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## 'A historic event for humanity'

US reaches turning point in fight against COVID-19 as FDA authorizes Pfizer vaccine



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# Fighting Brutality and Poverty from New York City to New Delhi

(Insider Bureau)-Led by Amit Singh Bagga, Jaslin Kaur, and Felicia Singh, more than 20 candidates express solidarity with thousands of Indian farmers who have been tear-gassed and beaten by police while peacefully protesting ruinous

In response to Indian government's violent crackdown on peaceful protests staged by tens of thousands of farmers against agricultural deregulation and austerity policies, Queens City Council Candidates Amit Singh Bagga (District 26), Jaslin Kaur (District 24), and Felicia Singh (District 32) released a letter expressing solidarity with the farmers and calling on all 2021 Council candidates, as well as current New York City elected officials, to denounce the Modi government's move to imperil the lives of India's farmers and the extensive police brutality they have faced.

The goal of the letter, which at its release was co-signed by more than 20 additional candidates, is to tie the fight against oppression of the largely Punjabi Sikh farmers to the fights

for racial, economic, and gender justice here in New York City, and also establish that the struggles of working people here against the unregulated capitalism are parallel to the struggles of the farmers fighting deregulation.

Over the past two decades, nearly 300,000 Indian farmers have taken their own lives as a result of constant downward economic pressure. Nowhere has the crisis been more acute than in Punjab, where farmer suicides have increased twelvefold in the past five years.

"The world's most powerful and largest 'democracies' now share the dubious distinction of driving their people to desperation and devastation through a combination of criminal negligence, hateful ideology, and unchecked market capitalism," said Amit Singh Bagga, Candidate for City Council District 26, grandson of a Punjabi farmer and son of Hindu and Sikh refugees of the Partition of India. "As candidates who seek to represent immigrants and low-wage workers across Queens who have roots in and feel pain

from every corner of the world, it is our solemn responsibility to speak out against tear-gassing in New Delhi as we would in New York City, and to commit ourselves to building a democracy and an economy that offers opportunity, dignity, and power to all."

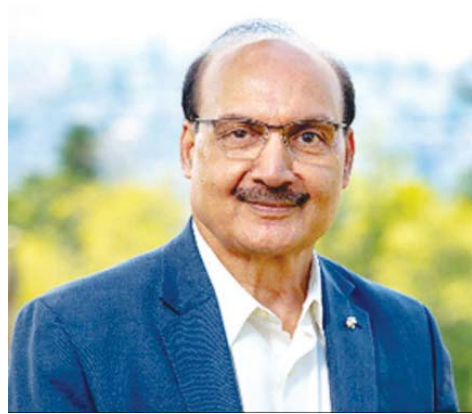
"While the farmer protests are on the other side of the world, they aren't so far away. The impacts are intimate for immigrant communities in my district who came to the United States, work unsafe, low-wage jobs, and are still sending remittances to their families abroad," said Jaslin Kaur, Candidate for City Council District 23. "Families are glued to WhatsApp and local news because they see an oppressive regime that weaponizes markets and refuses working families the dignity and safety we deserve. As a Punjabi woman and the daughter of a farmer and taxi driver, I can't stay silent about exploitation, police brutality, and state violence here or anywhere." "We understand the pain of farmers because we relate to their struggle. Their stories are the

stories of our mothers and fathers who have emigrated here in hopes of leading a life of dignity and respect," said Felicia Singh, Candidate for City Council District 32. "These proposals will cause a loss in generational wealth and livelihood. This is similar to what we've seen happen in NYC with medallion owners, like my father, who have invested so much time and money into their means to a living only to live in extreme debt. If we're not fighting for working people, who are we fighting for? We need to stand on the right side of justice and there is no better time than now." The protests, which intensified in the last week and have been largely led by Punjabi Sikh farmers, began in response to the Modi government's September passage of a set of laws to deregulate India's agricultural sector. Regulation of the sector, which has needed reform for both farmers and consumers, has nonetheless successfully prevented famines, which were previously common in South

Asia, killing millions. The proposals eliminate the requirement that farmers sell to mandis, or regulated markets, a move the Modi government argues will give farmers access to larger, freer markets. Also competing in these markets, however, are large industrial agriculture outfits, which can easily undercut any individual farmer's ability to negotiate prices. As such, these reforms threaten to generationally impoverish India's small farmers, who make up 86% of all farmers in the country.

India's economy is already suffering greatly, and was already extremely weak prior to the onset of the COVID-19 crisis. Despite the Modi government's claims that it has improved the Indian economy during its tenure, India's unemployment rate was the highest it had been in 45 years in 2019 and economic growth had become essentially non-existent, disproportionately impoverishing and destabilizing India's working people.

## Indian-Origin Raj Chouhan Elected Speaker Of Canada's British Columbia Province: Report



in 1973 and started working on a farm. He was greatly impacted by the plight of other immigrant workers and the wide disparity between the rich and poor in a prosperous country. This contributed to his ongoing advocacy for community and social justice for workers, the

report said, citing Mr Chouhan's biography. "I am truly grateful to have been entrusted with this role by all members of the legislative assembly," Mr Chouhan was quoted as saying in the report. "As a proud member of the Indo-Canadian community, I am tremendously proud of this historic occasion and honoured to continue my public service in this new role," he added. Mr Chouhan's selection was the first order of business Monday as British Columbia politicians returned to the legislature for a brief session after the October election that gave the New Democratic Party (NDP) a majority government.

(Insider Bureau)- Raj Chouhan, an Indian-origin legislator in Canada, has been elected as the Speaker of the British Columbia Legislative Assembly, becoming first from the community to occupy the post, according to a report. Mr Chouhan, who has represented Burnaby-Edmonds constituency five times in the British Columbia legislature, has served as Deputy Speaker in the previous government and would be replacing retiring Darryl Plecas as Speaker, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) News reported on Monday. Punjab-born Mr Chouhan immigrated to Canada



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# AAPI Welcomes Dr. Vivek Murthy's Nomination as US Surgeon General



(SAI Bureau) Chicago : "We congratulate Dr. Vivek Murthy on his appointment as the Surgeon General of the United States" Dr. Sudhakar Jonnalagadda, President of American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (AAPI) said here today. He praised the appointment of Dr. Murthy to be America's top doctor by the administration led by President-Elect Biden and Vice President-Elect Kamala Harris, and "offered fullest support" to Dr. Murthy, while describing the choice of Dr. Murthy as "cementing the reputation of physicians of Indian origin have across America."

Dr. Vivek Murthy will serve as the US Surgeon General under Biden-Harris administration, a role Murthy held under the Obama administration, President-Elect Joe Biden said here on Monday, December 7th. As he's set to return to the same position he held from 2014 to 2017, Murthy is expected to have an expanded portfolio, as the President-elect's team crafts their plans to tackle the coronavirus pandemic.

the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "The appointments Mr. Biden announced on Monday, including other senior officials to the US Health Department, will help round out Biden's team charged with addressing the pressing COVID-19 crisis, that has taken over 280,000 American lives," Dr. Sajani Shah, Chair of AAPI BOT said. Last week, Biden announced that Dr. Anthony Fauci would continue his role as director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases while also serving as his chief medical adviser on COVID-19.

Dr. Anupama Gotimukula, President-Elect of AAPI, that represents over 100,000 physicians of Indian origin in the United States, said, "We are proud of Dr. Vivek Murthy and his many accomplishments and look forward to supporting him throughout the process confirmation to be the US Surgeon General, as the nation and the entire world seeks to find best possible solutions to tackle the pandemic that has taken the lives of millions of people around the world."

Lauding Dr. Murthy "who has been a key coronavirus adviser to President-Elect Biden, regularly briefing him on the

pandemic during his campaign and the transition," Dr. Ravi Kolli, Vice President of AAPI said, "Dr. Murthy was part of Biden's public health advisory committee as the pandemic first took hold in the US and has been serving as a co-chair of the President-elect's Covid-19 advisory board during the transition. His ethics, quiet leadership style and impeccable credentials make him the smart choice for this leadership role."

"Dr. Vivek Murthy represents the next generation of Indian American physicians," Dr. Amit Chakrabarty, Secretary of AAPI said. "Dr. Murthy was America's youngest-ever top doctor, and he was also the first surgeon general of Indian-American descent, when appointed by President Barack Obama in 2014. If confirmed by the Senate, Dr. Murthy would play a key role in the administration's response to many daunting healthcare issues, including the pandemic that has taken the lives of hundreds of thousands of Americans." "Having a wide range of experiences and passion for science-based approach, Dr. Vivek Murthy will bring in new perspectives to the many healthcare issues that require immediate attention and concrete action plan," said Dr. Satheesh Kathula, Treasurer of

AAPI. Offering fullest cooperation from the Indian American Physician community, he said, "We at AAPI, look forward to working closely with Dr. Murthy and his team to end this deadly pandemic."

Dr. Murthy 43, has said Americans need a leader who works with the people for the progress of the country. As surgeon general under Obama, Murthy helped lead the national response to the Ebola and Zika viruses and the opioid crisis, among other health challenges. Dr. Murthy's commitment to medicine and health began early in life. The son of immigrants from India, he discovered the art of healing watching his parents - Hallegere and Myetriae Murthy - treat patients like family in his father's medical clinic in Miami, Florida. During his prior nomination, Indian American Doctors had lobbied earnestly to have Dr. Murthy confirmed as the US Surgeon General under Obama administration. "The feeling of de ja vu was pervasive, of a triumph over injustice with a hard fought battle by the Indian community during his confirmation, with AAPI playing a major role that secured the prize of the highest position occupied by an Indian American, and that too by one from our

second generation," said Dr. Ravi Jahagirdar, who had led a delegation of AAPI leaders to be at the historic oath taking ceremony of Dr. Vivek Murthy as the US Surgeon General at Fort Myer in Virginia across from Washington DC on Wednesday, April 22, 2015.

"The oath ceremony, a proud moment for Indian Americans, was led by Joseph Biden, Vice President and currently President-Elect, held in a large hall like a school stadium, with flags in abundance rigged in from the ceiling and leaning in from the sidewalls," recalls Dr. Suresh Reddy, the immediate past President of AAPI, who was present at the oath ceremony in the nation's capital. "I am proud of our community of Indian physicians for all the progress that we have made over the years, and I know that AAPI has been a critical force in making this process possible. The advice you shared and assistance you kindly offered were important pieces of this journey," Dr. Vivek Murthy, stated in a letter to Dr. Jayesh B. Shah, a past president of AAPI, who along with AAPI's Legislative Affairs Chair, Dr. Sampat Shivangi and several others had led several delegations to US Senators, lobbying for his confirmation. While expressing pride at the nomination of Dr. Murthy, Dr. Jonnalagadda pointed out to US President-elect Joe Biden's remarks yesterday, describing Indian American nominee for US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy as a "renowned physician" who could help guide Americans safely out of a still ranging coronavirus pandemic. Biden's remarks came as he spoke to the strength of his "world class" and "crisis tested" health team at an event in Delaware this week.

## Senator Ted Cruz Praises Sikh Cop Who Was Shot Dead In US

(SAI Bureau) Slain Sikh police officer Sandeep Singh Dhaliwal, who was gunned down in the line of duty during a routine traffic stop in Houston a year ago, was a hero and a trailblazer whose commitment to his faith will inspire generations of Sikhs and other religious minorities to serve in law enforcement, a top US Senator has said.

Senator Ted Cruz's remarks came after the US Senate unanimously passed a legislation

to name a post office in Houston after him.

Cruz, the US Senator for Texas, said that Dhaliwal has left a profound legacy on the law enforcement community.

