the ANOM devices.

"They believed it was secure communications," she told reporters in Washington.

FBI had master decryption key The massive coup came about in 2018, when the FBI shut down a precursor encrypted service called Phantom Secure and arrested its head Vincent Ramos and four others for supporting drug trafficking.

That appears to have led the FBI to a builder of the phones who was working on the next generation. The tech wizard already had one drug conviction and faced new charges. So they

agreed to produce ANOM for the FBI, who paid him or her \$170,000 to do so-adding to the encryption system a digital master key that only the FBI could use. ANOM would also copy all messages from a user to an FBI-controlled server located in a third country as they were transmitted. But how to get the bad guys to buy the phones, at \$2,000 apiece? The builder already had a network of trusted distributors in place from previous products, and pitched ANOM to them with the pitchline, "Enforce your right to privacy." The phone hit the market in October 2018, with distributors first selling about 50 in Australia for a Trojan Shield beta test, the FBI working with the Australia Federal Police. By 2019, ANOM devices were found around the world, used the most in Germany, Netherlands, Spain, Australia and Serbia, mainly by drug traffickers and money launderers. The FBI said more than 300 distinct transnational criminal organizations were using ANOM.

Shutting down rivals

It had its competitors. The FBI discovered that some gangs compartmentalised operations by different communications technology. In one, ANOM was used for the logistics of the drug shipments, while Ciphr or Sky were used to deal with the money involved. But ANOM gained in popularity as law enforcement went after other devices, like in 2020 when European authorities brought down EncroChat, a four-year-old encrypted handset. After US authorities closed down another rival, Sky Global, in March this year, active ANOM users soared from 3,000 to 9,000, the FBI said. Why was ANOM shut down now? Turner said Tuesday that many legal cases were ripening and that "it was time to get these criminals off the street." But a March blog post by an unknown writer claiming that ANOM was transferring data to unknown servers may have also threatened to expose the network.

# A sole lab in Kasauli is ensuring Covid-19 vaccines are safe for use in India

extremely important a single lab in Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh has been ensuring just this.

The Central Drugs Laboratory in Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh is the only World Health Organisation (WHO) prequalified and NABL accredited laboratory in the country responsible for conducting these crucial batch tests. This facility has been painstakingly testing every batch of anti-coronavirus vaccines along with other immunization vaccines in India. In other words, they grant the "blue tick"; without their approval for safety, the vaccines can't be given in any part of India.

Tucked away amidst the mountains of Himachal Pradesh, the stone structure of the building overlooks a panoramic view of Kasauli. Inside, a bunch of biochemists, scientists and officials have been testing batches of Covid-19 vaccines, the silver bullet against the novel coronavirus.

Even the first batch of Russia's Sputnik V that arrived from Moscow, Russia was sent here for batch testing and approved for inoculation in Hyderabad.

Regular batches of Covishield, Covaxin are being sent here for safety among other tests.

**PROCESS OF BATCH TESTING** It typically takes 24 hours for any vaccines to reach here from any manufacturer across India. There was a lot of pressure on the lab to expedite the quick testing and clearance of Covid vaccines, and

a. animal testing- abnormal toxicity, (7days)

b. Sterility test (14 days),

c. Endotoxin and other tests as explained in the SLP's Batch-testing of vaccines involves tests for sterility, toxicity, efficacy and other biochemical testing of the vaccine batch. In case of Covid-19 vaccines, efficacy tests

manufacturer sends them to the CDL. Testing is done parallelly, with this we are saving around 10 days," informed a scientist at the facility.

Recently, in order to expedite the roll-out of vaccines, the government of India decided to waive batch testing for those vaccines that have been approved

CDL, Kasauli as per the guidelines issued by DCG(I)," he told India Today.

**SPEEDY CLEARANCES**

The only WHO approved lab is releasing approximately 7,000 batches of vaccines per year and has the capacity to do about 250 batches a month. A total of about 90 batches of Covaxin and 130 batches of Covishield and three batches of Sputnik V have been tested and cleared by the lab till June 6 this year. Till now, not a single manufacturer batch had failed these crucial tests, said officials.

With a combined staff strength of around 70 people, the duration of testing and clearance has been reduced considerably so vaccination in India can be carried out at a steady click.

**NEED FOR MORE FACILITIES** Another lab that has been earmarked as an additional facility for vaccine testing is the Indian Institute of Biologicals, in Uttar Pradesh's Noida. It was authorised by the government in case the Kasauli CDL is unable to handle the tremendous load of more vaccines being manufactured and cleared amid the Covid-19 pandemic.



the 70-strong team of "corona warriors" has managed to deliver. **VACCINE TESTED FOR EFFICACY, SAFETY, STERILITY**

1. Efficacy Test - Potency parameter- how effective the vaccine is

2. Safety testing 3 parts

take two to three days. But the sterility tests take the longest time.

"It takes 14 days for sterility testing, it is a lengthy test. But the time has been shortened now because we are doing parallel testing. As soon as the samples are manufactured, the

by credible drug regulators such as the US FDA, EU or the UK's MHRA or even WHO.

"Yes Since the vaccines have already been tested by the national regulatory authority of that country and provide the release certificate of the country. However, it will be released by



# Jeff Bezos to travel on Blue Origin's first human space flight

Amazon Founder Jeff Bezos has announced he will be traveling on Blue Origin's first human space flight. Yahoo Finance's Akiko Fujita and Zack Guzman discuss.

Video Transcript

AKIKO FUJITA: Amazon founder and CEO Jeff Bezos is making a big announcement on Instagram today, saying he is headed to space on the first human flight for Blue Origin.

JEFF BEZOS: You see the Earth from space. It changes you. It changes your relationship with this planet, with humanity. It's one Earth. I want to go on this flight because it's the thing I've wanted to do all my life. It's an adventure. It's a big deal for me. I invited my brother to come on this first flight because we're closest friends.

I really want you to come with me. Would you?

- Are you serious?

JEFF BEZOS: I am. I think it would be meaningful.

AKIKO FUJITA: So there you have it, Zack. Jeff Bezos headed to space with his brother. By the way, there are six seats on this inaugural human flight for Blue Origin, two taken up by the Bezos. It's an interesting timing here because the flights

actually going to be on July 20. If you'll recall, he is stepping down from Amazon as the CEO on July 5.

And remember when that first announcement came down that he would be stepping back, there was a lot of speculation about whether, in fact, this was so that he could sort of double down on his efforts with Blue

any of this is like. I mean, it's very hard to imagine, you know, a commoner, if you will, just saying, you know, [INAUDIBLE] is putting in your two weeks. I got to go to space. Sorry, I'm a little busy over here. And I haven't seen Jeff Bezos in a cowboy hat before either. But I enjoyed that clip of him in a cowboy hat and a beer. But this



Origin. And now I mean, at least if you look at the timing, it feels that way because certainly if he was still the CEO of Amazon, you could say a lot of investors would argue, there's a significant risk with him taking the flight.

ZACK GUZMAN: Yeah, I mean, I guess you could point to that. And maybe that is kind of all the connection here. But it's just so difficult to kind of imagine what

is-- I mean, this is something that he has been interested, as we know, for a long time.

And it's something that I think, you know, when we talk about Richard Branson and his interest in space and what he's doing there at Virgin Galactic and then you talk about this endeavor with Jeff Bezos, I mean, it's starting to get to the point where it's-- you know, the interesting space flight's when

these guys are going up themselves. It's something-- I mean, obviously, all of these things are exciting to watch.

But now when you know the people who are on there and they're as high profile as Jeff Bezos, these are going to start to be some big events, you know? And I wonder what kind of rights and streaming around those we might start to see when it becomes a must watch event. And I mean, these are already must watch, Akiko.

AKIKO FUJITA: Always looking at the business side, right? Let's talk about the specifics of this trip, though, because it's pretty incredible. Six people, as I said, going up with Jeff Bezos. You're going to be spending time with them. I don't know if that's an added benefit. And they have auctioned off one of those seats. \$2.8 billion has been the highest bid so far that's come in. We're talking about an 11-minute space tourism trip, so not very long. But since this is part of our take, Zack, I'm going to put you on the spot. Would you go up in the inaugural flight, the very first--

ZACK GUZMAN: There are so many--AKIKO FUJITA: --flight? How comfortable would you be?

ZACK GUZMAN: I'm actually

nervous for him. And there's no reason for me to be nervous for him, but I'm just that risk averse. I wouldn't be comfortable at all, Akiko. There's enough things that I haven't done on Earth. I have no urge to leave our planet. I just wanted to go to Australia, to be honest, with this pandemic. I mean, I don't ask for much. But, you know, I've set my sights far lower.

AKIKO FUJITA: Space or Australia? Space or Australia? I think I would choose space if it's between those two options. But you're certainly right. I mean, there's a lot riding on this. You would imagine Jeff Bezos obviously well more-- much more informed than either of us, given that this is his venture. But it's going to be an interesting one, to your point. I mean, you know, one of the world's richest men going up in space in an inaugural flight with his brother, along with four other passengers.

ZACK GUZMAN: It's exciting. Yeah, and on the anniversary, as you pointed out, of the Apollo mission, too. So I mean, there's a lot of significance around it, but one that we will be watching with bated breath, not just because I'm a worrywart, but also because it is monumental in space travel.

## Jeff Bezos is going to space for 11 minutes. Here's how risky that is

Jeff Bezos can have anything. He could circle the globe in a private jet or sail it forever in a fleet of megayachts. He could afford to buy a the whole NFL; he could buy an archipelago for his family and friends; he could buy over 65,000 Bugatti Chirons (base price \$2.9 million), even though only 500 are being built. As the world's richest person, the possibilities are endless. But Bezos appears ready to risk it all for an 11-minute ride to space.

Just how risky is his decision? The answer isn't what you might expect. Space travel is, historically, fraught with danger. Though the risks are not necessarily astronomical for Bezos' jaunt to the cosmos, as his space company Blue Origin has spent the better part of the last decade running the suborbital New Shepard rocket he'll be riding on through a series of successful test flights. (Also, being in space is Bezos' lifelong

dream.) Still, what Bezos, his brother Mark Bezos, and the winner of an online auction, will be doing -- going on the very first crewed flight of New Shepard, a fully autonomous suborbital rocket and spacecraft system



designed to take ticket holders on brief joy rides to space -- is not entirely without risk. Here's what Bezos' flight will look like and the extent to which people are taking their lives in their hands when they go to outer space these days. What the flight looks like

When most people think about spaceflight, they think about an astronaut circling the Earth, floating in space, for at least a few days.

That is not what the Bezos brothers and their fellow passengers will be doing. They'll be going up and coming right back down, and they'll be doing it in less time -- about 11 minutes -- than it takes most people to get to work.

Suborbital flights differ greatly from orbital flights of the type most of us think of when we think of spaceflight. Blue Origin's New Shepard flights will be brief, up-and-down trips, though they will go more than 62 miles above Earth, which is widely considered to be the edge of outer space.

Orbital rockets need to drum up enough power to hit at least 17,000 miles per hour, or what's known as orbital velocity, essentially giving a spacecraft enough energy to continue whipping around the Earth rather than being dragged immediately back down by gravity.

Suborbital flights require far less power and speed. That means less time the rocket is required to burn, lower temperatures scorching the outside of the spacecraft, less force and compression ripping at the spacecraft, and generally fewer opportunities for something to go very wrong.

New Shepard's suborbital flights hit about about three times the speed of sound - roughly 2,300 miles per hour - and fly directly upward until the rocket expends most of its fuel. The crew capsule will then separate from the rocket at the top of the trajectory and briefly continue upward before the capsule almost hovers at the top of its flight path, giving the passengers a few minutes of weightlessness. It works sort of like an extended version of the weightlessness you experience when you reach the peak of a roller coaster hill, just before gravity brings your cart - or, in Bezos' case, your space capsule -- screaming back down toward the ground.

The New Shepard capsule then deploys a large plume of parachutes to slow its descent to less than 20 miles per hour before it hits the ground. The rocket, flying separately, reignites its engines and uses its



on-board computers to execute a pinpoint, upright landing. The booster landing looks similar to what SpaceX does with its Falcon 9 rockets, though those rockets are far more powerful than New Shepard and - yes - more prone to exploding on impact.

How big are the risks?

Blue Origin's New Shepard capsule, which is fully autonomous and does not require a pilot, has never had an explosive mishap in 15 test flights. And the nature of Bezos' flight means it comes with some inherently lower risks than more

ambitious space travel attempts. But that doesn't mean the risk is zero, either.

Because suborbital flights don't require as much speed or the intense process of trying to re-enter the Earth's atmosphere at incredible speeds, they're considered much less risky than orbital flights. With an orbital re-entry, a spacecraft's external temperatures can reach up to 3,500 degrees Fahrenheit, and astronauts can experience 4.5 Gs of force that is also placed upon the spacecraft, all while the ever-thickening atmosphere whips around the capsule.

High speeds and high altitudes come with inherent risks, and even small errors can have big consequences.

Earth's atmosphere is generally not considered survivable for significant amounts of time above altitudes of 50,000 feet without a spacesuit, and Bezos will be traveling up to 350,000 feet. But the capsule he travels in will be pressurized, so he doesn't need a special suit to keep him safe, and he'll have access to an oxygen mask if the cabin loses pressure. The spacecraft is also equipped with an abort system designed to

jettison the New Shepard capsule and passengers away from the rocket in case of emergency. There's also back-up safety features to help the capsule land gently even if a couple of its parachutes fail to deploy.