"That is exactly who Deputy Dhaliwal was, a hero. He was deeply committed to his faith, his family, and to serving others with compassion," Cruz said in his remarks on the Senate floor on Tuesday. "Moved by his Sikh faith, Deputy Dhaliwal was a

trailblazer. When he was first recruited by the sheriff's office, Deputy Dhaliwal petitioned the office to allow him to wear his turban and beard while in uniform, becoming the first to be allowed to do so," he said.

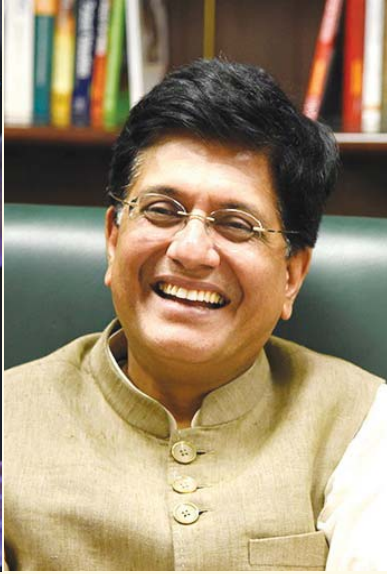
"Dhaliwal's commitment to his faith will inspire generations of Sikhs and other religious minorities to serve in law enforcement and protect our communities," he said. On September 27, 2019, Deputy

Dhaliwal, 42, was killed in the line of duty in service of his community.

In his remarks, Cruz also remembered Dhaliwal's commitment to love and peace. "When Hurricane Harvey decimated the Texas Gulf Coast, Deputy Dhaliwal served meals to Houstonians who were left homeless. In the wake of Hurricane Maria, he travelled to Puerto Rico to assist in the relief efforts there.



# Ekal Foundation's Unprecedented \$6.5 Million Magnificent Gala



**By Prakash Waghmare**

On Saturday, December 5, "Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation (EVF)" hosted a magnificent Star-studded Gala, called 'Future of India'. This Gala-2020 raised record-setting \$6.5 Million in pledges & donations for the special projects. The highlight of this virtual event was not only the participation of a galaxy of outstanding personalities, but also, the way they expressed their vote of confidence in 'Ekal' movement (as "EVF" is popularly known). The celebrities that lent their whole hearted support were

iconic cricketer Kapil Dev, Movie star Vivek Oberoi, Hon. Minister Piyush Goyal, leading entrepreneur Ajay Piramal, Bollywood singer Sanjeevani Bhelade and numerous entrepreneurs. The Gala was chaired by Mohan Wanchu, Chairman & CEO of EC Info Systems who, like all previous Galas, had ushered the concept in the first place. The main objective of the evening was, not only, to raise funds, but also, to acknowledge gratitude to loyal philanthropists who had consistently supported 'Ekal'

through the years. Earlier in the year, after successfully controlling 'Covid-19 pandemic in 102,000 rural & tribal villages of India, 'Ekal' had raised funds through 10 regional mid-year virtual concerts for its conventional activities even in the current covid-19 pandemic. Despite a snow storm and tornado that created some technical problems in transmission, the delayed start for the evening could not dampen the spirit of generous philanthropists to support their favorite projects at Ekal. There was overwhelming support for 'Integrated Village Development' (IVD), 'E-Shiksha', Tailoring Center, Telemedicine, 'Arogya Initiative', 'Ekal-on-wheels', 'Gramothan Research Ctr' (GRC), Computer Center etc. Among the high net-worth donors, 15 pledged \$250,000 or more while Ajay Keshap confirmed donation of cool \$1,000,000.

Mohan Wanchu, welcoming the virtual audience opened up the evening with an anecdote about a 'Rikshaw-puller' and how a 'Lok-kathakars' (a cadre of cultural story-teller) from an Ekal village transformed his life for better. Kamlesh Shah, co-chair of Gala started the pledge-drive by contributing \$580,000 and appealing donors to raise the bar of Gala-2020 to unprecedented level. Ranjani Saigal, Executive Director of "EVF" gave a brief outline of all Ekal special projects, which was followed by former ZEE-TV CEO & Chairperson of Ekal-Global, Dr Subhash Chandra giving an overview of what Ekal is all about. The person that stole the show was the movie star, philanthropist

Vivek Oberoi who also happens to be the Ekal-brand Ambassador. He emphasized that "the donation to Ekal wasn't a subsidy for the needy, but a divine investment in India's future". He further appealed to the youths of India to join 'inquisitive, creative and passionate organization like Ekal' to give purpose to their life. Global business tycoon, Ajay Piramal said, "Ekal's emphasis on dispensing quality education and primary healthcare in rural area is a game changer. No one understands rural-tribal mindset better than Ekal with its wide spread presence in villages nor anyone has a committed pool of huge selfless volunteers". Sajjan Agarwal, not only donated \$250,000 for 'Arogya Sevika' (Healthcare Assistant) in the villages, but also, appealed other donors to match his willingness to donate additional \$250,000. This challenge, in the very next moment, was met by Manubhai Shah. When it comes to healthcare, it is imperative to know that the donation of \$250,000 benefits 7,500 people in 150 villages. A new initiative, called 'GRANE' (Gramothan Atma-Nirbharata for Ekal), that is going to change farmer's life forever, was introduced by Vivek Sharma. It is aimed at bringing E-commerce activities to the villages so as to avail villagers with new profitable economic opportunities. Hon. Minister Piyush Goyal affirmed his own and his family's long association with Ekal. He lauded Hon PM Modi's August 15 speech whereby all villages would be interconnected by digital broadband in next 1,000 days. It is likely to promote wide spread

digitization of Education & Telemedicine. It is worth noting that Ajay Poddar of 'Artech Int'l' and Himanshu Shah of 'Shah Capital' have established "Gramothan Research Ctr" that would soon circuitously help up to one Million people, at each place with the state-of-the-art information on multiple levels. The evening was interspersed with brief video-clips of Ekal's outstanding work, its impact on rural lives and its initiatives to empower rural folks. Kapil Dev was interviewed live for his unique achievements in Cricket. He asserted that, "in life, winning is not everything". The most endearing memory to him was the fact that he got to play his game for his beloved country - and not winning the 'World Cup' or the captainship of the team etc. He was impressed by Ekal's infusion of fun-sports in education. Earlier this year in September, Bajrang Bagra, CEO of 'Ekal Abhiyan' (umbrella organization of all 'Ekal' satellite-divisions) had proposed to keep 102,000 school tallies 'as is' and embark on a transformative 'roadmap' that would revolutionize rural life in all its aspects. Among the primary goals proposed were to increase parameters of various special project, in next 5 years -- for example : to increase 'Ekal On Wheels' vans from current 25 to 85; 'Integrated Village Clusters' (30 villages each) from current 12 to 51; 'Skill Development Ctrs' from current 33 to 100; 'Gramothan Resource Ctrs' (GRC) from current 16 to 27; 'Telemedicine' from current 120 villages to 6,000 villages and 'Intensive Health Care' from current 1,200 villages to 6,000 villages.





# Diwali celebrations at Nassau County



(Insider Bureau) Recently the Office of Asian American Affairs hosted the opening ceremony of Nassau County's Diwali celebration. County Executive Laura Curran and Executive Director Farrah Mozawalla held the lighting ceremony alongside Dr. Bobby Kumar and Indu Jaiswal, then honored members of the Indian community with citations - Dr. Kusum Sinha, Dr. Sandeep Jauhar, Dr. Shefali Karkare, Babu Kudaravalli, Sonia Anand, Neelema Srivastwa, and Bishwaraj Bastola.

On November 18th, the Office of Asian American Affairs held a virtual Diwali Celebration over Zoom. A beautiful rendition of the

American and Indian national anthem kicked off the celebration, courtesy of Asha and Leela Bahadkar. Stunning dance performances lit up the screen as performers donned bright and colorful traditional attire. Melodic singing performances graced viewers' and listeners' screens. Thank you to the wonderful artists who contributed-Shridhar Ji, Satyam, Mathy Pillay, Swati Group, Jyotika Patel Group, Jyoti Gupta and Gunjan Rastogi. Diwali-the festival of lights-symbolizes the triumph of knowledge over ignorance, good over evil and light over darkness. This lively event showcased just that!



## Dr. Anthony Fauci, Dr. Sanjay Gupta, Deepika Padukone, Chandrika Tandon and Hindu Singh Sodha Honored with Children's Hope India Gratitude Awards



(Insider Bureau) New York : Thanksgiving Day. "In these uncertain times of the pandemic, we may be isolated from our loved ones and unable to share the joy of a Thanksgiving meal in person but we can still warm ourselves by sharing thanks," Melwani said. Children's Hope India's inaugural Gratitude Awards honored the heroes around the world who contributed to helping the community weather such uncertain times.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, was honored for being the voice of comfort, reason and science. Dr. Sanjay Gupta, host of the CNN show Sanjay Gupta MD and co-host with Anderson Cooper of global town halls throughout the pandemic, for coming into our homes and giving us wisdom and truth. Follow him on Twitter @drsanjaygupta. Deepika Padukone, actress, producer

and founder of The Live Love Laugh Foundation, for her bold and courageous championship around mental health issues. Follow her on Twitter @deepikapadukone. Chandrika Tandon, Grammy-nominated artist, humanitarian, and business leader, for her calming chants and dedication to helping children succeed. Follow her on Facebook @chandrikatandon. Hindu Singh Sodha, Rajasthan-based activist

working on refugee rights, conflict resolution and peace movements, and founder of the Universal Just Action Society, for his passionate advocacy and support of the refugee communities in Jodhpur, providing them hope for a new life. Follow him on Twitter @HinduSinghSodh1. Dina Pahlajani, Cofounder and President of Children's Hope India added that this year's awards were also dedicated to, "the braveheart children of Children's Hope India for adapting in such difficult times and staying committed to learning despite the challenges of the pandemic." Children's Hope India launched the Gratitude Awards to showcase the work of individuals around the world who give what they can--whether a monetary contribution, a helping hand or a kind word.



# Indian-Origin Couple In UK Among 1st In World To Get Covid Vaccine

**Hari Shukla from Tyne and Wear said he feels it is his duty to receive his first of the two-dose vaccine, a moment UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson hailed as a "huge step forward"**

(Insider Bureau)- An 87-year-old man and his 83-year-old wife from the north east of England on Tuesday became the first Indian-origin couple in the world to get a vaccine against COVID-19, after they got injected with their first of two doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech jab at a hospital in Newcastle.

Dr Hari Shukla, a race relations campaigner based in Tyne and Wear, had been contacted by the National Health Service (NHS) based on the criteria set for the world's first vaccine to receive regulatory approvals in the UK last week.

His wife, Ranjan, then volunteered for the jab as she also falls within the first phase of people aged 80 and over, care home workers as well as NHS workers at high risk eligible to receive the "life-saving jab".

"Hari Shukla and his wife Ranjan have become the first two patients at Newcastle Hospitals - and two of the first people in

the world - to receive the COVID-19 vaccine," Newcastle Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust said.

They join 90-year-old Margaret "Maggie" Keenan from Coventry as the very first in the world to receive her shot, followed by 81-year-old William Shakespeare in Warwickshire as the second.

"I'm so pleased we are hopefully coming towards the end of this pandemic and I am delighted to be doing my bit by having the vaccine, I feel it is my duty to do so and do whatever I can to help," said Shukla, who was born in Kenya and whose father was from Mumbai.

"Having been in contact with the NHS [National Health Service], I know how hard they all work and the greatest respect for them - they have a heart of gold and I am grateful for everything they have done to keep us safe during the pandemic," he said.