But even still, there is no way to absolutely guarantee safety should New Shepard malfunction. Even though suborbital flights are less risky than orbital missions, they can still be deadly.

One of Virgin Galactic's suborbital space planes, for example, broke apart in 2014

when one of the vehicle's copilots prematurely deployed the feathering system designed to keep the craft stable as it made its descent. The added drag on the plane ripped it to pieces, killing one of the pilots.

(Blue Origin competitor Virgin Galactic has since had three successful test flights of a revamped version of its SpaceShipTwo space plane.)

Blue Origin has not encountered similar tragic accidents during its testing phase, though - as an old industry adage goes - space is hard. But, Bezos has indicated, the risk is worth it.

# Everything you need to know about going to space

Who can go to space?

Almost anyone. At least anyone who can afford it.

Blue Origin, which is auctioning off a seat on a flight scheduled for July 20, said the winner must be able to endure three times the force of gravity for two minutes on ascent and five and a half times the force of gravity for a few seconds on the way down. Participants must be between five feet and 6 feet 4 inches tall and weigh between 110 and 223 pounds.

During the sweepstakes for a seat on a SpaceX flight designed to raise money for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, organizers said participants must weigh less than 250 pounds, be shorter than 6 feet 6 inches tall and be "physically and psychologically fit for training." Elon Musk, the founder of SpaceX, said that most people would be able to fly on the Dragon spacecraft. "If you can go on a roller-coaster ride, like an intense roller coaster ride, you should be fine for flying on Dragon," he recently said.

Virgin Galactic's website doesn't list any physical requirements for its future astronauts. "We will prepare every astronaut thoroughly, through a program of medical checkups and tailored training," it promises. How much does a ticket to space cost?

That depends. Flying to the International Space Station for a week on a trip commissioned by Axiom Space costs \$55 million per person. Some of that goes to NASA, which under new private astronaut pricing guidelines charges \$10 million a week per private astronaut for crew time, mission planning and communications. It also charges

other, smaller fees, including \$2,000 a day per person for food. Virgin Galactic, Richard Branson's space venture, had been charging \$250,000 for

Saturday. (Bezos owns The Washington Post.) What sort of training is involved to go to space?

Training for the suborbital space

unmatched safe and affordable journey to space without the need for any special prior experience or significant prior training and preparation." The training is

reentry and the journey back into the Earth's atmosphere."

Over the years, Virgin Galactic has built a community of want-to-be astronauts who have done training in coordination with Virgin Galactic by flying "Zero-G" parabolic flights and going to a centrifuge to help them adapt to increased gravity forces.

Axiom Space, which offers a much more ambitious mission of a week on the International Space Station, has a training curriculum that lasts 17 weeks at facilities run by NASA and the Japanese and European space agencies. "Training prepares the participant as an astronaut, develops a deep camaraderie with fellow astronauts, and truly inaugurates one as a member of the exclusive space traveler family."

Passengers train alongside their mission commander. Axiom has said former NASA astronauts Michael Lopez-Alegria and Peggy Whitson will command the first two missions.

Is space tourism new?

Several civilians have already gone to space. In the 2000s, Russia flew eight missions to the International Space Station with wealthy private citizens, such as Dennis Tito, Charles Simonyi and Anousheh Ansari, on board. In 2004, Mike Melvill and Brian Binnie flew to the edge of space on SpaceShipOne, the first commercial vehicle to reach space and a predecessor to the spaceplane currently flown by Virgin Galactic. In the 1980s, two members of Congress flew, Sen. Jake Garn (R-Utah) and Rep. Bill Nelson (D-Fla.), who was later a senator and now serves as NASA administrator. Their costs were borne by NASA.



© Stephen Boxall

suborbital flights, where passengers would experience a few minutes of weightlessness before falling back to Earth. But when ticket sales reopen later this year, the company has said the cost would go up. It hasn't said what the new price would be, but analysts have said they expect it to be \$500,000.

Jeff Bezos's Blue Origin hasn't announced prices for seats on its suborbital New Shepard spacecraft. But the online auction for a seat on its first human spaceflight mission has gone well over \$3 million. It is expected to climb higher in the live auction scheduled for

trips is nothing like what NASA astronauts go through. Blue Origin says on its website that the training for its flights lasts only a day. "The day before launch, you'll learn everything you need to know to make the most of your experience as an astronaut." The training "includes mission and vehicle overviews, in-depth safety briefings, mission simulation and instruction on your in-flight activities such as operational procedures, communications and maneuvering in a weightless environment."

Virgin Galactic said its goal is to offer its future astronauts "an

expected to last three days at Spaceport America in New Mexico, where passengers "will go through a customized medical screening and flight preparation process, including training for use of communication systems, flight protocols, emergency procedures and G-force training." They'll learn how "to exit their seats and experience weightlessness, floating about the cabin and positioning themselves at one of the many windows around the cabin sides and top. After enjoying several minutes of weightlessness, our astronauts will maneuver back to their own seats to prepare for



# How Risky Is It to Send Jeff Bezos to the Edge of Space?

Jeff Bezos and Virgin Galactic founder Richard Branson have been working for the past 20 years to get their companies' rockets built and launched. Now both are preparing to suit up and ride their own spacecraft. Bezos announced on Monday that he'll blast off July 20 on Blue Origin's New Shepard rocket, riding to the limit of Earth's atmosphere. Meanwhile, Branson is expected to fly this summer on the Virgin Galactic VSS Unity rocket plane to the same zone.

The rich-guy space race between Bezos and Branson (SpaceX's Elon Musk is the odd man out for now) may convince other well-heeled space tourists who want assurances that a rocket ride is both fun and safe. But experts note that space travel is always risky, even when spacecraft have undergone years of testing. Blue Origin's flight will be its first launch with human passengers; previous flights have only carried a mannequin. For Virgin Galactic, it will be only the second time the rocket plane has carried people.

"When you're flying humans, it's always one step more complex than just flying an uncrewed mission, and that's because you have the lives of six people that you have to worry about," says Laura Forczyk, an Atlanta-based space industry consultant who has flown several times with NASA on zero-g research flights. "Blue Origin has no reason to fear that something will go wrong, but you never know. Space is a risky business."

Blue Origin's flight to the edge of space-known as suborbital-will only last about 10 to 15 minutes, just enough time to reach an altitude to allow Bezos, his brother Mark, and four more passengers to float in weightlessness. (The others will include Blue Origin employees and the winner of an online auction that currently stands at \$3.8 million and ends Saturday.) Then the capsule will return to Earth under three parachutes and land in the West Texas desert. Blue Origin's New Shepard capsule is 100 percent automated. There's no pilot and the passengers can't maneuver or adjust course. The only task that passengers have to accomplish is to unbuckle and

then rebuckle their seatbelts, so they can float around and watch the Earth roll by through the capsule's massive windows.

A Blue Origin spokesperson declined to answer questions from WIRED about the kind of training the Bezos brothers will receive in advance of their flight, and about how control and navigation of the capsule works, instead pointing us to a page on their website that states that New

maintains the appropriate attitude. Then, after it slows and reaches lower altitude, the wings fold back down. The spacecraft returns to its original position and lands like an airplane on a runway, in this case, at Virgin's New Mexico spaceport. The whole trip lasts about 90 minutes from start to finish, and there's no bathroom on board.

Virgin Galactic's path to this year's human flights has

federal investigation.

Despite these incidents, Virgin Galactic hasn't given up, and made its most recent and successful crewed flight of VSS Unity in late May. Unity, the latest version of SpaceShipTwo, has been modified to increase safety measures, including a cabin pressurization system that will maintain life support if something should happen during any part of the trip. The

the same as traveling to the International Space Station. NASA vehicles like the now-retired Space Shuttle or the new SpaceX Crew Dragon depend on several booster rockets to get them into orbit, as well as complex life support, propulsion, navigation, and avionics systems that tell the rocket where to go. Some of these systems are automated; others require a trained pilot, such as during docking with the ISS. In contrast, the two new commercial spacecraft are simpler in design and operation, according to Doug Hurley, a NASA astronaut who piloted the first Crew Dragon spacecraft to the ISS in May, 2020, along with colleague Bob Behnken.

"None of it is easy," Hurley says of human spaceflight. "We ask a lot of the vehicles, whether it's a suborbital or orbital flight, to bring the occupants and the crews back safely. But, certainly, anybody who really understands this business knows intimately that there is a huge difference between getting the vehicle into orbit, and getting a vehicle to do a suborbital flight."

Hurley, who also flew two Space Shuttle missions, says the way to reduce risks is through equipment testing and crew training. While the private space companies haven't flown as many people as NASA has, over the past 10 years they have put their spacecraft through rigorous testing programs. Hurley remembers Elon Musk coming to him before liftoff last year to ease any of his concerns. "He said, 'We've done everything we possibly could,'" Hurley recalls. "We have gone back through the data and the numerous times we've asked everyone, even the interns at SpaceX, if there's anything else that we should look at-if there's anything else that we need to do before we put these guys on this vehicle."

The big difference between Crew Dragon and the Space Shuttle is that the newer spacecraft has an escape system that works on the launchpad and during takeoff. There were times where the shuttle crew had no chance for survival if something went wrong, like during the 1986 Challenger explosion just after liftoff and 2003 Columbia breakup during re-entry.



Shepard has made 15 successful flights, including three tests of its capsule abort system that will allow it to detach from the rocket in case something goes wrong on the launchpad or while aloft.

Virgin Galactic's VSS Unity is more like a rocket plane with wings. The polished-chrome six-seater is carried to about 50,000 feet in altitude by a specially built double-fuselage aircraft called WhiteKnightTwo. The rocket plane is released from underneath the aircraft, and then powers up its engines for 60 seconds to blast to the 50-mile-high edge of space, drifting there for a few minutes of joy. Once it reaches its highest point, the rear half of the vehicle folds upwards, which creates a high-drag, aerodynamically stable layout that allows the craft to float like a badminton shuttlecock. The increased drag keeps the craft's speed low, while the folded shape ensures the craft

experienced some fatal setbacks. Unity is the company's second SpaceShipTwo spaceplane. In 2007, three employees of Scaled Composites, a firm building the craft for Virgin, were killed at a Mojave Desert facility during early testing of SpaceShipTwo's rocket engines. Scaled Composites was financed by Branson at the time.

In 2014, a later version of SpaceShipTwo broke apart in midair, killing a copilot and seriously injuring the pilot during a test. Federal accident investigators found inadequate design safeguards, lax regulatory oversight, and a potentially anxious copilot lacking recent flight experience as important factors in the crash. At the time, Virgin officials said they were making changes to the system so that the wing position could not be released prematurely by either pilot, an event that led to the crash, according to the

spacecraft also includes an escape system for the crew and passengers, according to Aleanna Crane, vice president of communications for Virgin Galactic.

Just prior to liftoff, Branson and the other passengers will undergo three days of training at Virgin's New Mexico spaceport to familiarize themselves with the flight and review procedures, Crane added. Virgin is analyzing data from the May 22 flight before planning the next one, which will require an FAA license. That means it's still not clear whether Branson will get to space before Bezos' planned July 20 excursion. "We will have three additional test flights, two of them in the summer," Crane said from London. "One of which will have Richard on board."

The third test flight will include three members of the Italian Air Force for a research mission. NASA astronauts say that flying on a short suborbital trip is not



# Bidding for Blue Origin's first human flight alongside Jeff Bezos and his brother hits \$4.5 million - with only two more days left

Bidding for a seat on Blue Origin's New Shepard rocket alongside Jeff Bezos and his brother topped \$4.5 million on Thursday as the second phase of the online auction comes to a close.

According to the company's website, the highest bid to ride on the July 20 flight is currently \$4.5 million, over a million dollars more than Monday's high bid of \$3.2 million.

The identity of the top bidder is not yet known and will not be known until bidding has stopped on June 12, concluding with a live auction.

Bidders need to raise their bid limit by June 10 5PM EST to be a part of the June 12 auction. A Blue Origin spokesperson told DailyMail.com on Monday it had no further updates to share regarding the number of bidders or where they were from.

DailyMail.com had previously reported there were more than 5,200 bidders from 136 countries.

Blue Origin founder Jeff Bezos announced on Monday that he and his brother, Mark a former advertising executive and volunteer firefighter, will be on the New Shepard spacecraft when it flies next month, coinciding with the 52nd anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing.

'Ever since I was five years old, I've dreamed of traveling to space,' Bezos said on a video announcement posted to his Instagram account.



'On July 20th, I will take that journey with my brother. The greatest adventure, with my best friend.'

The other three passengers on the New Shepard flight are Sian Proctor, a community college educator in Arizona, Chris Sembroski, a former Air Force missileman from Washington, and Hayley Arceneaux, a physician assistant at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Tennessee.

The six passengers will spend at least 10 minutes floating in zero gravity inside the capsule during the suborbital sightseeing trip.

Blue Origin named the New Shepard program after astronaut Alan Shepard, who was the first American to fly into space exactly 60 years ago.

Washington state-based Blue

Origin is largely self funded by Bezos, who has been selling over \$1 billion worth of stock in Amazon per year to fund the company.

In sending tourists to space, Bezos has beaten Richard Branson and Elon Musk and their firms, Virgin Galactic and SpaceX to the punch.

While Musk is yet to comment on the news, Branson has congratulated Bezos, describing how their two firms are 'opening up access to space.'