Shukla, who has been honoured with an MBE, OBE and CBE for

his work as the Director of the Tyne and Wear Race Equality Council over the years, was notified by the NHS based on the criteria set by the UK's Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation as part of a phased rollout plan based on those at the highest risk of death from the deadly virus.

"Today marks a huge step forward in the UK's fight against coronavirus, as we begin delivering the vaccine to the first patients across the whole country. I am immensely proud of the scientists who developed the vaccine, members of the public who took part in trials, and the NHS who have worked tirelessly to prepare for rollout," said British Prime Minister Prime Johnson.

However, he struck a note of caution to warn that mass vaccination will take time and urged the public to remain "clear-eyed" and continue to follow the lockdown rules over the winter



months ahead.

The NHS said it is undertaking the biggest and most highly anticipated immunisation campaign in history at 50 hospital hubs, with more starting vaccinations over the coming weeks and months as the programme ramps up after the first set of doses arrived from Pfizer's manufacturing site in Belgium.

"We will look back on today, V-day, as a key moment in our fight back against this terrible disease, and I am proud our health services across the United Kingdom are about to embark on our largest ever vaccination programme," said Health Secretary Matt Hancock, who got teary eyed during television

interviews on Tuesday as he declared he felt "proud to be British".

Since the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine got the green light from the UK's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) last week, the NHS said its workers have been working around the clock to manage the large-scale logistical challenge of deploying the vaccine.

"Coronavirus is the greatest health challenge in NHS history, taking loved ones from us and disrupting every part of our lives," said Sir Simon Stevens, NHS Chief Executive.

"The deployment of this vaccine marks a decisive turning point in the battle with the pandemic.

## Sikh-Americans Hold Protest Rallies Across US Cities Against Farm Laws In India



(Insider Bureau)- Hundreds of Sikh-Americans have held peaceful protest rallies in several cities across the US in support of the Indian farmers who have been protesting against the new agricultural reforms in India.

A large car caravan of protesters from various parts of California blocked the traffic on the Bay Bridge on Saturday as they moved towards the Indian Consulate in San Francisco, while several hundreds gathered in downtown Indianapolis.

The protesters at both the places demanded the new laws be repealed, saying they would push Indian farmers towards poverty

and give the corporate sectors a monopoly.

"Farmers are the soul of any nation. We must protect our soul. People around the world, including many cities in the US and Canada, have come together to dispose of the bills that will open India's agricultural market to the private sector; allowing major corporations to take over independent farming communities and dilute crops' market value," said Indiana-based Gurinder Singh Khalsa. Khalsa was one of the organisers of the rally in downtown Indianapolis attended by nearly 500 Sikh Americans from various parts of Indiana.

## Thousands Protest In London To Support Indian Farmers, Several Arrested

(Insider Bureau)- Thousands of people protested in central London on Sunday over the Indian government's agricultural reforms that have triggered a massive demonstration by farmers. Several people were arrested by the police for violating COVID-19 rules, news agency PTI reported. A crowd of demonstrators converged on the Indian embassy, located on Aldwych, a major artery in the centre of the British capital, and groups marched around the Trafalgar Square area, a Reuters photographer at the scene said. Several police officers in face masks asked people to disperse from the "We stand with farmers of Punjab" demonstration, having warned that strict regulations remain in place to help prevent the spread of coronavirus and therefore demonstrations of larger than 30 risk arrests and fines.

The demonstration, largely made up of British Sikhs, involved



placard-waving with messages such as "Justice for Farmers" and sloganeering as well as several cars blocking roads. There was little social distancing in evidence and few participants were wearing face masks.

"Our High Commission has been coordinating closely with the authorities concerned and we will, together with them, address the issues that have come up - for example how this gathering of thousands could take place without specific permission," an Indian High Commission spokesperson was quoted as saying by PTI. It soon became

clear that the gathering was led by anti-India separatists who had taken the opportunity of the protests in India to ostensibly back the farmers in India but use the opportunity to pursue their own anti-India agenda," the spokesperson said.

The High Commission reiterated the government's stance that the protest against agriculture reform bills in India is part of an internal democratic process.

"It is work in progress in our functioning democracy. The government of India is in talks with the protesters which are still ongoing.



# PM Modi to address FICCI's 93rd AGM

PM Modi to address FICCI's 93rd AGM, Annual Convention

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will deliver the inaugural address at FICCI's (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry) 93rd Annual General Meeting (AGM) and Annual Convention on December 12 at 11 am via video conferencing.

Farmers protest enters 17th day: Toll plazas of Karnal, Panipat overpowered

The ongoing protest of the farmers enters its 17th day on Saturday with a massive plan to block highways set in motion. As the impasse persists with government saying it is open to talks and farmers concurring as well to more discussions - only if the Centre wants to discuss the withdrawal of the three farm

laws, the standoff sees no immediate resolution while the protest intensifies with more and more farmers' groups joining. Read more.

**5 years on, where India stands in its commitment to Paris Agreement**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address the Climate Ambition Summit on Saturday on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the landmark Paris Agreement. The virtual summit is being hosted by the United Nations (UN) and the United Kingdom and is being co-hosted by France in partnership with Chile and Italy. Read more. All not well with India's Tokyo preparation

It was a sight emblematic of this pandemic-shattered sporting

year: Norway's Karsten Warholm, running all alone, with no competitors or spectators, clearing one hurdle after another with those long strides, powering through the distance of 300m in a record time (33.78 seconds). Prateek Kuhad performs Kasoor, Cold/Mess, Tune Kaha, & more #HTLS2020

The 18th edition of the Hindustan Times Leadership Summit had a colourful conclusion with singer-songwriter Prateek Kuhad performing some of his hit songs. The musician sang songs like Kasoor, Cold/Mess, Tune Kaha, and The Last Time, among others. Watch the full concert here. Happy Birthday Rajinikanth: As he turns 70, five popular dialogues that are best suited for his political entry-



Actor Rajinikanth recently made his political entry official. But the star has been hinting about his political plunge for many years through several popular dialogues in his movies. On the occasion of his 70th birthday, we take a look at five most popular dialogues from his movies that are best suited for his political ambition.

**Hallelujah! Porta potties mix elements of light and music to 'sing' carols**

The year 2020 has been filled with surprising happenings and unprecedented events, some more grave than others. However, if you thought that you'd seen it all, then think again. Here is a video which may leave flabbergasted.

## India records 30,006 new Covid-19 cases in 24 hours, total tally crosses 9.8 million



India recorded 30,006 fresh Covid-19 infections in the last 24 hours, registering a 2 per cent increase from Friday's fresh infection tally. With 33,494 recoveries and 442 deaths recorded in the same time, the total tally reached 98,26,775. The number of active cases on Saturday further dipped to 3,59,819. The number of total recoveries reached 93,24,328, according to the dashboard of the Union health ministry. On

**The number of fresh cases saw a marginal increase on Saturday, a day after India achieved the landmark of bringing active caseload to 3.63 lakh after 146 days.**

Friday, the number of fresh cases was 29,398. India's Covid-19 tally had crossed the two million mark on August 7, three million on August 23 and four million on September 5. It went past five million on September 16, six million on September 28, seven million on October 11, eight million lakh on October 29, and nine on November 20. According to the Indian Council of Medical Research, a cumulative total of 15,26,97,399

samples have been tested up to December 11 with 10,65,176 samples being tested on Friday. On Friday, India reported the landmark achievement of bringing the active caseload to 3.63 lakh after 146 days. Kerala for the past few days has been recording the maximum number of new infections, while the situation in Delhi has improved. On Thursday, West Bengal (2,801), Uttar Pradesh (1,662) and Rajasthan (1,592)

reported more cases than Delhi (1,575). On Friday, however, Delhi saw a spike of 1,000 cases as it recorded 2,385 fresh Covid-19 infections. In the view of the steady rise in cases, Kerala has decided to not allow devotees inside Guruvayur temple in Thissur for two weeks as the area has been declared a containment zone. On Friday, as many as 22 employees of the devaswom tested positive for the infection

## 5 years on, where India stands in its commitment to Paris Agreement

*The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change which was adopted by 196 parties at the 21st Conference of Parties in Paris, on December 12, 2015, and was enforced on November 4, 2016.*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address the Climate Ambition Summit on Saturday on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the landmark Paris Agreement. The virtual summit is being hosted by the United Nations (UN) and the United Kingdom and is being co-hosted by France in partnership with Chile and Italy. This will be an opportunity for countries to show their commitment to the Paris Agreement. The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate

change which was adopted by 196 parties at the 21st Conference of Parties in Paris, on December 12, 2015, and was enforced on November 4, 2016. Here's everything you need to know about India's commitment to the Paris climate agreement: 1. While addressing a side meeting on climate change at the G20 Summit, PM Modi said India is not only meeting targets set at the Paris Agreement but is also exceeding them while calling for "an integrated, comprehensive and holistic way"

to tackling climate change. 2. In the G20 summit, Modi also said that India aims to restore around 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030.

3. Ahead of the Paris climate summit, environment minister Prakash Javadekar said, "Climate change hasn't happened in a day. It is the result of historical emissions over one hundred years. US has 25% of historical emission; EU has 22% of historical emissions; China has 13% and India has only 3%. We



haven't caused this problem but as a responsible nation, we will be a part of the solution." 4. Currently, India is contributing only 6.8% of global emissions and its per capita emissions are only 1.9 tonnes (per capita).

5. India's nationally determined contribution (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement is 2 degree compliant. The country is also likely to meet and possibly overachieve its NDCs under the Paris Agreement, the emissions gap report 2020 noted.



# Farmers protest enters 17th day



## No question of returning home, says union leader; protesters overpower toll plazas of Karnal, Panipat/10 points

farmers overpowered the toll-plazas of Karnal and Panipat on Delhi-Chandigarh National highway, allowing toll-free movement. Today, the workers of Bharatiya Kisan Union will make all highways leading to Delhi free of toll.

2. Faridabad Police is deploying as many as 3,500 police personnel at the toll plazas at five Delhi-Haryana border points, including Badarpur Border, Gurugram Faridabad, Kundli-Ghaziabad-Palwal, Pali Crusher Zone and Dhauj. There will be drone surveillance too. 3. On Friday, the Centre alleged that Leftist-Maoist are hijacking farmers protest. "People of India are watching, seeing what is happening, observing how across the country Leftist-Maoists are not finding any support & therefore they are trying to hijack this farmers agitation & trying misuse this platform for their own agenda," Food, railways and consumer affairs minister Piyush

Goyal tweeted. 4. A faction of the Bharatiya Kisan Union has moved the Supreme Court demanding the laws be rolled back. "The impugned legislations corporatise agriculture and usher in unregulated and exploitative regime because Indian farmers, of which most are illiterate, would not have the knowledge to negotiate the best terms with a private company and due to this [will] lead to unequal bargaining position in negotiating the farm agreements with corporates," the plea said.

5. Jannayak Janata Party (JJP) leader and Haryana deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala on Thursday said he will resign from his post in Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led state government if he is unable to ensure minimum support price for the procurement of farmers' crops.

6. As several farmer groups from Punjab, Haryana are on

their way to Delhi, on December 14, there will be sit-ins near BJP offices, according to the plan of the protesters. The Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh will organise sit-ins on Monday.

7. Meanwhile, the BJP has decided to hold nationwide programmes, including chaupal in rural areas to highlight the benefits of the three farm laws. 8. The main protest site at Singhu border is bustling with protesters are settling down at their makeshift new homes without betraying any sign of budging. Trolleys containing jaggery, roasted gram, peanuts, gajjak arrived at Singhu border on Friday from Punjab.