He tweeted: 'Many congratulations to @jeffbezos & his brother Mark on announcing spaceflight plans. Jeff started building Blue Origin in 2000, we started building Virgin Galactic in 2004 & now both are opening up access to Space - how extraordinary! Watch this space...'

Blue Origin, founded in 2000, touts itself as means to provide cheaper access to space through the use of reusable rockets, specifically the New Shepard that has flown 15 times.

The rocket's sole mission is to take tourists to space, who would travel inside a sleek, white capsule atop the vehicle.

The capsule is designed with the iconic Blue Origin feather across the exterior and inside are six reclining seats that mirror those inside a helicopter.

Blue Origin's plans are to send tourists 62 miles above Earth's surface and spend at least 10 minutes in orbit.

The company also recently conducted its first astronaut rehearsal in preparation for sending the first manned New Shepard into space.

The mock crew traveled the designated path of future spacefaring tourists, which included traveling to the launch pad and climbing up the tower to the passenger capsule.

While celebrities and the uber-rich appear to be a core market for space tourist jaunts, at least initially, industry sources expect Blue Origin to include some philanthropic component to its ticket strategy.

The idea of sending paying customers to the edge of space was once only a plot in science fiction films, but many companies other than Blue Origin are turning the epic journey into a reality.

A college science professor and an aerospace data analyst are among a four-member crew for a launch into orbit planned later this year by Elon Musk's SpaceX, part of a charity drive billed as the first all-civilian spaceflight in history.

Virgin Galactic also aims to fly private customers in early 2022, after a first flight with Branson on board later this year.

Its zero-gravity experience is anchored by its SpaceShipTwo plane, and the company has ambitious plans to offer point-to-point travel between far-flung cities at near-space altitudes.

Virgin says it will charge more than \$250,000 for new reservations but has not announced final pricing. Sales will reopen following Branson's flight.

## Virgin Galactic founder Richard Branson may try to beat Bezos to space: report

The billionaire space race is heating up.

Virgin Galactic founder Sir Richard Branson is reportedly weighing how he can beat Amazon founder Jeff Bezos to space next month. Bezos, who has a net worth of about \$191 billion, announced on Monday that he and his younger brother will be among the passengers on Blue Origin's first crewed flight to the edge of space on July 20.

On Tuesday, a source told the blog Parabolic Arc that Virgin Galactic wants to send Branson, who has a net worth of about \$6.9 billion, up on a test flight of its VSS Unity SpaceShipTwo rocket plane over the July 4 weekend.

Both men are jockeying to be the first tycoons to make it to space. SpaceX founder Elon Musk hasn't yet announced any intent to fly to space this summer.

Virgin Galactic's purported plans come over a month after Blue Origin set July 20 as the date for its flight. A Virgin Galactic spokesman told the blog: "We expect to complete the final test flights this summer through to early fall. At this time, we have not determined the date of our next flight."

A spokesperson told Insider that Branson's flight is "expected in the summer months."

A separate test flight with four "mission specialists," who are employees playing the role of future passengers, is also



expected this summer, the spokesperson told Insider.

The Parabolic Arc report noted that Virgin Galactic would need

additional regulatory approval from the Federal Aviation Administration before Branson can fly as the company's first

"spaceflight participant." But space regulation experts told Insider that the plan seems achievable in the amount of time available.

"To me, it looks absolutely very doable," said George Nield, a former associate administrator of the FAA, where he led its

Office of Commercial Space Transportation. Nield noted that he is not privy to communications between

Virgin Galactic and the FAA, which licenses commercial rocket launches.

Nield said it would likely be simple and easy for the company to get the necessary approval to allow Branson to fly as a participant, so long as data from its last successful flight doesn't raise any eyebrows.

And he added that it's possible Virgin Galactic just gives Branson a new role as a crew member rather than a participant, bypassing the regulatory scrutiny of a passenger flight.

"In my opinion, there is nothing preventing Richard Branson from also flying as a member of the flight crew," Nield said.



# Wealthiest Executives Paid Little to Nothing in Federal Income Taxes, Report Says

The 25 richest Americans, including Jeff Bezos, Michael Bloomberg and Elon Musk, paid relatively little - and sometimes nothing - in federal income taxes between 2014 and 2018, according to an analysis from the news organization ProPublica that was based on a trove of Internal Revenue Service tax data.

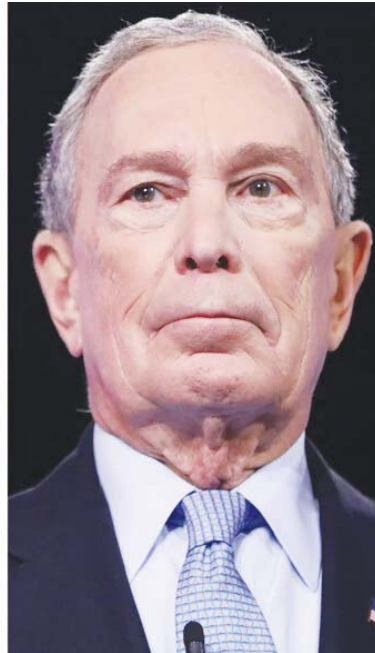
The analysis showed that the nation's richest executives paid just a fraction of their wealth in taxes - \$13.6 billion in federal income taxes during a time period when their collective net worth increased by \$401 billion, according to a tabulation by Forbes.

The documents reveal the stark inequity in the American tax system, as plutocrats like Mr. Bezos, Mr. Bloomberg, Warren Buffett, Mr. Musk and George Soros were able to benefit from a complex web of loopholes in the tax code and the fact that the United States puts its emphasis on taxing labor income versus wealth. Much of the wealth that the rich accrue - like shares in companies they run, vacation homes, yachts and other investments - isn't considered "taxable income" unless those assets are sold and a gain is realized. Even then, there are loopholes in the tax code that can limit or erase all tax liability.

Administration officials said on Tuesday that federal authorities were investigating the disclosure of private tax information, which can constitute a criminal offense. "Any unauthorized disclosure of confidential information by a person with access is illegal," Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, said at a briefing. "We take this very seriously."

The rare window into the tactics of the nation's top billionaires comes as President Biden is trying to overhaul the tax code so that corporations and the rich pay more. Mr. Biden has proposed raising the top marginal income tax rate to 39.6 percent from 37 percent, which would reverse the reduction ushered in by former President Donald J. Trump's 2017 tax cuts.

The documents and the conclusions of the analysis could



renew calls for Mr. Biden to consider a wealth tax, given that a higher marginal tax rate would do little to raise the tax bills of the 25 richest Americans. From 2014 to 2018, the 25 wealthiest Americans paid an average of 15.8 percent, or \$13.6 billion, in personal federal income taxes. Chuck Marr, senior director of federal tax policy at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, said the private tax data highlighted the relatively modest approach that Mr. Biden is proposing considering the extent to which the tax code rewards wealth and punishes labor.

"Some of the solutions are often cast as aggressive," Mr. Marr said. "What's really radical is the current circumstance."

Lawmakers like Senator Elizabeth Warren, Democrat of Massachusetts, have championed the idea of placing a 2 percent tax on an individual's net worth above \$50 million - including the value of stocks, houses, boats and anything else a person owns, after subtracting any debts. In an interview on Tuesday, Ms. Warren called the tax revelations "deeply shocking" and said it reinforced the fact that lawmakers should be thinking about wealth over income when writing tax policy.

"Increasing the personal income tax rate by 2 percent or 10 percent is not going to make any real difference to these multibillionaires," Ms. Warren said. "The real action in America is on wealth, not income."

Although she praised some of

Mr. Biden's proposals such as increasing taxes on capital gains and targeting "real" corporate profits, Ms. Warren said that she would like to see the White House be more ambitious.

"I want to see the Biden administration push harder on the wealth taxes," Ms. Warren said. Mr. Biden and his advisers have generally deemed the idea of a wealth tax unworkable but they have not formally closed the door on the idea. Instead, the president wants an extra \$80 billion over a 10-year period to beef up the Internal Revenue Service so it is better equipped to go after tax cheats. And he has proposed doubling the tax on capital gains - the proceeds of selling an asset like a stock or a boat - for people earning more than \$1 million.

"We know that there is more to be done to ensure that corporations, individuals who are at the highest income, are paying more of their fair share," Ms. Psaki said.

At a New York Times DealBook event in February, Treasury Secretary Janet L. Yellen said that a wealth tax is "something that has very difficult implementation problems." She suggested that other tax changes that would increase taxes on wealth that is transferred at death could have a similar effect. In March, however, Ms. Yellen suggested that she remained open minded about a wealth tax.

"Well, that's something that we haven't decided yet," Ms. Yellen said on ABC News, before pointing to other tax ideas that

would also affect the rich.

ProPublica did not reveal how it obtained the information and it could not be independently verified by The New York Times. But the publication said the documents were provided to the outlet "in raw form, with no conditions or conclusions" and that it had run the information past every executive whose information was included in the article. "Every person whose tax information is described in this story was asked to comment," ProPublica said, adding that those who responded "all said they had paid the taxes they owed." In a separate article, the outlet said it was publishing the information "quite selectively and carefully - because we believe it serves the public interest in fundamental ways, allowing readers to see patterns that were until now hidden."

The report highlights the techniques that the wealthy often use to reduce their tax bills, including taking advantage of a complex web of loopholes and deductions that are perfectly legal and can significantly minimize tax liability. That includes borrowing huge sums of money backed by enormous stock holdings. Loans are not taxed and the interest that the executives pay on the borrowed money can often be deducted from their tax bills.

In 2007, Mr. Bezos, the chief executive of Amazon, paid nothing in federal income taxes even as his company's stock price doubled. Four years later, as his wealth swelled to \$18 billion, Mr. Bezos reported

losses and received a tax credit of \$4,000 for his children, according to ProPublica. An Amazon spokesman did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Mr. Buffett, the chief executive of Berkshire Hathaway who has long said publicly that the tax code should hit the rich harder, paid just \$23.7 million in taxes from 2014 to 2018, when his wealth rose by \$24.3 billion.

In a statement to ProPublica, Mr. Buffett said he expected that 99.5 percent of his wealth would go toward taxes and charity upon his death, adding, "I continue to believe that the tax code should be changed substantially."

Mr. Soros, the billionaire philanthropist and investor, paid no federal income tax for three consecutive years, according to the report. A spokesman for Mr. Soros told ProPublica that "between 2016 and 2018 George Soros lost money on his investments, therefore he did not owe federal income taxes in those years."

In 2018, Mr. Bloomberg, who controls the media giant Bloomberg L.P., reported income of \$1.9 billion and paid \$70.7 million in income tax. According to the report, Mr. Bloomberg was able to reduce his tax bill through deductions, charitable donations and "credits for having paid foreign taxes."

A spokesman for Mr. Bloomberg, in a statement to ProPublica, said they would "use all legal means at our disposal to determine which individual or government entity leaked these and ensure that they are held responsible."

The Treasury Department said that the federal government is working to determine how the tax records were released.

"The unauthorized disclosure of confidential government information is illegal," Lily Adams, a Treasury spokeswoman, said. "The matter is being referred to the Office of the Inspector General, Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the U.S. attorney's office for the District of Columbia, all of whom have independent authority to investigate."



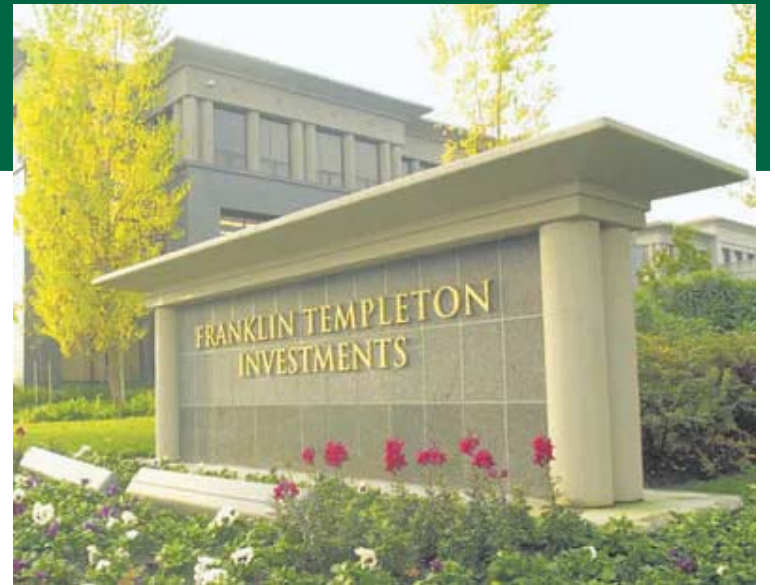
# Franklin Templeton: A sordid saga

*Sebi's findings are also bound to raise questions of propriety and probity around the behaviour of the Kudvas, but that is beyond the regulator's purview and a matter between them and their respective organisations*

Many investors in Franklin Templeton will mutual funds opt for debt funds because they believe them to be safe. But as the story of six Franklin Templeton India debt funds shows, it all depends on the risk appetite, assessment and integrity of the fund's managers. To be sure, the pandemic's impact on the economy was the factor that triggered the closure of the six funds last April, but as an order from stock market (and mutual fund) watchdog, Sebi, explained on Monday, there were other factors too. The order (which

challenge) points to the information asymmetry that allowed a senior executive at the company and his family to withdraw their investments in the six funds - shortly before they were closed. While investors have received around 27% of their investments in these funds, and will likely receive at least 60% in total (that's the amount that's come back to the funds), there are lessons in this sordid saga. The first lesson is for investors. Many may have been drawn to the generic safety of

debt funds and the specific attractiveness of Franklin Templeton. This approach was clearly flawed because it ignored what the funds were investing in. The second is for the fund managers, with revelations of significant gaps in the due diligence process. The third is for regulators. Details of how Franklin Templeton ran its funds, and how its senior executive Vivek Kudva and his wife Roopa Kudva, who runs the impact investment firm Omidyar Network in India, exited the funds just before their closure



point to possible areas that require monitoring, if not regulatory change. Sebi's findings are also bound to raise questions of propriety and probity around the behaviour of the Kudvas, but that is beyond the regulator's purview and a matter between them and their respective organisations.

## Kamala Harris is in a really tough spot



In the future, instead of falling back on the message of "don't come," Harris would be well advised to remind her global audience that asylum is a legal right. It is a right subject to final adjudication by US immigration authorities, and it is complicated. But Americans are capable of understanding nuanced issues, and grasping that we have legal and humanitarian obligations to our neighbors.

In reality, Harris' words were likely not intended for Central Americans. They were probably meant to preclude any Republican charges that the Biden administration is for "open borders."

Yet, when it comes to immigration, it is a waste of time for the Biden administration to try to blunt partisan attacks. Consider that Republicans have seized on Harris' trip as a failure, emphasizing that she has not visited the border. "Vice

President Harris is in Mexico today," Ohio Republican Rep. Jim Jordan tweeted Tuesday. "Probably the closest she's ever been to the southern border. But she still won't visit it." Such a visit to the border probably would have been meaningless. These trips, often taken by Republican lawmakers, amount to little more than a silly photo op. For conservative lawmakers, they are a popular way to remind their base of the "border crisis" and to signal that migration is a threat to the country. Given that the purpose of Harris' trip was to address the root causes of migration, the notion of a trip to the border this week made no sense.

That didn't stop NBC News' Lester Holt from pressing Harris on why she hadn't been to the border. "I-- and I haven't been to Europe," Harris replied. "And I mean, I don't--I don't understand the point that you're making." On one hand, her

answer swatted away Holt's query. On the other, to some observers she came across as flippant and ill-prepared for what should have been an easily foreseeable question.

Funny, under the previous administration, government neophyte Jared Kushner was tasked with bringing about peace in the Middle East and he wasn't subjected to as much acute scrutiny. It may well be that as a woman of color and a daughter of immigrants Harris is being held to an impossible standard for success. Multiple administrations have wrestled with problems at the border, and people expect Harris to solve it in a matter of months?

The fact is Republicans have failed in their efforts to paint Biden as a radical socialist, and he has strong favorability ratings. That leaves Harris as a prime target for GOP talking points, especially on immigration -- a contentious issue among voters of both parties. The only way out of this quandary is for the Biden administration to act boldly and lean into the migration issue. A good start would be to end the use of Title 42, a provision of US law that the Trump administration invoked as a basis for swiftly expelling immigrants. Another would be to funnel more aid to Central America through non-profit

groups and non-governmental organizations, instead of corrupt governments. Finally, the administration needs to come up with more succinct messaging to counter the GOP's very successful and inaccurate fearmongering. It is time for the Biden administration to make a firm break with the failed, inhumane policies of the past-

- and that will ensure more support from progressives. Vice President Harris has a rare opportunity to help bring about change in Central America. But actions will always speak louder than words. Her work will only be effective when she is advocating smart, compassionate policies.

## *Covid-19: A man-made pandemic?* *New study breaks out!*

Scientists Dalglish and Sorensen did an extensive analysis and research on the SARS-CoV-2 virus samples in 2020 while creating a vaccine when they discovered 'unique fingerprints' in the sample that appeared 'laboratory altered.'

Sorensen stated that four amino acids on the spike have a positive charge. Hence the virus tightly clings to the negatively charged parts of a human, becoming more infectious. It is very rare to find even three in a row in naturally occurring organisms. Contrarily, four in a row is 'extremely unlikely.' 'The only way to get this if manufactured artificially,' reported Dalglish.

Sorensen said that he believes the virus escaped

from lower security areas of the institute, where he considers Gain of Function research was performed.

US President Joe Biden has ordered the intelligence community to re-double efforts to examine how the virus was originated, including the lab accident theory. The European Union, the UK, Australia and Japan also seek a deeper investigation into the origins of the pandemic.

The compelling report with the evidence suggests that the worst misfortune that brought the world to a standstill is not naturally occurring. More investigations are needed to get a better sense of the origins and what all steps to be taken to prevent the next pandemic?



# Hidden figures: Underreported Covid cases and deaths in Rural India makes the fight harder

Rural India's desperately inadequate health infrastructure is common knowledge. But official estimates understate the crisis, which makes the battle against the pandemic even harder.

Ojhauri is a nondescript village in Uttar Pradesh's Gola tehsil, 50 km from Gorakhpur, the home district of chief minister Yogi Adityanath. In the past month, this village, with a population of about 4,500, reportedly saw 30 deaths preceded by Covid-like symptoms. However, there was no response from the nearest community health centre (CHC), located in Gola. On May 20, Neelranjan Ojha, a native of Ojhauri, reported the deaths to Himanshu Thakur, the district panchayati raj officer of Gorakhpur. Immediately after, a team of health officials arrived at the village and eight people were admitted to a Covid hospital in Gorakhpur.

State officials in Maharashtra have been similarly lax or late in responding to Covid cases in rural areas. Around 20 per cent of the state's daily Covid tests are being conducted in Mumbai alone, which accounts for just 1.5 per cent of the population of Maharashtra. In rural districts such as Ahmednagar, Buldana, Satara and Beed, among others, where the positivity rate is 23-30 per cent, the number of daily tests is below 5,000. In the second week of May, a controversy also erupted in Beed after the district administration failed to add 240 Covid-related deaths to the state's tally.

Such under-reporting is not restricted to Maharashtra alone. And as India grapples with the second wave, what makes the situation more dangerous is missing data. Government statistics do not give an accurate account of the devastation, which has led to an inadequate response. "In the absence of reliable Covid surveillance and data from rural India, we cannot be sure about the extent and severity of the pandemic," says Dr Chandrakant Lahariya, a Delhi-based epidemiologist and public policy and health systems expert. "National aggregates may indicate a declining spread



in urban settings, but it is possible the virus is still spreading in rural India."

A May 7 report by SBI Research

The 243 districts that receive funding under the Centre's Backward Region Grant Fund accounted for 11 per cent of all

inadequate medical infrastructure, a hesitancy to get tested and administrative apathy. For instance, between May 1 and 23, Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray conducted four meetings to review Covid cases in the state, but only one of these, on May 16, focused primarily on rural areas. Thackeray took cognisance of the situation only after it became clear that around 70 per cent of the state's new cases were being recorded in talukas with populations below 100,000. The same day, the Union government directed states to improve rural medical infrastructure by strengthening access to resources such as beds, oxygen, testing kits and ambulances in primary health centres (PHCs), community health centres (CHCs) and sub-district hospitals, and by creating makeshift Covid care centres (CCCs). The guidelines also recommended that Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) kits be made available at all PHCs, sub-centres (SCs) and health and wellness centres, that community health officers and auxiliary nurse midwives (ANMs) be trained to perform rapid antigen tests and that accredited social health activist (ASHA) workers be tasked with active surveillance in villages. State preparedness

While most states have started taking measures on these lines—some were doing so even before the directive went out—the task is immense. Even before the pandemic could place extraordinary demands upon it,

healthcare in rural India was already crippled by poor infrastructure, a lack of manpower and policy neglect. There is a massive shortage of SCs, PHCs and CHCs, which form the creaky backbone of healthcare in the hinterland. According to the Union ministry of health and family welfare, India faces a 23 per cent shortage of SCs, a 28 per cent shortage of PHCs and a 37 per cent shortage of CHCs. As a Rural Health Statistics report released last year reveals, on average, each SC serves four villages; each PHC, 27 villages; and each CHC, 128 villages. To put it another way, one CHC is responsible for an area of about 596 sq. km, almost the size of Mumbai.

Even when it comes to new Covid-capable infrastructure, there has been a sharp skew in favour of urban areas. For instance, in Madhya Pradesh, there are 819 medical installations that offer Covid treatment. Of these, only 69 are in rural areas. Only 14 per cent of isolation beds, one per cent of oxygen beds and 0.54 per cent of ICUs are in rural areas.

The situation is similar when it comes to personnel. Although there has been a 40 per cent increase in the number of allopathic doctors in PHCs across India in the past 15 years, there is still a seven per cent shortage. More importantly, there is a 76.1 per cent shortfall of specialists at CHCs. "India has perhaps the largest network of PHCs and SCs. But there is an urgent need to provide personnel, especially grassroots workers, since they are the points of first contact," says professor Sanghamitra Sheel Acharya of the Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health at Jawaharlal Nehru University's School of Social Sciences.

This cripples even upgraded infrastructure. For instance, as per a directive issued by Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath, four CHCs in each district are to be converted into dedicated Covid hospitals, with 50 beds, an oxygen concentrator and a team of doctors. One such is the Shambhunath CHC in Bah, 70 km from Agra.

## THE GROWING RURAL THREAT

Even after under-reporting of cases/deaths from rural India, official data records a near 12 percentage point surge in cases over the past three months

**181** districts, out of the 254 districts with over 10 per cent positivity rate (May 24-30), have a high rural population

**ONLY 136** of these 254 districts have done at least 50 per cent RT-PCR tests

**19% TEST POSITIVITY RATE** **1.6% CASE FATALITY RATE**

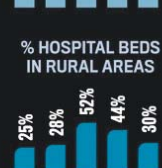
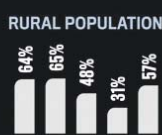
In four Northeastern states—Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Sikkim—which have an average 65 per cent rural population



**STRETCHED**  
A patient at a CHC in Jajod, in Rajasthan's Sikar district

## 5 HIGHLY INFECTED BIG STATES

Though among the worst hit, the southern states are better equipped with rural beds

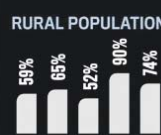


Positivity rate and death rate are a seven-day average between May 24 and May 30. Sources: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare; Rural Health Statistics, 2019-20; How India Lives

Graphics by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

## 5 BIG STATES WITH HIGHEST DEATH RATE

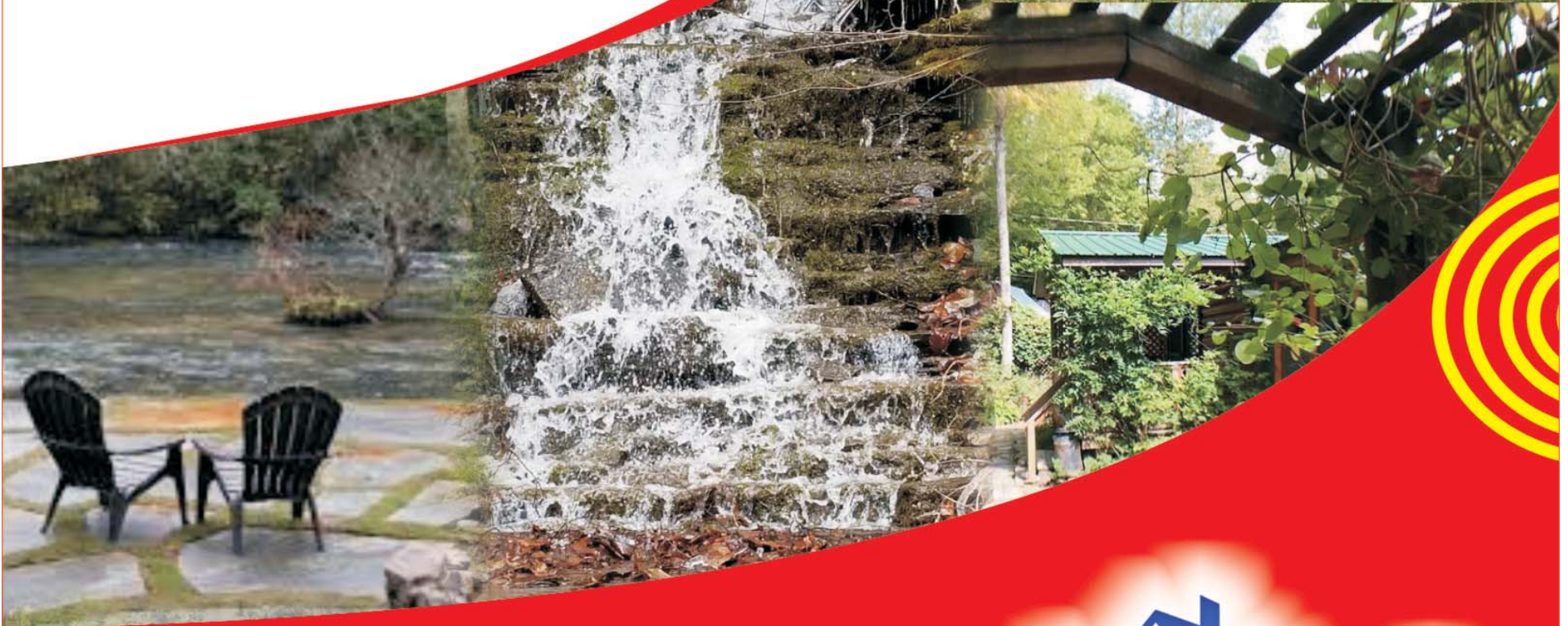
Rural Punjab has the most worrying death rate even though its positivity rate is not the worst





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# A Blueprint for Peace in Afghanistan After U.S. Troops Leave



President Joe Biden announced in April that the United States would withdraw all troops from Afghanistan by September. The decision prompted a debate among Americans between those who want to remain committed and those arguing that it's time to recognize the limits of U.S. influence in Afghanistan. But in Afghanistan itself, the biggest uncertainty is about who will fill the security vacuum left by U.S. troops. Will the Taliban take over, despite espousing a dogmatic vision that most Afghans reject? Will regional power players jockeying for influence fill the void, or will Afghanistan finally gain genuine sovereignty over its own territory?