9. Free medical units have also been set up to check the health of elderly protesters who are braving the cold.

10. Bharatiya Kisan Union national spokesperson Rakesh Tikait on Friday said farmers won't back out now unless the three laws are repealed.

(News Agencies)-The ongoing protest of the farmers enters its 17th day on Saturday with a massive plan to block highways set in motion. As the impasse persists with government saying it is open to talks and farmers concurring as well to more discussions - only if the Centre wants to discuss the withdrawal of the three farm laws, the standoff sees no immediate resolution while the protest intensifies with more and more farmers' groups joining. On Friday, agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar reiterated the commitment of the Centre and said it has not yet received any proposal from the agitating farmers. The farmers, on the other hand, said the Centre should inform the farmers when they want to meet.

Here are the latest updates of the protest: 1. On Friday midnight,

## Several govt offices set afire in Arunachal's Changlang ahead of panchayat poll



(News Agencies)- Several government offices were set on fire by a large group of youths in Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh on Friday, ahead of Panchayat and civic body polls in the state later this month.

According to district officials, the office of the extra assistant commissioner (EAC) and the post office in remote Vijoynagar were burnt down and the offices of the special branch (SP) and a police station in the area were vandalized.

"Around 500 youths had carried out a rally on Friday morning from Gandhigram village to Vijoynagar, the circle headquarters. Suddenly, without provocation, the youths attacked government property," said Devansh Yadav, deputy commissioner, Changlang. "They burnt down the office of the EAC and the post office and

vandalized the SP office and police station around 8:00 am. There were no injuries or casualties, but government property was destroyed," he added.

The district administration has taken the help of Assam Rifles and also rushed senior police officers to Vijoynagar to bring the situation under control and also to nab the miscreants involved in the incident.

Reports say that the youths were seeking cancellation of the Panchayat polls, due in the state on December 22, over alleged grant of voting rights to scheduled tribes not belonging to Arunachal Pradesh.

"The Panchayat elections in the area have already been postponed but despite that the youths carried out the rally and destroyed government property. Appropriate action will be taken," said Yadav.

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## Powerful citizens, missing Opposition

Irrespective of where you stand on the new farm laws when seen through the prism of economic policy, and despite the few fumbles and missteps of the agitation, there is no denying the fact that the farmers' protests have held their nerve to become the most sustained civil society protest against the government, since the street agitation against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

It also brings home an intriguing reality check on the state of India's democracy. On the plus side, it shows us that if enough people want to do so, dissent will still find a way of forcing checks and balances on the system. On the downside, it brings home a new reality of Indian politics - the country's missing Opposition. It is quite evident now that until such time as a new national alternative - whether personality, party or ideology-based - is able to develop, the tempering and moderation of the government's enormous political clout will come from the people.

In 2019, before the elections, I recall Arvind Kejriwal saying to me in an interview,

"People will defeat the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), no politicians would be needed." As it turned out, the people, as defined by our first-past-the-post system, endorsed the prime minister, instead of "defeating" him. But Kejriwal's formulation had an unwitting kernel of truth in it. I am not sure he meant it that way, but the BJP's political dominance and ability to keep winning elections has nudged India in the direction of a one-party democracy. And the interrogation of power that any healthy democracy requires, is no longer by India's institutions, but by its citizenry.

Sure, the Opposition makes some sporadic and rhetorical noise on the floor of Parliament. And, on occasion, it leads marches and submits petitions to Governors or to the President. But here is the inconvenient truth it may not want to hear.

When was the last time a major Opposition leader showed even a committed fortnight of energy on an issue, as the farmers have done? Most interventions, when they do take place, are one-day long and photo-op driven. This is not to say that imagery and symbolism do not have their own value in mainstream politics. But think of, let's say, the Hathras gang-rape. After the much-vaunted pictures of the Gandhi family with the young Dalit victim's family, where was the sustained focus on the cause by them? Or let's take what happened with migrant workers this year. If Rahul Gandhi had spent his time walking

consistently with the men, women and children who fled the cities for the villages instead of doing zoom interviews with global economists, might he not have been viewed differently, even by his political opponents? The farmers' protest has signalled more committed and consistent focus than any campaign run by the Opposition.

The truth is India's Opposition is made of part-time politicians, especially on the national stage. In states, there have been some politicians who have shown the rigour and discipline for full-time politics, but ironically, after they win, if they do, they seem to cut a tactical deal with the Centre, overtly, covertly, said or unsaid. Within this framework, they trade being the lords and ladies of their fiefdoms with supporting the government when operating outside the parameters of their states. Whether it's Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana or Odisha, we have seen similar patterns - hostile local politics transform into conciliation of some kind after the state elections.

It is, of course, also true that movements that are seen to be run by people instead of politicians do trigger more popular support. The farmers' movement carries the moral advantage of not having party politicians on its stage.

But it is still instructive that in the last year since the Modi government took office, there have been only two moments when it has been willing to engage in a dialogue or pause a decision taken by the administration. The first was when students across India created enough of a forced pressure, even within BJP-voting households, for the BJP to do a go-slow on the National Register of Citizens (NRC). And now, when the agitation powered by the gumption of Sikhs from Punjab has at least resulted in several rounds of talks between ministers and protesters.

In both these instances, the anger on the street was able to engage - either intellectually or emotionally - even those who are Modi supporters. Even when they were not sure where they stood on the actual legislations, there was enough authenticity in the protests for BJP voters to want the government to show empathy and engagement.

For the government, the farmers protest is a lesson that no matter how powerful you may be, the voice of the people still gets in through the cracks. For the Opposition, there are reminders here, of its own growing redundancy.

## What to expect when the vaccine rolls out

With Pfizer/BioNtech becoming the first company to get its vaccine approved for public use in the United Kingdom (UK), the wait for a post-Covid world seems to have got shorter. New developments are taking place each day; in India, the Serum Institute of India (SII)'s Covishield and Bharat Biotech's Covaxin stand just weeks away from getting regulatory clearances led by Pfizer, claiming the waiver of clinical trials in accordance with special provisions under the New Drugs and Clinical Trials Rules, 2019 and based on the results of its United States (US) trials. Who would've thought that vaccine generation which had till date been a decades' long process would get abridged to a period of a year? Given the magnitude of this feat, it is only fitting to earmark 2020 in golden letters in the legacy of science.

However, does vaccine inception guarantee its distribution to one and all? While the vulnerability and essentiality clauses of the selection criteria call for prioritising front line workers and senior citizens as the first beneficiaries of the inoculation drive and with politicians and bureaucrats in the mix, ordinary citizens will ultimately bear the brunt. Indians are very shrewd when it comes to making connections for claiming benefits. This will manifest in the form of those having political connections and resources getting an upper hand in the vaccination drive. By 2021, it has been estimated that 800 million Indians would have to be inoculated to meet the requirement of the herd immunity objective. Nonetheless, with no clear public vaccine rollout plan in place, it remains to be seen who all will make the

cut. Vaccines are our best bet against the virus, but not much is known about their capability to break the chain of transmission or indeed the efficacy of each vaccine. Apart from this, side-effects after being inoculated have also not been explored properly till date, courtesy of emergency approvals. When the news of an officer-bearer contracting Covid-19 after being injected with Covaxin made the rounds recently, the question of vaccine efficacy was raised again. Also, there is news of several volunteers of the same vaccine testing positive during trials. Given this, it would not be wise to let our guards down at such a critical stage. This calls for a need to tone down our over-optimism regarding the vaccine and adhere to the social vaccine which demands adherence to the 3S principle- social distancing, shielding through masks and sanitising.

Even if the vaccines get accelerated approval, their storage and transportation will prove challenging. With Pfizer requiring temperatures as low as minus 70 degree Celsius for storage, its distribution in India will be problematic. But with new developments and use of dry ice, the vaccine vial can be stored for up to five days at refrigerated (2-8 degree Celsius) conditions. Given the burgeoning demand for the vaccine, this should not be that difficult to manage. Covishield, on the other hand, can be originally stored at refrigerated temperatures (2-8 degrees Celsius) without a need for thawing. With the Centre and states bolstering cold chain infrastructure, it is the administration that remains.



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Editor in Chief &amp; Publisher :

Sharanjit Singh Thind

Editor (Political Affairs-India) :

Aruna Singh

Chief Photographer : Vijay Shah

Editorial Intern: Roubin Singh Thind

Special Correspondent :

Gagandeep Singh (India)

Web Coordinator : Harpreet Singh

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REGD &amp; MAILING OFFICE :

P.O Box 7005 Hicksville New York 11801

Phone: 917 612 3158

editor@thesouthasianinsider.com, thesouthasianinsider@gmail.com

www.thesouthasianinsider.com

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# An Open Letter to New York City and State Leaders

On May 22, 2019 Mayor Bill de Blasio signed Executive Order 47, one of the most consequential measures supporting the city's community media industry, directing all city agencies to spend at least 50 percent of their annual print and digital advertising budgets on community media publications.

The initiative has been a resounding success, as shown in an independent report by the Center for Community Media (CCM) at CUNY's Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism. In the fiscal year after the executive order was signed, New York City spent a record \$9.9 million on community media publications, 84 percent of its total print and digital advertising budget. We were offered a lifeline as we saw city agency campaigns rolling in, many of us receiving them for the first time.

We are more than 230 print and digital publications serving communities in all five of the city's boroughs, publishing in 37 languages. Without advertising from city agencies, many of us would not have survived the pandemic that saw so many businesses - who had advertised in and even distributed our newspapers - shutter across the city. Many of these businesses may not return, and now more than ever, we have an essential role to play in helping our readers survive and rebuild in the wake of this pandemic.

## Wanted: A Legal Protection for a Commendable Model

These public service campaigns reached vital communities of color and immigrant communities, in many languages, creating awareness about the resources available to them during the pandemic, guiding them on how to access critical services, and encouraging stronger civic engagement from an informed and responsive citizenry.

As we move into a new year and get ready for the 2021 municipal elections, it's time to build on the remarkable progress made by the de Blasio administration. Important steps are necessary to build on the progress made by the mayor:

1. A renewed commitment from city leaders to continue the current policy of allocating at least 50 percent of the total print and digital ad budgets to the local community media, while maintaining a robust ad budget
2. City Council legislation to solidify this commitment and protect it from political or administrative changes
3. Effective implementation of the new legislation in its true spirit

We also ask that the New York State government and Legislature follow suit. Like the City, the State will also find the community media a necessary partner in building a more engaged society. Kowshik Ahmed, Editor, Weekly Bangalee

Najmul Ahsan, Publisher, Weekly Parichoy  
Manuel Alcantara, Editor, Peruanesimo News

María del Carmen Amado, Newspapers Group General Manager-Editor, Westchester Hispano, New York Hispano  
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Kishor Panthi, Editor-in-Chief, Khasokhas

Cristina DC Pastor, Founding Editor, The FilAm

Pearl Phillip, Editor-in-Chief, Caribbean American Weekly,

The Immigrant's Journal & Workers' World Today Publications

Garry Pierre-Pierre, Founder/Publisher, The Haitian Times

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Stephen Witt, Publisher, KingsCountyPolitics.com,

QueensCountyPolitics.com, NewYorkCountyPolitics.com

# Why Protesting Farmers Are Unable To Trust Government



The third rail of Indian politics has always been agriculture. While the economy has been partly liberalized since opening up to the world in 1991, the process has largely bypassed the three-fifths of Indians who depend for their livelihoods, directly or

indirectly, on farming. In September, the government finally introduced a much-needed set of changes to how agriculture is organized and how produce is sold in India. Now tens of thousands of agitating farmers have marched upon New Delhi in protest.