To ensure the answer is the latter, all key Afghan players, including the Taliban, need to be committed to a peaceful settlement.

For the past nine months, the Afghan Republic and the Taliban have engaged in on-and-off talks to negotiate a political settlement that would bring about a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire and set out the principles for a future Afghan state. The Taliban agreed to participate in these talks under a prior deal with the Trump administration, in which the Americans agreed to withdraw troops by May 1, 2021. But after Biden postponed U.S. withdrawal by four months, the Taliban refused to participate in the much-anticipated April peace conference in Istanbul co-hosted by Turkey, the United Nations and Qatar. The conference was delayed, but it is widely expected that talks will resume within the

next couple of months. Meanwhile, Biden's decision is placing pressure on both sides to develop more coherent positions and clarify exactly what they want.

The question for the Afghan people is no longer about the future of U.S. military involvement. Rather, it's about what Afghans need to do, with the help of their partners, to ensure the country contributes to the region's overall stability and economic potential, and is at peace with itself and its neighbors.

I was born in Kabul during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, and I have yet to enjoy a period of life without conflict. I have dodged bombs and rockets in makeshift underground ditches, watched my home being looted by rival mujaheddin factions, and even gotten into trouble with Taliban authorities for a faux-hawk hairstyle inspired by Leo DiCaprio in *Titanic*. After the Taliban fell in 2001, I worked with the United Nations before joining the Afghan government in 2006. I eventually became deputy foreign minister, serving until 2014. Since then, I have been involved in several intra-Afghan dialogues, including talks with the Taliban.

My experiences have led me to make a number of conclusions about how to achieve lasting peace and security in Afghanistan. As the intra-Afghan talks resume, Afghans and their international partners should keep in mind the following factors: financial stability, distribution of power, nonalignment, and inclusivity. To

bring about a settlement along these lines, the United States and its allies, Pakistan and other regional players, and, most importantly, Afghans themselves, all have a role to play. It is critical that the United States understand these dynamics in order to give this round of talks the best chance of setting Afghanistan up for peace and stability on its own terms.

The first consideration must be putting Afghanistan on sound financial footing. There can be no genuine sovereign independence for a country that is unable to raise sufficient domestic revenue to sustain its own public administration and security forces. Afghanistan's long-term financial security should be considered just as important as elections and constitutional reform.

To be clear, international assistance will remain part of the picture for the foreseeable future. Still, as part of an eventual settlement, Afghan leaders should secure agreements on ways to build the country's revenue base. This will include liberating all Afghans—men and women—to work, engage in business, and otherwise contribute to the economy.

Second, any settlement should reflect the reality that Afghanistan is a pluralistic society. This pluralism is manifested in the basic geography of the nation, which boasts snow-capped mountains as well as extensive plains; resource-rich regions alongside much poorer ones; dense urban areas and sparsely populated

rural regions. There is also ethnic-cultural diversity, and of course each province has its own aspirations and development priorities.

It has become fashionable over the decades to believe that only a centralized state can contain this pluralism. The impulse to over-centralize state power leads Kabul to attempt to implement national policies that may work in one region but fail badly in another. For instance, the central government in June 2020 decided that each Afghan province would have one female deputy governor—a policy that was welcomed in civil society but ignored security threats and hostile working environments for women in certain provinces. Similarly, the government recently imposed a uniform testing requirement for district administrators, which advantaged younger graduates with links to the capital while pushing out community-based leaders with experience dealing with local, tribal and cultural dynamics. "Kabul-centric" policies often fail to appreciate these realities on the ground.

Too often, the capital plays a life-and-death role in Afghanistan's politics. For politicians affiliated with various regions, security for their part of the country often requires exerting control in Kabul. Failure to be part of the winning political force can mean getting shut out from accessing state resources. The concentration of power and resources in Kabul also means an imbalance in economic opportunities: Young Afghans in particular are very aware that there are limited prospects in the peripheral

regions, even as the population of Kabul has grown fivefold during the 20 years of U.S. military involvement.

Relatedly, the concentration of power in the hands of a single official, namely the president, has proven counterproductive. The recent case of President Ashraf Ghani's unilateral dismissal of a provincial governor is a case in point: The designated replacement, Daud Laghmani, is an ally of the president unfamiliar with the province. Locals have objected so soundly to his appointment that he is unable to take up the job. Sadly, there are many such examples in Afghan history in which capricious decisions from Kabul have led to violent insurgencies from the rural areas.

Decades of failed attempts at overcentralized governance suggest it is time to seriously consider constitutionally structured decentralization. The provinces, where the country's diversity is truly on display, need the capacity to innovate and manage their own affairs while remaining part of the constitutional structure of the unitary government. Skeptics may object that decentralization would weaken the government, entrenching established political forces in the provinces while enabling neighbors to meddle in Afghanistan's internal affairs through local proxies. But it's worth noting that successive efforts to create a strong centralized state have also failed to curb the influence of regional and local power holders in the provinces.



# The darkest days of my life: Reporting on India's brutal second Covid wave

Wearing a crumpled pastel T-shirt, jeans and a white face mask, a grieving young man performed the final rites at Nigambodh Ghat, one of Delhi's biggest crematoriums. He looked lost, numb and exhausted. Accompanied by a family member, Madhur Chawla followed the priests' directions almost robotically.

He'd lost his 49-year-old mother to Covid-19. Madhur couldn't bring himself to immerse the ashes of his mother -- while his relative obliged, the 27-year-old sat on a bench close by.

In a war, you know who you're fighting against. But in this war, the enemy has been an invisible, deadly virus, striking at will -- taking someone's last breath with it. What can you say to console a grieving son? I approached Madhur with the intent to offer my condolences but failed miserably. Even if I wanted to document his story, this wasn't the time or place. Holding back my tears, I asked Madhur if I could sit next to him. We sat at two ends of the bench, in complete silence. Almost five minutes later, Madhur said, "This has been the toughest



following Covid protocols -- have fallen prey to the virus.

In April, when I decided to step out to report on the second wave and its deadly impact, my parents were visiting from Kolkata, a city in eastern India and my hometown. I decided to curtail the risk of infecting them. So I packed my bags and checked into a hotel. By then the condominium I live in, home to more than 1,500 people, had reported 57 positive cases.

News of family and friends being

and subsequent deaths were peaking. My country was facing the world's worst Covid-19 outbreak. I could sense how nervous my husband and parents were. I promised to be as safe as possible.

While my video journalist and I put on our personal protective equipment and face shields in the parking lot of the crematorium, scores of ambulances lined up with grieving families in tow. Bodies on biers, covered in white sheets and bound by rope, were

all night -- this time grieving for a loved one.

The crematorium was divided into two sections, one for non-Covid bodies and the other for those who died from the virus. The waiting for the Covid section was much longer. A queue to get a token number stretched longer by the hour.

My dilemma as a reporter was: how do I walk up to any of these people, who feel betrayed, abandoned and are in complete grief? I didn't -- rather, I couldn't. I had never seen anything like this in my life. Wherever I looked, there were bodies -- in ambulances, on elevated platforms, even in cars.

Five funeral pyres had already been set ablaze. Within an hour, raging fires enveloped the entire enclosure.

Another young man in his late 30s was standing near a burning pyre. His uncle had died of the virus. Speaking to me, Neeraj Pal said they tried calling his phone three days back. There was no response. Worried, they called the hospital to ask after him. It was then they were told that he was no more.

"If we hadn't called the hospital, we would have been informed much later about his death," said Pal.

A middle-aged woman slumped into the front seat of her car. Her husband's lifeless body, rolled up in white cloth, was sitting up on the backseat. Beating her chest, she told me her husband was gasping for breath until the very end. They rushed him to four hospitals, but none took him, she said. He died at home.

"People are not dying of the virus, they're dying because there are no beds, no oxygen to keep them

alive," she told me.

The most unforgettable image was of children at the crematorium, some as young as four. Many had lost a parent to the virus. This overstretched crematorium would be the last memory they'd have of their loved ones.

According to the Indian government, 577 children lost their parents in a span of 55 days during the second wave.

The situation in hospitals was as morbid as crematoriums. The Covid ward of a private hospital we visited was packed, with no further admissions allowed. For hours, family members had been sitting outside, waiting for news on their loved ones.

Almost 40 minutes later, more than a dozen cars rushed in. They had patients in the backseat, breathless and in distress. Relatives rushed to the ward, requesting oxygen cylinders, but the hospital didn't have any to spare. An old woman in a wheelchair, a frail old man gasping for breath while his son implored for a hospital bed, another waiting in an ambulance -- all eventually turned away.

Helpless guards at the ward entrance kept repeating these words in Hindi: "There's no bed, no oxygen. Try another hospital." A young woman was breathing in the last liter of oxygen from a cylinder, while her family pleaded with hospital authorities for more. Seeing our camera and mic, her relative walked up to me. "You're from the media, help us," she said. "They'll listen to you. I just need one bed for my sister."

I wanted to help. I ran to the ward. I spoke to a doctor. But I failed -- the hospital had exceeded its capacity to accommodate patients.

Sitting in the porch was a woman in a PPE suit. Sonika Babbar had accompanied her sick father and brother to the hospital, brought there by ambulances as her father's oxygen levels fell. "There are no beds available," Babbar said. "Patients are lying on the floor inside the ward."

India reported more than 350,000 cases of Covid-19 that day, April 26. When I went on air on Becky Anderson's show "Connect The World" the next evening to share what I'd seen, I couldn't hold back my tears. It wasn't easy to set aside my emotions and speak only as a reporter.



thing I've ever done."

His father, who was being treated for Covid-19, had been discharged from hospital the day before. His twin was still in medical care, and didn't get to say his final goodbye before their mother died of the virus.

It's been a dark time for India. Indians have been infected at an alarming rate, and have unexpectedly lost loved ones to Covid-19. Even shutting our doors and windows hasn't helped. People -- young and old, including children who have strictly been

infected had already started coming in. Colleagues had lost relatives. This time, the impact of the virus was too close to home.

I told my 5-year-old daughter Anaya that I'd have to step out for a couple of days. Little did we know I'd be living just 20 kilometers (about 12.4 miles) away from her for the next 18 days. Vaccinations for the 18- to 44-year-old age group were to commence a week later.

Delhi was gasping for breath. Complaints of oxygen shortages

pulled out and taken into the crematorium.

Hindus believe in burning the bodies of their loved ones. Logs are stacked, the body is placed on top and set on fire. Later, families collect the remains and immerse them in a holy river.

An uncomfortable silence enveloped the length and breadth of this final resting place, shattered intermittently by wails of relatives, some in PPE suits, others in masks and face shields. It was 10 a.m. on this day. Most of them had probably stayed up



# Colonial Pipeline's recovered Bitcoin ransom is a ray of hope

Earlier this week, CNN broke the story that the Justice Department and FBI were able to recover \$2.3 million of the nearly \$5 million worth of Bitcoin Colonial Pipeline paid to DarkSide, the ransomware gang whose attack was responsible for Colonial Pipeline shutting down East Coast operations last month.

The oil giant paid the ransom in an effort to quickly restore service - but it's now accepted knowledge that paying ransom encourages more ransomware incidents.

While this seizure signals more accountability, there are many reasons to expect that

ransomware attacks will quickly get worse before getting better. Ransomware encrypts a victim's data, making it unusable, unless the victim pays a ransom for the keys to decrypt the data. Recently, criminals have also threatened to publish an organization's data if it does not pay the ransom. In an announcement Monday, Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco called these payments "the fuel that propels the digital extortion engine."

There are local initiatives and concerted commitments among mayors that would prevent municipalities from paying ransoms. Meanwhile, insurance carriers have started to remove ransomware payments from policies, and the federal government has placed several ransomware gangs on sanctions lists, making ransom payments illegal under the federal law.

Bitcoin has long been the cryptocurrency of choice for criminal enterprises deploying ransomware. Cryptocurrency infrastructure itself enables these tactics, but that is changing. This is not because, as

some erroneously assume, Bitcoin is untraceable.

While Bitcoin does offer users extra privacy, it is not totally anonymous - rather, it provides users a form of digital pseudonym. As transactions are logged on the blockchain, a public ledger, Bitcoin is eminently traceable. Criminal enterprises paid in Bitcoin, however, launder their proceeds through legitimate coin-swapping services, illegitimate mixers designed to make it very difficult to "follow the money," and shady over-the-counter brokers who turn cryptocurrency into cash.

Lax know-your-customer (KYC) requirements are, in large part, to blame for cryptocurrencies making extortion scalable. These lax practices are for the most part the hallmarks of a young, under-regulated industry rather than an intentionally malicious oversight. These practices will eventually mature into more robust KYC processes likely as a condition of doing business with larger exchanges like Coinbase.