The protests may have less to do with the recent reforms, which allow farmers to enter into direct contracts with purchasers and which eliminate the monopoly government warehouses previously held on the wholesale trade, than those that may be coming. The answer isn't for the government to reverse course - it's to go further. Unlike many other countries, India doesn't provide direct income support to its farmers. Various farm insurance schemes have also failed to get off the ground. Instead, what the government does is buy produce - mostly rice and wheat. This is then stored in the warehouses of the state-controlled Food Corporation of India and

distributed at a subsidized price to the population.

The system guarantees farmers a set price for their output, while their inputs - water, power, fertilizer, seeds - are free or subsidized. It dates from the 1960s, when famines devastated an India that did not grow enough to feed itself. For several humiliating years, the country survived on U.S. food aid - what was then called a "ship-to-mouth existence."

Following pressure from President Lyndon B. Johnson's White House, Indian policymakers shifted from imposing a cap on food prices, inspired by Soviet-era economics, to setting a minimum support price, as

advised by American economists. That, together with newly developed food grains, became the basis for the so-called Green Revolution, in which wheat production doubled in less than a decade.

Unfortunately, the subsidies for rice and wheat caused too few farmers to plant vegetables, which are subject to major price fluctuations. (They are a constant headache for the inflation-targeting central bank.) Meanwhile, India produces too much grain, which is now rotting in government granaries. Policies designed for an India on the edge of starvation don't fit the India of today, which should be more worried about quality of its nutrition.





# Navigating the vaccine challenge

## Getting the product, quantity, condition, place, time and cost right is key

For anyone seeking to understand the path ahead for vaccines and vaccination for Sars-CoV-2, there is abundant confusion. Part of this is because there is divergence in information from official sources, academics and "unofficial" sources, and a difference in opinion on the timeliness and completeness. Press releases tell us that vaccines are performing well. On December 2, the United Kingdom (UK)'s Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency became the first regulator to grant temporary authorisation based on a phase III trial, to Pfizer and BioNTech's mRNA-based Covid-19 vaccine. On December 7, the UK began the process of administering vaccines.

Results from the Astra-Zeneca/University of Oxford vaccine, based on a chimpanzee adenoviral vector, well exceed the 50% efficacy requested by the World Health Organization (WHO) and regulators, leading to the reasonable assumption that most vaccines that are based on the spike protein of Sars-CoV-2 will be successful.

In India, Pfizer has applied to the Central Drugs Standards Control Organisation for emergency approval, under the provisions of the New Drugs and Clinical Trials Rule, 2019, which allow the national regulatory authority to waive clinical trials. Even if Pfizer is granted approval, it is unlikely that this will be a vaccine that can be widely deployed because it requires storage at -70 degrees

Celsius. Given the limited capacity of even cold storage at -20 degrees Celsius as required by the Moderna vaccine, it is likely that India's national immunisation system, and those of other low- and middle-income countries, will opt for vaccines that can be stored at the more widely available facilities that hold vaccines at 2-8 degrees Celsius.

If vaccines that will not be used for national immunisation programmes are given limited or full approval, the ability to purchase vaccines will differentiate sections of society between those with purchased access and those who must wait for the government to provide vaccines. This situation already exists for many vaccines, such as influenza or chickenpox where vaccines are available in the private sector. Open and transparent discussions about the role of the private sector and access to vaccines are essential for a clearer picture of what lies ahead.

In terms of production capacity, figures vary, but a survey of 113 manufacturers by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations and partners between March and June 2020 estimated that global capacity was two to four billion doses by the end of 2021. Vaccine production landscapes tend to be slow to change, but much more optimistic figures are now being projected, with the Duke Global Health Innovation Center stating that purchase of more than nine billion doses is in discussion and India

alone already has an advance market commitment of 1.6 billion doses. This figure does not align with the government's announcement of financial commitments to vaccines or plans for immunisation, and company announcements of their production capacity and commitment not just to India, but to global supply through the COVAX facility.

Even if the figures are correct, and India will have access to 1.6 billion doses of vaccines by the end of 2021, there are significant challenges to getting these doses to where they are needed. The WHO has six rights of supply-chain management for immunisation, which are right product, right quantity, right condition, right place, right time and right cost. Making sure that all of these logistics are in place requires permutations of product packed volume, temperature for transport and storage, location of supply and delivery, cycle for vaccination and restocking. Availability of refrigerated transport, security of transport, opportunities for pilferage and replacement with fake products are all very real concerns for which preparation is necessary.

To accompany the complexity of storage and supply, which in India will be managed by the National Cold Chain Vaccine Management Resource Centre and the electronic Vaccine Information Network, redeveloped as COVIN, we will need to train vaccinators, have additional supplies needed

for immunisations, prepare for immunisation sessions and establish systems for waste disposal. And all that, as we develop and use methods to identify and track individuals who need the vaccine.

India does not have an adult immunisation programme beyond the tetanus/diphtheria vaccination for pregnant women. Hence, in the prioritisation lists that have been announced, identifying and reaching all priority groups will be a challenge. States have been asked to list public and private health care workers, and this is feasible and being done. However, moving beyond health care workers and other essential workers, however defined, to the elderly and those with co-morbidities as indicated in official announcements will be difficult and there is a need to prepare for falsified documents and fraud.

As important as the issue of delivering vaccines to those

prioritised, and not those who try to beat the system is the global concern for migrants and refugees who might be excluded from vaccination based on lack of residency documentation. Ensuring that both doses of a two-dose schedule are delivered is also a challenge since drop-outs are already known to be an issue, particularly for the most vulnerable populations, for infant immunisation. This is likely to much greater with adult immunisation.

Not all problems can be anticipated, but we have experience with strengthening immunisation and with the conduct of campaigns, particularly in the last decade. While the government is using that experience to plan for a range of product, supply and logistic scenarios, sharing plans and developing the right partnerships is important, because in this enterprise, all of us are stakeholders.





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# Agriculture as a shock-absorber

**Commercialisation is inevitable. But it must be accompanied with building an alternative social safety net**

The slew of agricultural reforms initiated by the government has led to a vigorous discussion in the media about the pros and cons of these policy changes. Most of these discussions have focused on agriculture as an activity that provides farmers with a regular source of income. The arguments have engaged mainly with the question of whether these reforms would increase these incomes, if agriculture became more commercialised. In all these discussions however, there is one important aspect that has got largely overlooked - the role of agriculture as an informal social safety net, specifically in times of crisis. To be clear, there are two types of safety nets that are needed in developing countries. The first is a protection against chronic poverty and unemployment in normal times. This is the objective behind Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, the largest State-

sponsored formal programme of this type. The second provides protection against a sudden crisis, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. As we found out when the pandemic broke out, we do not have a formal State-financed social safety net infrastructure that is adequate for such a situation. Safety nets for crisis situations are critical for developing economies that have adopted a market-led growth strategy. Markets are useful in driving higher rates of growth over time, but they are also much more vulnerable to many types of shocks. Since poor and vulnerable citizens do not have adequate savings for these hard times, these shocks expose them to health and even life risks during these periods. In the absence of formal safety nets, they turn to informal community-based support systems. In India, a significant section of wage earners who work in small towns or large cities still have their links with their villages intact. For these people,

agriculture and allied sectors in their villages remain the informal safety net - a source of income if a crisis shuts down their principal livelihood in urban areas. For those who have lost these rural family links, the only alternative during these crises remains the informal retail sector - the fruit and vegetable carts. The importance of agriculture as an informal social safety net became clear during the reverse migration that India experienced after the imposition of the first lockdown. The long and arduous journeys that hundreds of thousands of people undertook were obviously extremely risky. The only reason so many migrants took such a decision was based on their trust that the agricultural sector would save their lives. In his book, *How Asia Works*, Joe Studwell describes a similar phenomenon in Taiwan during the first oil crisis in the mid-1970s, where close to 200,000 factory workers returned to farming. Such temporary reverse migrations in slack periods are also common in



China. In contrast to these experiences, Studwell suggests that countries ranging from 18th-century Britain to the Philippines in recent times, which are characterised by larger-scale farming, have ended up with "legions of indigent poor or acres of squatter camps". Another example of this phenomenon is contemporary South Africa, which has a significantly large group of poor and vulnerable people. But agriculture in South Africa is in the hand of a few large farms and plantation owners and, as a result, it fails as an informal social safety net. One of the effects of this is high crime rates in South African cities. So what does all of this mean for India

and, more specifically, for our agricultural policies? The reforms initiated by the government are an attempt to move the agricultural sector away from the current institutional arrangements controlled by the arhtiyas towards more corporatised agricultural marketing. This is a change that is inevitable, given the market-led growth strategy that we have adopted since the 1990s. As agriculture becomes more corporatised - with the participation of large retail companies as their clients - farms will also be forced to consolidate. The logic of such consolidation is in the interest of both the corporate buyers and the farms.

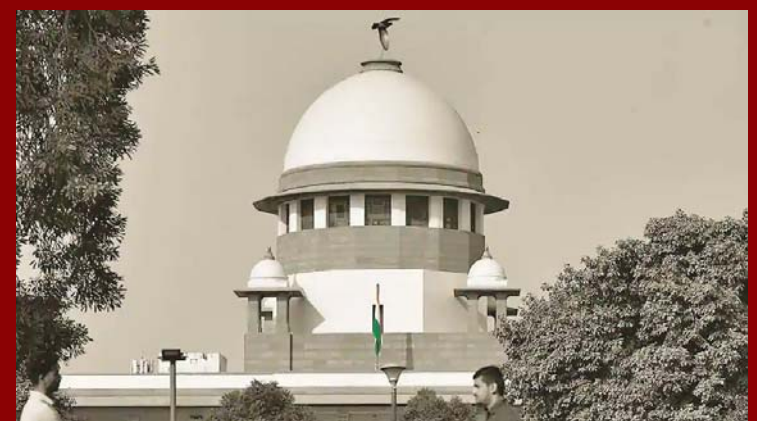
## A tale of evasion, deference and inconsistency

**There are a few characteristic features that have marked judicial conduct during this period, which are of serious concern**

At the height of the Brexit controversy in the United Kingdom, the legal commentator David Allen Green wryly remarked that the surest sign that a Constitution was working was that constitutional law was boring; when constitutional law began to get exciting, something was probably rotten in the State. In the last few years, constitutional law in India has been ceaselessly exciting, and at the centre of things has been the Supreme Court (SC) of India. In that context, the court's functioning has come under serious scrutiny, and the debate has quickly turned acrimonious. Why is the independence and integrity of the SC being questioned in the public domain, in a way that it has not been since the Emergency? There are a few characteristic features that have marked judicial conduct

during this period, which are of serious concern. The most glaring is that of judicial evasion. The SC simply refuses to hear constitutional challenges to far-reaching State action, sometimes for years. Its refusal to hear those cases unambiguously benefits the State. For example, the Aadhaar challenge was kept pending for six years, and by the time, it was finally heard, the State effectively presented the court with a fait accompli. The challenge to the alteration of Article 370, the internet shutdown in Kashmir, the litigation between the government of Delhi and the central government, and the challenge to economically weaker sections (EWS) reservations are some other instances of judicial evasion, but by far the most egregious is that of electoral bonds. By virtue of the electoral bonds scheme,

thousands of crore of anonymous corporate donations have been funnelled to political parties (for structural reasons, a vast bulk of these donations go to the ruling party), setting up an entire system of opaque electoral funding. The electoral bonds scheme was challenged in 2018, immediately after it was brought into force. Multiple state elections and a general election have passed, but the case has not been heard, and the former Chief Justice - and now member of Parliament - Ranjan Gogoi, when asked about this case, brazenly said that he didn't "remember" it. No matter how many contempt applications are filed by zealous law students, it is impossible to look at this and not have serious questions about the SC's institutional independence. Judicial evasion is accompanied judicial deference. Much has been made of the SC's



uncritical acceptance of the Solicitor-General's statement that no migrants were walking on the road in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic, but this is only one example of a broader trend in which the court fails to perform even its basic task of scrutinising the government's claims during litigation. Sometimes, this takes a particularly extreme form, as in the internet shutdown case in Kashmir, where after multiple hearings, the court simply refused to rule on the legality of the shutdown, and instead asked a government-appointed

committee to do so. To this day - 16 months after the shut-down - internet continues to be restricted in Kashmir. This has been accompanied by the court's refusal to rule on habeas corpus (illegal detention) applications for months, until the government itself decides to release the detained individual, making the case infructuous. No matter how many contempt applications are filed by zealous law students, it is impossible to look at this and not have serious questions about the SC's institutional independence.