The Biden administration's strategic review of the role of cryptocurrency in ransomware steps on the gas.

Moreover, the US is already developing methodologies to track lesser-known cryptocurrencies to which criminals are gravitating.

These factors creates a perfect storm - time is of the essence for criminal enterprises to make as much money as they can. This also puts pressure on the ransomware industry itself.

Operations like DarkSide are part of the ransomware-as-a-service ecosystem. For a share of the profits, DarkSide deploys ransomware on behalf of other criminal actors who have established illicit access to an organization.

For several years, I have hunted a persistent group that attempted to steal credentials from more than 1,500 entities in the United States, most of which are part of critical infrastructure. More than 300 hospitals, 80 energy sector companies (including pipelines), 60 pharmaceutical companies, 200 state and local governments, 80 school districts, and 100 targets in the food distribution ecosystem of the United States were targeted by this adversary. Slick, efficient, and designed to evade detection, many of these attacks were successful. Left undetected, a competent adversary will find a way to make access persistent, which allows an adversary to poke around, find the high-grade ore, and stage an effective ransomware event that may even knock out backups intended to protect against ransomware. There is a rush to monetize this type of access, given the dwindling lifespan of ransomware - another reason why we can expect a higher velocity of attacks in the short term.



## Is America going the way of Nicaragua?



The world is watching us - America, the beacon of democracy, freedom of the press, freedom of religion and individual rights. As President Biden heads to Europe for his first overseas trip, he is making the case that American democracy can withstand its current challenges. He asked in a recent op-ed, "Can democracies come together to deliver real results for our people in a rapidly changing

world?" And he answered: "I believe the answer is yes."

But right now, citizens may be asking: Is America the country with more than 100 scholars warning about threats to our democracy from within?

Is America the country with a former president, Donald Trump, who incited an insurrection and who allegedly seized phone records of U.S. journalists?

Is America the country whose

lives to come to democratic America?

Take Nicaragua, where police recently raided the home of opposition figure Cristiana Chamorro and placed her under house arrest in a move viewed by critics as an attempt by the federal government to block her efforts to run for president. Chamorro is a journalist, vice president of La Prensa, an opposition newspaper formerly led by her father, who was

assassinated, and daughter of a violent summer coming?

But let's get specific. Does our rhetoric match reality? Or are we starting to look like some of our neighbors whose citizens flee their countries, risking their

defamation campaigns, harassment, surveillance and assault." But how will the U.S. have credibility in calling out Nicaragua's government if we are showing signs of undemocratic behavior? The U.S. government has slapped financial sanctions on more than two-dozen Nicaraguan officials it accuses of undermining democracy. And Sec. of State Antony Blinken

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affirmed this week that the Ortega government is moving "in the opposite direction" of guaranteeing fair and free elections. This message is coming from a U.S. in the middle of its own internal battle over voting rights.

America's voice in the world is vital; people listen to us. But we have to get our own house in order if we are going to be the country Ronald Reagan imagined when he observed, "America is a shining city upon a hill whose beacon of light guides freedom-loving people everywhere."

We cannot risk becoming hypocrites in the world, leaving competitors such as Russia and China to define the global standard of behavior. If we lose our international standing as a democracy, countries such as Nicaragua will ignore our pleas, and pro-democracy leaders like Cristiana Chamorro will be in further jeopardy.



# Explained: What is Turkey's 'sea snot' outbreak that could jeopardise its economic activity, marine life



brown sheet known as marine mucilage that is formed by dead and living organic material. The sludge forms when algae overloaded with nutrients fests on warm weather due to climate change. It is to be noted that algae are the prime source of maintaining oxygen concentration in water bodies, however, if their growth is overlooked, they could lead to the formation of this mucilage that could block sunlight from entering the deep waters.

While the exact cause of their rampant growth is being ascertained, one prime reason is pollution from organic compounds like nitrogen and phosphorous. Meanwhile, the rising water temperatures have also played their part. Baris Salihoglu, head of METU's Institute of Maritime Sciences told DW, "We know that the water temperature in Marmara has increased by 2 to 2.5 degrees Celsius over the past 20 years,

above the global average." The sea is surrounded by a population of nearly 20 million people, which has triggered overfishing in the area causing a major loss to the aquatic biodiversity making it vulnerable to such outbreaks. Industrial and agricultural runoff has also been contributing to Marmara's degradation.

Why the heightened focus?

The Sea of Marmara connects the Black Sea to the Aegean Sea, which is an important trade route for the region. At the moment boats have to negotiate through the thick sludge in the Marmara, however, if it spreads rampantly to the Black Sea it could create a global problem. President Erdogan said, "My fear is, if this expands to the Black Sea, the trouble will be enormous. We need to take this step without delay." The Sea of Marmara is also an important source of economy in the region, which includes major metropolitan like Istanbul, and the growing

accumulation of sea snot could jeopardise the fisheries industries. Local fishermen have been complaining that the nets are being filled with sludge making them extremely heavy to be lifted and at times visible to the fish. Meanwhile, the aquatic ecosystem is also on the verge. There have been reports of fish species being endangered from the sludge as they are dying from suffocation. Professor Bayram Ozturk of the Turkish Marine Research told BBC that due to the overgrowth of the mucilage, several species are under threat including oysters, mussels, sea stars, adding that "it's a real catastrophe." The Mucilage has spread to nearly 80-100 feet below the surface and if it collapses to the bottom of the seafloor it could be further detrimental to the marine ecosystem in the region. The sea-snot has the capability of poisoning fishes and other marine species that are already on the verge.

The sea of Marmara, which lies within Turkey and separates Istanbul between Europe and Asia, is festured with a new challenge-sea snot. The huge mass of organic matter has taken over the water body, disturbing the aquatic ecosystem and local communities. The crisis has been triggered by global warming and increasing pollutants.

Amid growing concerns over the accumulation of the slimy green sludge, Turkey has vowed to save its shores from new development

building up in its waters. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said, "We will save our seas from this mucilage calamity."

The sludge has also been seen in the adjoining Black Sea and Greece's Aegean Sea, which are connected by the Sea of Marmara. Now the government has unleashed a massive campaign to get rid of the crisis that threatens Turkey's marine ecosystem.

What is Sea-Snot and how has it formed?

Sea snot is a thick, slimy grey-

## US Supreme Court blocks permanent residency for some immigrants

**The U.S. Supreme Court on Monday refused to let immigrants who have been allowed to stay in the United States on humanitarian grounds apply to become permanent residents.**

The U.S. Supreme Court on Monday refused to let immigrants who have been allowed to stay in the United States on humanitarian grounds apply to become permanent residents if they entered the country illegally, siding with President Joe Biden's administration.

The justices, acting in an appeal by a married couple from El Salvador who were granted so-called Temporary Protected Status, unanimously upheld a lower court ruling that barred their applications for permanent residency, also known as a green card, because of their unlawful entry.

The case could affect thousands of immigrants, many of whom have lived in the United States for years.

Biden, who has sought to reverse many of his Republican predecessor Donald Trump's hardline immigration policies, had opposed the immigrants in this

case, placing the president at odds with immigration advocacy groups and some of his fellow Democrats.

A federal law called the Immigration and Nationality Act generally requires that people seeking to become permanent residents have been "inspected and admitted" into the United States. At issue in the case was whether a grant of Temporary Protected Status (TPS), which gives the recipient "lawful status," satisfies those requirements.

Writing for the court, liberal Justice Elena Kagan said that "because a grant of TPS does not come with a ticket of admission, it does not eliminate the disqualifying effect of an unlawful entry."

Foreign nationals can be granted Temporary Protected Status if a humanitarian crisis in their home country, such as a natural disaster or armed conflict, would make their return unsafe. There

are about 400,000 people in the United States with protected status, which prevents deportation and lets them work legally.

The case involves Jose Sanchez and Sonia Gonzalez, who live in New Jersey and have four children.

"We are of course highly disappointed the court decided against the rights of immigrants who otherwise played by the rules like Mr. and Mrs. Sanchez," said Jaime Aparisi, the couple's lawyer. "TPS recipients like them have been living and working lawfully here for 20 years."

The Justice Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The couple twice entered the United States illegally: in 1997 and 1998. After a series of earthquakes in 2001, the United States designated El Salvador as covered under the Temporary Protected Status program. The



couple received protection under the program that same year.

U.S. officials rejected their 2014 applications for green cards because they had not been lawfully admitted. They sued in federal court, saying that those with lawful status, including Temporary Protected Status recipients, are deemed to have been lawfully admitted, and may apply for permanent residency. Last year, the Philadelphia-based 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against the couple.

Besides El Salvador, 11 other countries currently have such designations: Haiti, Honduras, Myanmar, Nepal, Nicaragua,

Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Syria, Venezuela and Yemen. Myanmar was the latest addition to the list, placed there by Biden's administration in the wake of a Feb. 1 military coup there.

The Supreme Court ruled in the case on a day when Vice President Kamala Harris visited Guatemala as part of the Biden administration's efforts to press that country as well as El Salvador and Honduras to do more to tackle corruption to improve social conditions and make people from those Central American nations less eager to emigrate.



# Perseverance hits the road: Rover begins search for ancient microbial life on Mars

**Over the next several months, Perseverance will be exploring a four sq km patch of the crater floor, from where it will collect soil samples.**

The Perseverance rover trundling the surface of Mars began its most critical mission phase - looking for ancient microbial life. This phase of the mission began on June 1, the Joint Propulsion Laboratory said in a statement as the rover left the "Octavia E. Butler" landing site.

During the first few weeks of the science operations phase, the rover will drive up to a low-lying scenic overlook in the Jezero crater, from where it will survey some of the oldest geological features using its auto-navigation and sampling systems. "The goal is to find four spots to collect samples," JPL said. Over the next several months,

Perseverance will be exploring a four sq km patch of the crater floor, from where it will collect soil samples to be returned to Earth in future missions. "We are putting the rover's commissioning phase as well as the landing site in our rearview mirror and hitting the road," said Jennifer Trosper, Perseverance project manager.

Perseverance's science goal The SUV-sized rover is the most advanced laboratory on wheels to have landed on Mars in the last decade. The science goal of the mission includes studying the Jezero region in order to understand the geology and past habitability of the environment in the area and to

search for signs of ancient microscopic life. During the science phase, the rover will also take measurements and test technologies to support future human and robotic explorations. In a bid to collect unique samples, the rover will explore two geologic units in which Jezero's deepest and most ancient layers of exposed bedrock and other intriguing geologic features can be found. According to JPL, the first unit, called "the Crater Floor Fractured Rough," is the crater-filled floor of Jezero. The adjacent unit, named "Séítah" (meaning 'amidst the sand' in the Navajo language), has its fair share of Mars bedrock. JPL has



mapped the route that the rover will take to reach its new destination, along with optional turnoffs and labelled areas of interest and potential obstructions. The first science campaign will be completed when the rover returns to the landing site with the samples in its casings after travelling nearly 2.5 to 5 kilometres. During the first phase, up to eight of

Perseverance's 43 sample tubes could be filled with Mars rock and regolith, following which the rover will travel toward the location of its second science campaign: Jezero's delta region. Scientists believe that the delta region is the confluence of an ancient river and a lake and rich in carbonates minerals that can preserve fossilised signs of ancient life on Earth.

## Solar Eclipse 2021: Ring of fire captured in stunning photos from around the world

**The June 10 solar eclipse is rare as it witnessed the occurrence of the ring of fire around the Moon and was visible in parts of Canada and Siberia.**

Weeks after the world witnessed the picturesque Bloodmoon, Supermoon and total lunar eclipse, the first solar eclipse of 2021 was seen around the globe on Thursday.

The annular solar eclipse occurs when the sun, moon and the earth come in a straight line and almost on the same plane. It is a partial eclipse when a ring of fire appears in the sky.

The June 10 solar eclipse was rare as it witnessed the occurrence of

the ring of fire around the Moon. During a solar eclipse, the Moon casts a shadow on the Earth, creating a visual phenomenon as it moves between the Earth and the Sun, blocking sunlight. As the Moon covers the centre of the Sun, the edges emit a glowing halo creating an illuminated 'ring of fire'.

The partial eclipse started at around 11:42 am Indian Standard Time (IST) and the annular eclipse occurred from 3:30 pm and

continued up to 4:52 pm, though for different intervals for a particular region, depending upon one's geographical location. The partial eclipse ended at around 6:41 pm IST.

The annular solar eclipse was visible from parts of Greenland, North-Eastern Canada, the North Pole and some parts of Russia. Meanwhile, Europe, North America, Asia, Arctic and Atlantic regions also witnessed a partial solar eclipse.



1Eclipsed sun rises over New York  
"The rare cosmic development was visible in the vast region of North America, Europe and Asia. The ring of fire was also witnessed in parts of Greenland, North-Eastern Canada, the North Pole

and some parts of Russia.

2View from China- "During a solar eclipse, the Moon casts a shadow on the Earth, creating a visual phenomenon as it moves between the Earth and the Sun, blocking sunlight.

## With focus on reasserting fight against climate change, G7 leaders to meet in Cornwall



The Group of Seven (G7) richest democracies are set to meet at Carbis Bay Hotel, a seaside resort in Cornwall, UK between June 11-13. The countries will sit together with a major focus on Covid-19 vaccination and supporting

middle, low-income countries along with showing fresh resort to tackle the menace of climate change.