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

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

## Stay home except to get medical care

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



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

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



## Call ahead before visiting your doctor

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



## Wear a facemask if you are sick

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



## Cover your coughs and sneezes

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



## Clean your hands often

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



## Avoid sharing personal household items

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





# Confronting everyday sources of pollution across the country

*Our fixation with the November smog misleads the way we approach this national public health crisis in three fundamental ways.*



The annual November smog in the National Capital Region (NCR) frames the air pollution crisis - its scale, sources and solutions - in ways that undermine the long-term efforts needed. Instead of letting this episodic manifestation guide policy action, we must focus on tackling the less visible, everyday air pollution across the country.

Delhi-NCR's pollution levels witness two pronounced spikes every year - between late-October to mid-November, and again from late-December to mid-January. The first spike is attributable to stubble burning adding to the "baseload" of emissions from year-round

sources that are unable to disperse due to stable meteorological conditions. The second spike is almost entirely due to the baseload and conditions being conducive to the formation of "secondary particles" from gaseous pollutants emitted by power plants, industries and vehicles in the region. Increased burning of wood and other solid fuels for heating is also an important factor during this time.

Alarming as these spikes are, we should not make them the threshold for what is deemed unacceptable, and normalise objectively high levels of pollution otherwise. Consider the first week of December this year.

The air quality index (AQI) remained either "very poor" or "severe" (in other words, more than twice the national standards) in Kanpur and Lucknow all seven days, and in Patna for six days. In NCR, Ghaziabad witnessed "severe" AQI on six days, while levels in Delhi and Gurugram were "very poor" throughout. Howrah in West Bengal and Singrauli in Madhya Pradesh also experienced either "poor" or "very poor" air quality throughout the week. Indeed, air quality in much of the Indo-Gangetic Plain is "poor" or worse for half the year. Our fixation with the November smog, therefore, misleads the way we approach this national public health crisis in three fundamental ways.

First, although over three-fourths of India's population breathes air that does not meet the national standards, apocalyptic levels for a few weeks in the capital become the defining feature of the crisis. Instead, the defining feature ought to be the sheer everyday nature of it, across the country. Research shows that

the average exposure to air pollution is similar in rural and urban India. Given that two-thirds of our population is rural, a whopping 75% of the 1.1 million deaths attributable to air pollution in India occur in villages, as per a Health Effects Institute assessment in 2018. Yet, in terms of monitoring air quality, rural areas remain a blindspot. In the absence of official data, the rural air pollution crisis does not get due acknowledgment, let alone proportionate attention.

Second, episodic sources get disproportionate blame, and year-round sources insufficient scrutiny. To be clear, stubble burning is certainly an important contributor in NCR for the few weeks during late October-mid November. But seen over the course of the year, this is only one of the major sources in the region, alongside vehicles, industries, and power plants, waste burning, and dust re-suspended due to vehicular movement and from construction activities. At a national level, household burning

of solid fuels for cooking and other purposes forms the single largest source of outdoor pollution exposure, in addition to causing pollution indoors. All these sources need to be tackled in parallel to see meaningful improvements in air quality, in Delhi and elsewhere in India.

Third, it results in an excessive emphasis on emergency responses, and on entirely misguided and unscientific tech-fixes such as smog towers. The only way to reduce air pollution is to cut emissions at the source, throughout the year. Since the sources are so different from each other, the agencies responsible and the types of interventions needed also vary substantially. Developing effective sectoral policies and ensuring that these are implemented well require resources, systematic planning, and political will.

The onset of the November smog should be thought of as a symptom, not the disease. It is, however, an annual reminder that we have a long way to go.

## The politics behind the farm protests

***Rural India enjoys disproportionate political power. It's time for a change***

The question of representation in India is usually seen through the prism of caste, religion and region. But the question of sharing political power between rural and urban areas has attracted scanty scrutiny.

For too long India has been romanticised as a rural civilisation. This has roots in colonial rule, when nationalists uncritically accepted European characterisation of India as an unchanging, timeless, rural society. Instead of questioning its very basis, most of the anti-imperialist responses sought to prove the superiority of this "spiritual and rural India" over the industrial, materialistic West.

While Mahatma Gandhi exemplified the extreme end of this reaction, even socialists and Hindu nationalists were not immune from this delusion. They

failed to see that decline of urban centres and industry was itself the by-product of colonial rule, and historically, India had one of the highest rates of urbanisation. Most things we know of and take pride in Indian history comes from the cities and urban milieu and not some "timeless village". This is also not surprising because it is the rise of cities that heralds the rise of civilisation - for it is when a society has reached a certain threshold of social and economic sophistication, driven by technical advances, that it becomes distinct from subsistence existence.

However, the post-Independence Indian polity remained attached to agrarianism and ruralism with ceaseless eulogies to the Kisan as Annadata. Instead of recognising that farming is just another source of livelihood, the polity has converted it into the

essence of India with excessive sentimentality nurtured over decades. It is reflected in a policy that privileges the farmers not just over urban dwellers but also the other sections of rural society, most notably agrarian labourers. The demands at the centre of the current farmer protests demonstrate this distortion in the Indian polity.

Those spearheading the protests belong to the class of capitalist farmers that rose during the Green Revolution in north-western India. Government support in the form of subsidies, Minimum Support Prices (MSPs), free water, electricity, credit, among other measures, was critical to the formation of this class - apart from the expansion of landholding either through forced purchase or outright land-grab from the Dalit castes and small farmers.



This segment of farmers also acquired interests in moneylending and trade and commerce, which they think is under threat from the entry of the agri-business companies. But since no one wants to be seen as "anti-farmer" and to question complex politics within an agrarian society, the "cause" has gained wide traction in the public, intelligentsia, and political parties. However, do note that 86% of farmers in the country are small and marginal farmers who are net-buyers of the food grains. Forcing the State to sustain

artificially high prices feeds into inflation and hurts these farmers, apart from the large population of landless labourers.

In Punjab alone, Dalits are around 32% of the population, but hardly own 3% of the agricultural land. The higher MSP and perverse incentives it creates has distorted cropping patterns, destroyed biodiversity and caused environmental and ecological havoc with depletion of water tables, degradation of soil and smog engulfing the entire north India as arid Punjab is now cultivating rice.





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# Indian Overseas Congress, USA demands revocation of the newly enacted farm Laws.

By George Abraham,  
Vice-Chair "IOCUSA"

Indian Overseas Congress, USA demands that Modi Government revokes the newly enacted farm laws and engage in a dialogue with the protesting farmers to resolve this serious crisis. "It is quite unfortunate to see the Government using water cannons and teargas against farmers who are peacefully protesting to safeguard their livelihoods," said George Abraham, Vice-Chairman of the Indian Overseas Congress, USA. "The Modi Administration is systematically trampling the democratic rights of India's people in terms of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly," added Mr. Abraham.

Mr. Mohinder Singh Gilzian, President of the IOCUSA, criticized the way the new law was pushed through the Parliament without any consultation with farmers or any input from a select committee. "It is another example of total disregard of federalism and lack of respect for the Parliamentary procedures that have become the hallmark of this Government. It is quite incredible that those who

are in power are questioning the patriotism of the farmers who feed the nation." Mr. Gilzian added. Mr. Harbachan Singh, the Secretary-General of the IOCUSA, called upon the Government to respond by saying that "if the minuscule corona virus can bring the world down to its knees, there is no telling that farmers can teach their elected officials some lessons when it becomes necessary. It helps, therefore, for the Government to listen to the legitimate demands and calls for protection by the people".

The farmers express their legitimate fear that without Minimum Support Pricing, they may become victims to the crony capitalists who hold such sway and power over the country today. The Government is trying to assure them that it will continue with the supporting mechanism. However, nobody can blame the farmers for their skepticism as they were promised in 2014 to implement M.S. Swaminathan's recommendations according to which farmers were to be paid 50% over and above the cost of the crop as the MSP. However, they have not only reneged in fulfilling those promises but went

about filing an affidavit in February 2015 opposing it in the Supreme Court. It was nothing but a cruel joke played on the farmers and exposed the anti-farmer policies of the Modi Government at the Centre and Khattar-led BJP government in Haryana. Besides, farmers have not forgotten the police firing and killings in Madhya Pradesh that took place in 2017.

Thanks to the Nehruvian vision and past Congress governments' policies, India's food storage facilities are filled with food grains today; however, some would argue that India is not keeping up with changing times. The nation has just witnessed the distribution of free food grains during the pandemic times to those poor laborers. They were walking back to their home villages due to the Government's draconian lockdown. Let us not forget the great famine in the 1940s, and an empty granary would have led to another disastrous famine in India today. Suppose the current enacted provisions of the farm law is fully implemented, it may eventually dry up the storage of foods in Government facilities and may even do away with 'Food

Corporation of India' in favor of the corporate interests.

The existing Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) system may need reforming, but 425 of them plus 1400 or so purchasing centers are doing their job buying, storing, and forwarding those food grains to buyers across India. These APMCs include farmers, Traders, Agricultural experts, and others contributing towards the purchasing decisions. If they fail to meet a threshold in pricing, farmers currently have the option to sell that to the Government for the Minimum Support Price. This is the mechanism that has been removed in favor of the Ambanis and Adanis, who have taken over all other Industry and Business sectors and demanded that the Government now must do the same in the agricultural sector. Therefore, these laws are not enacted primarily for the benefit of the farmers but serve the interests of these billionaire businesspeople with little or no social concern other than to increase their wealth at any cost to the society-at-large. It is to be noted that in these pandemic times, when other sectors are

showing a downward trend, they are casting their eye on the food grains to make up the losses.

There is no empirical evidence to prove that getting rid of the Essential Commodity Act will help the farmers with more income and stabilize the prices for consumers. Under the new laws, corporates will be able to stock any amount, and the outlets like Reliance or Amazon could exploit the supply and demand situation to do price gouging. The recent pandemic in the west showed how the prices were manipulated to maximize these online entities' profits. Farmers and Consumers alike would be placed under the mercy of these corporate giants.

Therefore, IOCUSA firmly stands behind these courageous farmers who are braving the severe cold weather and facing a threat from the COVID-19 infection to fight for what is right not only for themselves but also for the whole nation. We salute our valiant farmers! It is time for the Modi government to revoke the newly enacted farm Laws and end favoring a few crony capitalists.