The G7 will see heads of states from the US, UK, Canada, Japan, Germany, France and Italy come together to discuss

the global challenges facing the world. The meeting that is dominated by western nations will see US President Joe Biden advance his multilateral agenda in the backdrop of rising China and an assertive Russia.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to participate in the summit virtually as India continues to recover from the second wave of the deadly coronavirus pandemic. A global menace: Tackling climate change

One of the key agenda to dominate the talks at the G7 summit will be climate change as countries reassert their willingness to reduce the global temperature by 1.5-degree

celsius. Ahead of the G7 meeting, environment ministers of these countries have agreed that they will deliver climate targets in line with limiting the rise in global temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius. They also agreed to cut direct funding of coal-based power stations in poorer nations by the end of this year. The meeting of the environment ministers had taken place in May.

Ahead of his departure for the ambitious meet, Biden in an opinion column for The Washington Post had said, "This is a defining question of our time: Can democracies come together to deliver real results for our

people in a rapidly changing world? Will the democratic alliances and institutions that shaped so much of the last century prove their capacity against modern-day threats and adversaries? I believe the answer is yes." Meanwhile, a recent study by the Swiss Re Institute indicates that the economies of G7 countries will shrink twice as much as they did during the Covid-19 pandemic. The research showed that the world's biggest industrial economies are projected to lose 8.5 per cent of GDP annually, or nearly \$5 trillion, by 2050 if leaders do not enact plans to tackle it.

The report said that if nothing is



# I recovered from Covid-19. When can I start working out?

**If you have recovered from Covid-19 and are wondering whether you can just about attempt to resume your mini-workout sessions at home, here's the answer.**

The worst long-term side-effect of Covid-19 is undoubtedly weakness. Although symptoms disappear after recovery, most people complain of a lingering sense of fatigue, with limited ability to exercise or even perform daily activities. Several patients also experience muscle pain long after recovery.

If you are a fitness enthusiast, this can work against you because we are sure you don't

miss your workout sessions for the world but of course, Covid stopped you. Now, if you have recovered from Covid-19 and are wondering whether you can just about attempt to resume your mini-workout sessions at home, here's the answer.

IndiaToday.in consulted two doctors, who advised exercise routines that you can follow, if you wish to regain your physical strength after recovering from Covid-19.

## SLOW AND STEADY

Soon after recovery, it is important for you to understand that you must not rush with your fitness session since Covid makes your body weak. Do not exert yourself. "Go for a slow and steady exercise schedule which will not exhaust your oxygen reserve in the lungs," Dr Ijen Bhattacharya, physician and diabetologist from Ghaziabad, told IndiaToday.in.

## WORKOUT ROUTINE



You may resume routine work at home but do not stress yourself, Dr Ijen Bhattacharya said, adding that "breathing exercises and Pranayam are good. You

may also do brisk walking for 15-30 minutes on every alternate day at home itself." If you enjoy doing intense workouts, hold on for a month.

## Severe Covid-19 with oxygen therapy may reduce gray matter in brain, say neurologists

**Gray matter is vital for processing information in the brain, enabling individuals to control movement, memory, and emotions.**



Covid-19 is not only a respiratory infection but takes a toll on the brain too and is linked to reduced gray matter, neurologists have warned. The reduction in gray matter volume has been witnessed in the frontal lobe of the brain in severe Covid-19 patients with fever and requiring oxygen therapy, a small study conducted by researchers at

Georgia State University has found. The study has been published in the journal Neurobiology of Stress. "People with severe cases of Covid-19 who require oxygen and/or ventilator support with prolonged hospitalisation seem to be at a higher risk of developing neurological symptoms," Dr Pavan Pai, neurologist,

Wockhardt Hospital, told IndiaToday.in. Gray matter is vital for processing information in the brain, enabling individuals to control movement, memory, and emotions. Gray matter abnormality may affect functioning of neurons and communication. Those with pre-existing brain disorders more at risk. Padma Shri awardee Dr BN Gangadhar, Director of National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), said such an outcome was likely to be seen in those with pre-existing brain disorders and co-morbidities like hypertension and obesity. "Contracting Covid-19 has nothing

to do with your brain being small or big. But once you get Covid-19, those with smaller brains are likely to have a poorer outcome. Lesser gray matter is another risk factor for poorer outcome," Dr BN Gangadhar told IndiaToday.in. Dr Pavan Pai said that low gray matter volume in the brain was linked with a higher level of disability among Covid-19 patients. "Reduced gray matter is also seen in mood disorders which explains how it causes mood swings and anxiety issues in Covid-recovered patients," he said. Proper sleep, managing stress key in such scenarios, Dr Pai suggested that everyone should watch for "abnormal symptoms" after recovering from Covid-19 and go for regular follow-ups with the doctor for appropriate treatment. "Brain manifestations post Covid-19 can be avoided by sleeping 8 to 9 hours per night, managing stress, exercising, managing Diabetes mellitus and blood pressure, strengthening brain power by solving brain puzzles, finding enjoyable activities, increasing intake of protein, fruits, vegetables and healthy fats," he said.

## Boost Your Immunity: Black-eyed bean salad

**In today's segment of Boost Your Immunity, we bring to you a tasty and healthy recipe of Black-eyed bean salad. It is easy to make and has high nutritional value.**

Health has taken precedence over everything else in today's world. It's of utmost importance to boost our immunity in order to safeguard ourselves from diseases and also build the strength to fight them. Today, in our Boost Your Immunity segment, we bring you a protein-rich recipe made with black-eyed beans, also known as black-eyed peas or lobia.

Manisha Aggarwal, a Delhi-based nutritionist, shares a recipe of Black-eyed bean salad with IndiaToday.in and also informs us about the great nutritional value of these pulses. The dish overall

benefits health, builds immunity and can be enjoyed as a snack anytime.

## INGREDIENTS

1 cup dry Lobia or black-eyed beans  
1 medium tomato finely-chopped  
1 cucumber finely-chopped  
1 ripe mango  
50g chopped cottage cheese  
¼ cup roasted and coarsely chopped peanuts  
Chopped coriander leaves for garnishing  
Seasonings:  
Juice of 1 lemon  
¼ tsp cinnamon powder  
¼ tsp black pepper powder

¼ tsp roasted cumin powder

¼ tsp chaat masala

1 tsp honey

Black salt as per taste

## HOW TO MAKE

Soak lobia overnight or for 4-6 hours. Pressure-cook it along with salt for 2-3 whistles. Keep a check on the amount of water used, it shouldn't be more than 1-1/2 cups. Take a large mixing bowl and add the drained and cooled lobia followed by chopped, tomato, cucumber, mango and cottage cheese. Add all the seasonings and mix well. Sprinkle coarsely grounded peanuts and fresh coriander.



## BENEFITS

The main ingredient, lobia/cowpea/black-eyed pea, is high on protein, zinc, folate, magnesium and potassium. High soluble fiber and insoluble fiber content makes it desirable as an antidiabetic and antihypertensive product. Since many Covid

patients are experiencing high sugar levels, this chaat can be helpful. Cottage cheese and peanuts further increase protein and zinc value of the dish. Lemons and tomatoes used here add much-required vitamin C. Cinnamon and black pepper are perfect for boosting immunity.



# Will printing more money help revive Indian economy? All you need to



**Many prominent economists and industry leaders have called for additional money printing by the Reserve Bank of India to help boost expenditure during the second Covid-19 wave. However, there are several problems associated with additional money printing. Here is all you need to know.**

The second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic has put immense pressure on the Indian economy and many prominent voices have urged the government to increase its expenditure and announce relief measures to tide over the crisis. Some experts and industry leaders suggest that increased expenditure and more relief measures can be achieved if the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) increasing printing currency. Some individuals have called for more cash printing including billionaire banker Uday Kotak. He said, "This is the time to expand the balance sheet of the government, duly supported by the RBI... for monetary expansion or printing of money." Nobel laureate Abhijit Banerjee

and former finance minister P Chidambaram also suggested that printing money is an ideal way to support expenditure during the ongoing second wave of the pandemic. While Banerjee said that the additional cash printing will help in direct cash transfers to poorer sections of the society, Chidambaram said the government should "act boldly and spend" by borrowing or printing more money. "This is not the time to worry about the fiscal deficit. So what if the deficit widens to 6.5%? We can't lose another year like we lost the last year. But the way the government is reacting, we are going to lose another year. My advice to the government is to act boldly and spend. Borrow

or print money and spend," Simply put, the problem with Chidambaram said. ADDITIONAL CASH PRINTING When the government is required to increase its expenditure beyond budgetary allocation in view of a crisis situation, the central bank has the option of printing more money to support the additional liquidity requirement. The process of spending more money by a government, known as deficit financing, can be achieved by borrowing or minting more money to increase liquidity in the economy. The central bank has various options to increase liquidity, but it may not be a viable solution as it will not lead to a rise in economic output. While additional money printing is likely to increase the demand for goods and services, it may lead to a sharp rise in inflation if the economic output fails to support demand. In turn, there will be a sharp increase in prices of existing goods and services as the demand will rise, but supply won't.

the government. However, Subbarao added that it should only be done if there is absolutely no alternative. Subbarao clearly mentioned in an interview with news agency PTI that India is "nowhere" near such a scenario. He suggested that the government can consider Covid bonds as an option to raise borrowing as part of budgeted borrowing to deal with the economic slowdown during the second wave. "It (RBI) can (print money) but, it should avoid doing so unless there is absolutely no alternative. For sure, there are times when monetisation despite its costs - becomes inevitable such as when the government cannot finance its deficit at reasonable rates," Subbarao said. "We are nowhere near such a scenario," he added. Subbarao further said that people who have called for additional money printing do not realise that the central bank is indirectly printing money even now to finance the deficit.

## Is it safe to invest in cryptocurrencies? Here is all you need to know

**Despite the growing popularity of cryptocurrencies in India, a large number of investors hesitate to put their money in the virtual coin trading space. Find out if it is safe to invest in cryptocurrencies in India.**

The popularity of cryptocurrencies has been growing rapidly in India since last year as more investors try their luck in the lucrative virtual coin trading space. Indian cryptocurrency exchanges confirm that they are adding people to their platform at a faster rate in 2021. In view of the rapid customer base growth, cryptocurrency exchanges are optimistic that the emerging asset class will keep attracting more investors in India. However, the amount of cryptocurrency investments in India is only a fraction of traditional investment-class assets like equities. The trend indicates that while younger Indian investors are placing their bets on crypto assets instead of traditional options, a larger number of individuals still remain hesitant, even though they are keen on exploring the cryptocurrency

space. IS IT SAFE TO INVEST IN CRYPTOCURRENCY? The answer to the question is tricky as it is still an emerging asset class and has not yet gained widespread acceptance like equities, commodities and mutual funds. Whether investing in cryptocurrencies is safe remains a hotly debated topic in the financial space, with many backing the decentralised digital currency and an equal number of people opposing it. However, from a pure investment point of view, the risks associated with Bitcoin, Ethereum (Ether) or any other cryptocurrency are no different from other traditional assets, except the fact that the virtual coin market faces higher volatility. Analysts have clearly stated that all cryptocurrencies are risky assets and wild price swings are common in the virtual coin trading

space. This is likely to reduce as the asset gains wider mainstream acceptance. But investors should be clear that the crypto space at the moment involves high risks and rewards. In other words, you need to have a big risk appetite to gain from crypto trading. At the same time, investors should note that cryptocurrency is far more resilient than it appears. Nischal Shetty, CEO of popular cryptocurrency exchange WazirX, has highlighted in the past that the asset has survived two major global recessions and has been around for over a decade. Shetty had said that cryptocurrencies, like gold, act as a hedge to protect fiat currencies and equities. This is one reason why cryptocurrency demand grew rapidly during the first wave of the pandemic. Unlike fiat currencies and stocks, cryptocurrencies are not



impacted as much by inflation and offer an ideal alternative to gold, which is another preferred hedge investment. It should also be noted that investing in cryptocurrencies is legal in India and there are no laws that prohibit individuals from buying or selling virtual coins. For people who have a high risk appetite and have the patience to remain invested for a longer period, exploring the cryptocurrency space may not be such a bad idea. People should also ensure that they conduct adequate research before investing.

Having said that, there are visible risks that cannot be ignored. REGULATORY HURDLES, POSSIBILITY OF BAN In India, like many other parts of the world, the biggest risk involved in cryptocurrency trade is the lack of regulation and oversight. The fact that the government has not been able to come up with a concrete stand on cryptocurrency is the reason behind the lack of regulation. The problem dates back to 2018 when the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) came out with a circular to impose a blanket ban on such trade.



# Paani Paani: After Bengali avatar, Jacqueline Fernandez stuns in Rajasthani look

South African beauty Jacqueline Fernandez manages to pull off any Indian attire with such panache and grace that it seems as though she has been wearing desi clothes her whole life. After winning the hearts of audiences with her gorgeous Bengali-inspired look in rapper Badshah's song Genda Phool, the Kick actor has once again teamed up with the desi rapper for his all new song Paani Paani. While Jacqueline was seen in a Bengali avatar for Genda Phool, in which she was seen wearing a gorgeous red and white saree along with accessories and make-up to match, for the new song Paani Paani, the stunning leading lady is seen flaunting her moves in a traditional Rajasthani look. Badshah's Paani Paani was released on Wednesday and also features the voice of singer Aastha Gill.



The music video of the peppy track was shot in Jaisalmer, featuring Badshah and Jacqueline. Talking about the song, Jacqueline said in an

interview, "The process of making Paani Paani and shooting it was a beautiful journey. When Aastha and I recorded the song, we knew that we had something unique in our hands and I only wanted Jacqueline to be a part of it. We shot it in the beautiful desert landscape and the video looks stunning. The sound of the song is different—we have used folk instruments, and local dance form that gives this a fresh look and feel," he added.

Badshah also took to social media to talk about his new song. He wrote, "We have worked really really hard for this. I have always made sure that I give the best to my audience and to the fans. Do something different from what I have done before and take it to the next level."



## Angelina Jolie expresses 'grief, solidarity for people of India who are suffering' amid Covid-19 pandemic

Angelina Jolie is the latest Hollywood star who has shown solidarity with India after it battled a deadly second wave of the coronavirus pandemic over the last two months.

Angelina said there are 'no words' to describe the situation in India as it was. The coronavirus cases have begun declining in the country with more and more citizens getting vaccinated each day. Angelina joined the likes of Reese Witherspoon, Camilla Cabello, Shawn Mendes and Will Smith to show support towards India.

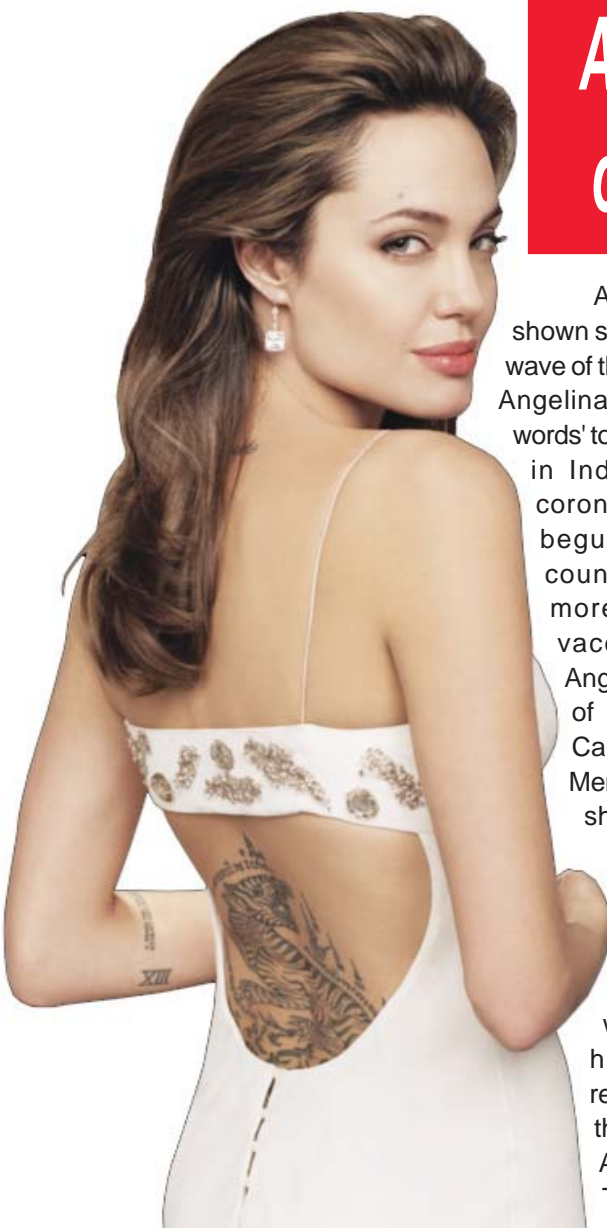
Speaking to NDTV, Angelina said, "I would certainly say to the people of India, with a very heavy heart, there is just really no words to express the grief, solidarity, for all that the people of India are suffering."

Angelina's latest release has been action thriller, Those Who Wish Me Dead. She plays a fire fighter

in the film, directed by Taylor Sheridan. Hindustan Times gave a favourable review to the movie. "Angelina Jolie delivers a true movie star performance as Hannah, a smokejumper

who is struggling emotionally, after failing to save three young campers and a colleague in a forest fire... This is the sort of studio movie that used to get made a decade ago. And that's squarely the style that Sheridan is going for in Those Who Wish Me Dead. He directs without any visual embellishments, although his story builds to a conclusion that can only be described as melodramatic. Hannah goes full momma-bear on the assassins in a fiery face-off, giving Jolie an opportunity to flex not only her dramatic chops, but her long-dormant

bonafides as an action star." Angelina will also be seen finally entering the Marvel Cinematic Universe with the release of Eternals later this year. She stars with Kit Harrington, Richard Madden, Kumail Nanjiani and Salma Hayek in the movie.





# Kirti Kulhari says Sasha in upcoming film Shaadistan 'doesn't seek validation for anything'

From playing a lawyer who is a single mother in *Four More Shots Please!* to a survivor of abuse in *Criminal Justice: Behind Closed Doors*, actor Kirti Kulhari says she wants to tap into the varying degrees of complexity through her on-screen characters. The 36-year-old-actor, however, is not adverse to taking up a "white character" provided it is written well.

"I want to play as complex characters as possible. I want to play dark, grey characters. I am bored of playing white characters. But if a script comes up where a white character is written with a lot of depth and layers, I would like to play that (too)," Kulhari told PTI in a Zoom



interview.

"Every (role) I played is not simple to play. Human beings are not simple and to tap into so many aspects is not easy," she added.

The actor is looking forward to the release of her upcoming film *Shaadistan*. In the movie, Kulhari

plays a singer named Sasha, whom she described as "a tigress when it comes to taking charge of her life".

Directed by Raj Singh Chaudhary, *Shaadistan* follows the journey of four young free-spirited musicians, a small-town couple and their young daughter

in a camper van, travelling from Mumbai to a small town in Rajasthan.

"To me, Sasha represents freedom, which is misunderstood by people in terms of freedom to do this or to do sex or whatever. When you say freedom, it means choosing your own life and how you want to live your life and who you want to be. Sasha doesn't seek validation for anything in her life."

Asked if Sasha was an extension of her *Four More Shots Please!* character Anjana Menon, Kirti said both women are empowered and unapologetic but they are very different.

"Anjana is in the process of finding herself. She comes from a place of being emotionally

carried away, while Sasha has found herself, she is not operating from a space of ego or being not sure. She is emotional but will stand up for herself and others."

Also read: When birthday girl Sonam Kapoor said she would like a man who is richer and better-looking than Anil Kapoor. The actor, who is set to play a doctor in the upcoming web series *Human*, said she wants to keep reinventing herself.

"I don't care about what image I make but I want to tell a story or play a character that will touch you and make a difference. Being an actor, I am given an opportunity to make a difference to the world I live in and this is my way of doing it," she added.

## Shanaya Kapoor in bikini top and low-waist leather pants nails Y2K aesthetics



Shanaya Kapoor is one of the up-and-coming fashionistas. To know what we are talking about, you just have to scroll through her Instagram account. The younger cousin of Sonam, Rhea and Janhvi Kapoor has mastered the art of impeccable dressing like her sisters and her fans love it.

Recently, stylist Chandini Whabi shared a BTS video from a shoot featuring Shanaya. In the clip, a team of stylists can be seen working on Shanaya and incorporating the Y2K aesthetics into her look. The star kid wore a beige and black coloured bikini top with a matching bikini bottom. Shanaya teamed a pair of low-

waist black flared leather pants with the bikini top. She wore the pants in a way that the straps of her bikini bottoms were clearly visible. Her entire look screamed of the Y2K vibes, which covers the late 90s and early-to-mid 2000s era. For the hairdo, Shanaya tied her tresses in a voluminous ponytail adorned with colourful hair beads. A few strands of hair were decoratively curled on her forehead and decorated with shimmery hair stickers. She accessorised her attire with tiny silver hoop earrings. As for her make-up, Shanaya opted for glowing skin, shimmery pink eye shadow, sleek eyeliner, mascara on the

lashes, well-defined eyebrows, glossy pink lip shade and beaming highlighter on her face. For the uninitiated, the Y2K style is typically quite futuristic and has a retro edge to it. Think of shiny materials, chunky sneakers, pleated skirts, baguette, low-rise flare jeans, crop tops and colourful sunglasses.

This is not the first time Shanaya has set the internet on fire with her sartorial picks. A recent photoshoot for which she wore a risqué sheer draped dress with an OTT hat created quite the buzz online. She had shared the pictures on her Instagram with the caption, "Mentally I'm in Mexico ordering for tacos by the beach."

## Shaan recalls not recognising Honey Singh at a party, leaving him 'upset': 'I felt like an idiot'



Singer Shaan admitted that he didn't recognise rapper Yo Yo Honey Singh when the two met in person once, and when he apologised, Honey became 'upset'. Shaan's admission comes weeks after he criticised the rapper's music. In an appearance on music composer Salim Merchant's chat show, the two spoke about Shaan's controversial statements. The *Tanha Dil* singer took the opportunity to share the anecdote about Honey. Reminded about his tendency to forget people's names while having conversations with them, Shaan said, "Yo Yo Honey Singh. I'd never met him before. When I saw him on screen, he was much slimmer. I didn't realise he'd gained a lot of weight; I met him at some party. And everyone was copying his style at that point. So I didn't recognise him." He continued, "He met with a lot of love, said 'Shaan sir, I've been

following you...' I said 'thank you'." Shaan added with a laugh, "Suddenly I realised (who he was), and like an idiot, I went and said sorry. He became a little upset. I felt like such an idiot. Why did I have to go back and tell him that I didn't recognise him?" In April, Shaan invited controversy when he made comments about mainstream rap music in general and highlighted songs by Yo Yo Honey Singh as being musically unimpressive. In an interview with *AskMen India*, Shaan said in Hindi, "Very few people actually understand music. We cannot musically educate everyone but what we can do is churn out good music so that people develop a taste for it. But the easiest way is to stoop down to their level. Why is rap music so popular today? Is it because they use expletives? No, because there is no musicality in rap songs."





## Joe Biden heads overseas as his prospects darken at home

(SAI Bureau)-Joe Biden is heading abroad, just at the moment when his hopes for a historic legislative legacy at home seem headed for a wall.

For all the talk among Democrats of Biden assembling a Rooseveltian legacy, the moment was always going to come when his vast political agenda would hit the blockade of Washington's uncompromising political math. Recent days have chastened Democrats who dreamed of using what may be a brief two-year window of congressional power to

forge the most fundamental economic and political change for a generation. Biden had a strong start to



his presidency. The country is awakening, albeit with a few economic hiccups, from a pandemic that has never been closer to ending thanks to his rollout of vaccines developed during the previous administration. He's restored decorum to the White House, and his approval ratings are above 50% consistently — a level never reached by ex-President Donald Trump.

But the reality of a 50-50 Senate, the ideological tension in the Democratic coalition and a Republican Party transformed into

Trump's personality cult have brought Biden to a moment of truth.

(Contd on page 32)

Psychological effects of the pandemic may be felt in young people for a long time to come



(SAI Bureau)- The pandemic has taken a toll on the mental wellness of many people around the world, and some experts are concerned about the lasting effects it could have on adolescents and young adults especially.

"The risk for the future is that we have a group who have spent almost a year and a half of their early life in a total blackout, gaining no experience or human capital," Massimiliano Mascherini, the head of social policy at the EU's foundation for living and working, told The Guardian. "They may represent a part of the workforce that will suffer throughout their lives."

(Contd on page 33)

## A tale of two states, two parties



(SAI Bureau)-In recent weeks, political observers have been treated to yet another demonstration of the contrasting working styles of the two main national political parties, the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The context may have been different, but in both Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Punjab, strong chief ministers (CMs) were

(Contd on page 31)

## What's the price today? FBI phone app reaped secrets of global drug networks

(SAI Bureau)-One drug trafficker texted another that he had a "job" and a proven way to get it done: two kilograms of cocaine from Bogota using the French embassy's protected diplomatic pouch. The pair were straightforward, because they were using the newest, safest mode of communicating: a special-purpose, highly encrypted, messaging-only

(Contd on page 33)

## Climate change is rapidly transforming the Arctic: Why everybody should care

(SAI Bureau)-The part of Earth's surface lying north of the Arctic Circle encompasses an area of 7.7 million square miles, of which 70 percent is open or ice-covered ocean. Only eight nations possess territory or territorial waters in this region: the United States (because of Alaska), Canada, Russia, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Iceland and Denmark (because of Greenland). A mere 4 million people inhabit the Arctic. Indigenous people make up about 10 percent of the total, spread



across two dozen ethnolinguistic groups (e.g., Inuit, Aleut, Saami).

Beyond its value to the people who live there, however, the Arctic has long been recognized as having considerable importance beyond the region. It is significant militarily, because of the Arctic's location, linking all of the world's northern land masses. It's also significant economically for its oil, gas, strategic metals, and ocean fisheries; and it's prized around the

(Contd on page 31)

## A sole lab in Kasauli is ensuring Covid-19 vaccines are safe for use in India

(SAI Bureau)-Few are aware of the fact that vaccines that are manufactured by vaccine firms are not yet ready to be given to humans without further quality checks. In other words, vaccine makers have to be given a "blue tick" before their vaccines can reach the people. It is a process that has been followed ever since vaccines were being made for all immunisation purposes in India. The whole process became even more crucial as vaccines that would take decades to be manufactured and perfected were created for Covid-19 in less than a year. This is where the role of batch tests becomes

(Contd on page 34)