## Beyond the Paris pact

**There is both urgency and hope. India deserves accolades for its record**

The Paris Agreement to battle the climate crisis marks its fifth year with renewed hope and renewed urgency. The hope

that the agreement does not go far enough in keeping the world average temperature increase below the 2 degree Celsius

surpass its carbon emission commitments under the Paris agreement. Equally telling, a consortium of green think tanks



lies in the knowledge that the world's largest economy, the United States (US), will rejoin the Paris pact next month. The urgency lies in the recognition

danger mark. India can hold its head up high. The Narendra Modi government's ambitious renewable energy programme has meant India will easily

Even a pandemic-induced economic lockdown only reduced carbon emissions by seven per cent. The coming task, as all governments recognise, is

how to go beyond Paris. The decision of the US, Brazil and others to ignore their Paris commitments is a reminder that large, cumbersome multilateral agreements are not necessarily the only or even the best way to curb carbon. The return of the US opens the gate for large-scale financial and technological assistance for the renewable goals of countries such as India. And innovative ways to accomplish this bilaterally or otherwise will define global green policy in the coming decade.

New Delhi must know the global green transformation will not be all smooth. Green technology will determine future global economic competitiveness. The European Union (EU) plans to introduce carbon tariffs next year and merge climate policy

with trade wars. Working out the proper political equations will be as important as setting out market-friendly incentives at home to ensure investment flows down the proper green channels. The largest corporations of the world have already begun putting their money on a green future. Eleven of the Group of 20 countries have declared net zero carbon targets, with China, EU and Japan among the most recent economies to do so. Climate now has far greater public acceptance across the world than it has ever had - and the shock and awe of the Paris accord contributed to this new green consensus. But India must be ready for a new world of climate that will be as much about cooperation as it will be about competition.



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# How the agriculture reforms finally liberate farmers



The agitation is led by a section of the farmers, misled by false propaganda. On the other hand, the majority of the tilling class, Dalits and the poor, are conspicuous by their absence

In early April 2019, the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) released a Farmers Manifesto for Freedom. It was a progressive document, and said, "Seven decades after India won independence from British colonial rule, the largest section of our population, the farmers, have remained bound by the chain of laws and regulations".

The manifesto sought "freedom to trade" and bemoaned that existing laws were restricting farmers from "where, how and at what price they can sell their

produce", and underlined that Agricultural Produce Marketing Committees (APMCs) have only helped in creating "legal monopolies" of a few "licensed traders", who now have a "stranglehold on farmers". It called for removal of restriction on land use including "contract farming", and abolition of "such laws as the APMC and the Essential Commodities Act". It even sought facilitation of "future trading" in all agricultural commodities.

APMCs were started in central India during British rule to force cotton farmers to sell their produce only to State-run markets so that cotton mills in England could have cheap raw material from India. After Independence, the powerful rural

lobby ensured that this legacy continued. It helped farmers in the initial years when Indian agriculture was in dire straits until the Green Revolution. But today, as the BKU manifesto highlights, APMCs have become dens of "middlemen" from whom the farmers have to be "saved".

This is what the three recent agriculture reform acts intend to do. Strangely, the same BKU is on the streets leading the so-called farmers agitation against the reforms. They argued earlier that the farmers were "bound by the chains" of British-era laws. Now, they argue that the same chains should be restored because the farmers may, in future, be bound by the chains of private agri-entrepreneurs.

Incidentally, through a tweet on April 4, 2019, the BKU leadership had expressed happiness about the Congress and Rahul Gandhi adopting "some parts" and said, "Let us see what the BJP and Narendra Modi adopt". The Congress is now supporting BKU leadership's duplicity, while the Modi government is working for the implementation of its

manifesto. The acts are the most historic and boldest reforms in agriculture since Independence. The farmer is the only private producer in India who didn't have freedom to sell until now. "Farmers of India! You are henceforth the masters of the harvest", said Ram Manohar Lohia in 1963 articulating his vision for agricultural reforms. Modi has transformed that vision into a reality.

The APMC regime was an anomaly, with farmers forced to sell their produce only to APMCs. For political reasons, government after government, in states as well as at the Centre, went on extending the Minimum Support Price regime leading not only to a distorted pricing regime but also the production pattern. The new laws end that anomaly.

They essentially extend three benefits to farmers. They are now free to sell their produce wherever they get better prices - in mandis or to private procurers anywhere. They can now price their produce as per the demand. They can now enter into agreements with corporate and private agribusinesses and

engage even in future trading. Opposition to such historic reforms is suicidal for the farming community. Yet, some sections of the farmers are on the streets blockading Delhi arteries. There could be some genuine apprehensions, such as the need for an MSP protection in case private businesses try to exploit farmers. The government has been open to discussion on such concerns. But the propaganda that the new acts make the farmers slaves to private businesses is far-fetched. The acts protect the land of the farmer from any kind of exploitation even if the farmer defaults.

The agitation is led by a section of the farmers, misled by false propaganda. On the other hand, the majority of the tilling class, Dalits and the poor, are conspicuous by their absence. The government must engage with the farmers directly and explain the benefits. A couple of amendments could be considered, but anything beyond that would be detrimental to the future of agriculture.

## The illegality of Uttar Pradesh's crackdown on interfaith marriages



With Uttar Pradesh leading the way, a set of states now plan to pass laws to end what they call "love jihad", a term which lacks any real definition and is beyond comprehension. This will make it a non-bailable, cognisable offence. Apart from the fact that it has no basis in law, the practical implication of this is that the constable on the street will have the power to arrest someone considered guilty of this "crime" without seeking the

court's permission. This proposed law is wrong on many counts. First, the Constitution enshrines secularism. This means India is not anti-religion, pro-religion or irreligious. Despite this, several states have had anti-conversion laws for a long time, including Odisha, Arunachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh and Jharkhand. However, these laws made it illegal to use force to convert a person. The so-called love jihad

law plans to outlaw religious conversion which may take place for marriage purposes. This interferes with personal liberty. Second, based on Articles 25 to 28, an Indian citizen is guaranteed the freedom to practise any religion of his or her choice. The "love jihad" law curtails this freedom. The State wants to intervene not only in the citizens' private relationship with God, but also in the choice of their spouse. In addition, the proposed law does not account for agnostics. Third, the Supreme Court in Shafin Jahan v Ashok KM (2018), after setting aside the annulment of the marriage of a Muslim convert from Kerala, Hadiya (Akhila Ashokan) and Shafin Jahan, a Muslim man, upheld the right to marry a person of one's choice as a part of Article 21. The Court said, "Matters of dress and of food, of ideas and ideologies, of love and partnership,

are within the central aspects of identity. The law may regulate (subject to constitutional compliance) the conditions of a valid marriage, as it may regulate the situations in which a marital tie can be ended or annulled... Matters of belief and faith, including whether to believe, are at the core of constitutional liberty. The Constitution exists for believers as well as for agnostics. The Constitution protects the ability of each individual to pursue a way of life or faith to which she or he seeks to adhere... The right to marry a person of one's choice is integral to Article 21 of the Constitution. The Constitution also guarantees the right to life. This right cannot be taken away, except through a law which is substantively and procedurally fair, just and reasonable. Intrinsic to the liberty which the Constitution guarantees as a fundamental right is the ability of

each individual to make decisions on matters central to the pursuit of happiness." Therefore, the proposed law violates the right to life under Article 21. Fourth, in SC's K.S. Puttaswamy v UOI (2017) judgment, it read the "right of choice of a family life" as a fundamental right. The regressive law limits the choice of a prospective spouse such that this spouse would only be one approved by the State. Fifth, the Allahabad High Court, on November 11, in the case of Salamat Ansari v Uttar Pradesh (2020), held that the choice of a partner is the exclusive domain of the individual. It also distinguished itself from the Noor Jahan Begum case (2014) by suggesting that this earlier case did not deal with the "liberty of two matured individuals in choosing a partner or their right to freedom of choice as to with whom they would like to live".



# US blacklists Chinese triad boss 'Broken Tooth' in latest round of anti-corruption sanctions



(News Agencies)- The United States government has placed sanctions on Wan Kuok-koi, a notorious gangster and triad boss known as "Broken Tooth." Wan is known as a leader of the 14K Triad, which the US Treasury described as "one of the largest Chinese organized criminal organizations in the world," engaging in "drug trafficking, illegal gambling, racketeering, human trafficking, and a range of other criminal activities." Under the sanctions, any assets held by Wan in the US will be frozen and American citizens are forbidden from doing business with him.

Born in the Portuguese colony of Macao, Wan rose through the ranks of the triad to become one of the territory's most powerful crime bosses, waging a bloody

war against rival gangs, with bombings, shootings and stabbings a regular occurrence. He was jailed in November 1999 on a host of charges, shortly before the colony was handed over to China. Upon his release in 2012, Wan, who had always maintained his innocence, sought to reinvent himself -- at least publicly -- as a legitimate businessman, reportedly backing ventures in Cambodia and Palau. According to the US Treasury, he also gained membership of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), an advisory body to the ruling Communist Party. In 2018, the Treasury statement said, Wan established the headquarters of the World Hongmen History and Culture Association in

Cambodia. Also known as Tiandihui, or the Heaven and Earth Society, the Hongmen is a fraternal organization dating to the mid-1600s, with footholds around the world. In Hong Kong and Macao, it has been closely linked to triad activity, and the US sanctions accuse the 14K of "utilizing Broken Tooth's World Hongmen History and Culture Association as an effort to legitimize itself."

"The World Hongmen History and Culture Association has managed to co-opt elite figures in Malaysia and Cambodia. This continues a pattern of overseas Chinese actors trying to paper over illegal criminal activities by framing their actions in terms of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the China Dream, or other major initiatives of the CCP," the Treasury statement said using the acronym for the Chinese Communist Party.

"The World Hongmen History and Culture Association is spreading across Southeast Asia, establishing a powerful business network involved in the development and launching of crypto currencies, real estate, and most recently a security company specialized in protecting BRI

investments," the statement added. CNN could not reach the association for comment on the Treasury accusations. Wan could also not be reached.

The sanctions against Wan are part of a wider effort against worldwide corruption, as part of International Anti-Corruption Day. On Wednesday, the US also designated a Liberian lawmaker and one Kyrgyz individual under Executive Order 13818, which targets corruption and serious human rights abuse.

Belt and road's alleged crime links

The activity ascribed to Wan by the Treasury statement, particularly in Cambodia, resembles that of another alleged Chinese crime boss, Zhao Wei. This week, CNN reported that Zhao -- one of the world's most notorious narcotics traffickers -- was closely linked to a casino development project in Laos, apparently with the imprimatur of the local government. Both Cambodia and Laos are members of the Belt and Road Initiative, a vast trade and infrastructure project that is the signature project of Chinese President Xi Jinping. First

announced in 2013, the project promises to build ports, roads and railways to create new trade corridors linking China to Asia, Africa and Europe, with tens of billions of dollars in investments and loans. The project has been dogged by criticism, particularly from Western countries, that have accused China of saddling developing countries with debts that they cannot afford to repay. According to the US Treasury, the BRI also has links to organized crime. "Chinese enterprises behind the BRI projects have several things in common: their leadership has links to criminal networks or actors involved in illicit activities in other parts of Southeast Asia, as well as China; they have pre-existing organizations engaged in casinos and crypto currencies; they advertise themselves online to be associated with Beijing's BRI and flaunt connections with key Chinese government agencies; and all of them have established associations that actively seek to assist Chinese nationals," the statement said. CNN has reached out to the Chinese government for comment on the Treasury's assertions regarding BRI projects.

## Afghan government condemns murder of female journalist and driver as 'utterly despicable'



(News Agencies)-The Afghan government has described the killing of female journalist Malalai Maiwand by gunmen on Thursday as "utterly despicable." Sediqi Sediqi, a spokesperson for President Ashraf Ghani condemned the murder, calling it "cowardly and heinous." "The Afghan government strongly condemns it and conveys

message of condolence and sympathy to her family and friends," Sediqi said in a tweet. "The current senseless violence against our people must end." At 7 a.m. local time, unidentified gunmen shot and killed Maiwand and her driver in an attack on their vehicle in Jalalabad, the capital of the eastern province of Nangarhar,

a statement from the provincial media office said. She was a reporter at Enikas Radio and TV in Nangarhar and this is an incident that underscores an increasing trend of violence against journalists in the country. No one has claimed responsibility for the attack, but Reuters cited Afghan interior ministry spokesman Tariq Arian as saying that -- over the past 15 years -- the Taliban has been behind the majority of attacks on journalists. CNN has reached out to the Taliban for comment. Meanwhile Reuters has cited Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid as saying he denied the group's involvement in the incident.

"She was on the way to office when the incident happened," Attaullah Khogyani, spokesman

for the provincial governor, told Reuters. Enikas has been targeted before, with its owner, Engineer Zalmay, kidnapped for ransom in 2018. Maiwand is also not the first of her family to be targeted. Five years ago, her mother, also an activist, was killed by unknown gunmen.

"With the killing of Malalai, the working field for female journalists is getting more smaller and the journalists may not dare to continue their jobs the way they were doing before," Nai, an organization supporting media in Afghanistan, said in a statement.

Last month, Elyas Dayee, a Radio Azadi journalist, was killed in a bomb blast in the

southern Helmand province, and Yama Siawash, a former TOLONews presenter, was killed in a similar blast in Kabul.

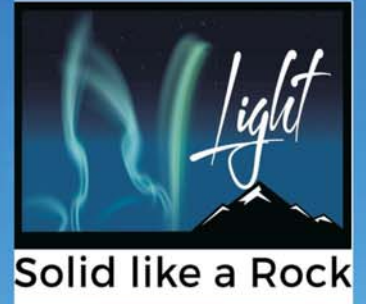
The Afghan government, German embassy, EU delegation and British ambassador condemned growing attacks on journalists and activists.

International donors and governments have also expressed apprehension about a possible reversal of progress on women's rights over the last two decades if the Taliban return to any sort of power with the withdrawal of foreign troops from the country next year.

The Taliban's hardline rule was marked by oppressive laws for women up until the group was toppled following a 2001 US-led invasion of Afghanistan.



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## Bhutan parliament decriminalizes homosexuality, to delight of activists



Rights activist Tashi Tsheten said he was "thrilled and really happy" over the parliamentary move, calling it a "victory" for the LGBT+ community.

"I think the bill being passed on Human Rights Day itself is a momentous day for everyone in Bhutan," Tsheten, the director of LGBT+ group, Rainbow Bhutan, told Reuters.

"I believe everyone who has stood up for the LGBT+ community in Bhutan is going to celebrate today as this is our victory."

The move by the majority-Buddhist nation of 800,000 people comes after other Asian countries relaxed restrictions on the rights of the LGBT+ people.

Neighboring India removed a centuries-old colonial prohibition on gay sex in 2018, triggering celebration across the country.

(News Agencies)-A joint sitting of both houses of Bhutan's parliament approved a bill on Thursday to legalize gay sex, making the tiny Himalayan kingdom the latest Asian nation to take steps towards easing restrictions on same-sex relationships.

Sections 213 and 214 of the penal code had criminalized "unnatural sex," widely interpreted as homosexuality. Lawmaker Ugyen Wangdi, the vice chairperson of a joint panel

considering the changes, said 63 of the total 69 members of both houses of parliament had voted in favor of amending the code to scrap the provision. Six members were absent.

"Homosexuality will not be considered as unnatural sex now," Wangdi told Reuters by phone from the Bhutanese capital of Thimphu, without giving details.

The changes still need to be approved by the King of Bhutan to become a law.

## Tech giants call for 'changes' to Pakistani censorship laws

(News Agencies)- Tech giants Google, Facebook and others have sought "critical changes" to newly passed Pakistani internet regulations that broaden censorship and authorise widespread surveillance without judicial oversight, among other issues, in a new letter to the Pakistani prime minister.

The letter, dated December 5 but shared with journalists on Wednesday, details the major concerns of the Asia Internet Coalition (AIC), which represents Google, Facebook, Twitter and others in the region, regarding new internet regulations passed last month.

"AIC members are alarmed by the scope of Pakistan's new Rules, as well as the opaque process by which these rules were finalised," reads the letter. A version of the new regulations was first passed in February but was quickly rescinded by Prime Minister Imran Khan after an outcry by rights groups and

technology companies. Khan promised there would be an inclusive consultative process to amend the regulations.

The AIC, digital rights activists and officials at social media companies, however, told Al Jazeera such a process never occurred. A new version of the rules was passed and implemented in November, with few changes to the original regulations.

On December 1, the government revised the rules once more, to remove a clause that outlawed any criticism of the federal and provincial government or any public office holders after rights groups decried the move as being authoritarian. The new AIC letter referenced the move to revise the rules last week without official consultations or processes as being problematic. "Industry stakeholders have therefore lost trust in the consultation process because it is neither credible nor transparent," reads the letter.

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# China and Pakistan conduct joint air drills – with eye on India

China and Pakistan are conducting joint air force exercises in the southern desert of the Islamic Republic near the border with India in a not-so-subtle message to a country with which both have long had tense relations.

The drills come just a week after Chinese Defense Minister Gen. Wei Fenghe visited Pakistan and signed a memorandum of understanding for deepening military cooperation. The exercises, dubbed Shaheen -- or Falcon -- IX, are underway at the newly operational Bholari air base in the arid region of Sindh in the country's south, less than 200 km from the Indian border. The Pakistan Air Force released a video showing the wide range of military aircraft on display in the exercise, which will last until late December. China has sent its fourth-generation Shenyang J-11 air superiority fighters and Chengdu J-10 multirole jets. Pakistan, meanwhile, is flying a mix of third-generation Chinese-made Chengdu F-7 interceptors, French Dassault



Mirage 5 attack planes and the new multirole JF-17 Thunder -- jointly produced by China and Pakistan. No American equipment, such as the F-16, has been deployed, the Pakistanis said. China's Defense Ministry said the drills will "deepen practical cooperation between the two air forces." Pakistan's air force, which comprises a mix of U.S., French and Chinese hardware, has become increasingly reliant on Beijing. Islamabad's economic and political proximity to China and decades of simmering tensions with archrival India have created what it sees as a need for closer tactical cooperation with its larger neighbor and stronger ally. At the

opening ceremony on Wednesday, Air Vice Marshal Ahmed Sulehri, the deputy chief of Pakistan's air staff, said the exercises "will further enhance interoperability of both air forces, thereby fortifying brotherly relations between the two countries." Major Gen. Sun Hong, the assistant chief of staff of the People's Liberation Army Air Force, said they "will improve actual level of combat training and strengthen cooperation." India has recently featured as a common perceived threat for both the Chinese and Pakistani militaries. Pakistan and India, both nuclear-armed, have been rivals since independence from Britain more than 70 years ago, fighting

wars and engaging in frequent border skirmishes, with tensions especially high in the disputed region of Kashmir. India and China, meanwhile, have also long been at odds and fought a brief war in 1962. Last summer, the PLA and the Indian Army clashed in a secluded but disputed part of the Himalayas, which saw 20 Indian Army personnel killed in the bloodiest fighting between the world's two most populous countries in more than 40 years. The Chinese side has not disclosed its casualties.

While the Chinese military has been modernizing for years, the recent violence has triggered a series of reactions in New Delhi, including a rethink about India's security arrangements and military exercises. India recently hosted the massive Malabar 2020 naval exercise with the U.S., Japan and Australia. New Delhi's inclusion of Canberra as a participant helped revitalize the "Quad," or Quadrilateral Security Dialogue -- a loose body consisting of the four countries but now being viewed as a democratic bulwark

against China's growing assertiveness in the Asia-Pacific and beyond. India has also signed a series of security agreements -- ranging from intelligence sharing to logistical support -- with its Quad partners. Beijing and Islamabad, meanwhile, have been strengthening their relationship which they have glowingly described as an "all-weather friendship" and "iron brotherhood" since the 1950s, with decades of steady economic, military and even nuclear support from China for Pakistan. A hallmark of their closeness is the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, or CPEC, a \$60 billion communications, energy and infrastructure project to connect western China to the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf through ports and pipelines. CPEC, considered a flagship project of Chinese President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road initiative, is protected and led by elements of the Pakistani military.

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## Defendant Pleads Guilty to Manslaughter in Stabbing death of Long Island Man

(News Agencies)- Accused Grabbed a Knife from Food Cart to Kill Victim; Faces 17 Years in Prison at Sentencing

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced that John Daves, 34, has pleaded guilty to manslaughter for the September 2018 stabbing death of a 25-year-old Long Island man, who was patronizing a food cart in Jackson Heights, Queens when he was attacked. District Attorney Katz said, "A minor dispute while ordering at a food cart escalated into a man being chased down and brutally stabbed to death. This was a needless act of violence that should never have happened." Daves, whose address is unknown, pleaded guilty to manslaughter in the first degree before Queens Supreme Court Justice Kenneth Holder. The defendant is scheduled to be sentenced on February 3, 2021. Justice Holder indicated he will sentence Daves to 17 years in prison, to be followed by five years' post release supervision. District Attorney Katz said that, shortly after 9:30 p.m. on September

27, 2018, at the intersection of 80th Street and Roosevelt Avenue, Daves and the victim, Miguel Angel Becerra-Perez, were both waiting at a food cart to place their orders. The two men exchanged words and a verbal argument ensued. The defendant grabbed a knife from the food cart and video surveillance of the scene shows him chase the 25-year-old victim down the street, catch up with him and then stab Becerra-Perez in the right arm and chest. The victim died as a result of the knife attack. Assistant District Attorney Courtney Finnerty, of the District Attorney's Homicide Bureau, prosecuted the case, with the assistance of Assistant District Attorney Adarna DeFietas, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Brad A. Leventhal, Bureau Chief, Peter J. McCormack III, Senior Deputy Bureau Chief, John W. Kosinski and Kenneth M. Appelbaum, Deputy Bureau Chiefs, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Major Crimes Daniel A. Saunders.

## A surfer was attacked and killed by a shark in Hawaii, forcing the suspension of a surfing competition

(News Agencies)- A surfer who was attacked by a shark in Hawaii on Tuesday has died, prompting the suspension a women's professional surfing competition in Honolulu Bay.

The unidentified victim passed away early Wednesday evening, officials at Maui Memorial Medical Center told CNN.

bite mark appearing to measure 17 inches wide.

The attack prompted the indefinite hold of the World Surf League women's professional surfing competition Maui Pro on the day of the incident, according to a release by the WSL.

The WSL announced the decision to cancel the remaining heats of the competition at

Honolulu Bay on Wednesday, stating in a release that the organization is working on options to complete the event at an alternate location in Hawaii after working with local authorities and speaking to surfers. The surfer who died in the attack was a recreational surfer and was not involved in the WSL competition, said the DLNR.

The surfing organization shared condolences to the shark attack victim's family, friends and the Maui surfing community in a social media post on Thursday. The WSL has learned that Tuesday's victim of the shark attack at Honolulu Bay has tragically passed away," wrote the WSL in a caption on social media. "Our thoughts and hearts are with the victim's family and friends as well as the entire Maui surfing community."



The 56-year-old man from Lahaina, a city in West Maui, was paddling out from the old ramp in the bay when the incident occurred, according to a release by Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources. He was taken to the hospital and admitted for surgery after the attack, said the DLNR. The state department posted multiple photos to social media showing a surfboard with large bite marks. One photo showed a

# What does the Hunter Biden investigation actually tell us?

On Wednesday, we learned that Hunter Biden, the son of President-elect Joe Biden, is under investigation by federal prosecutors in Delaware regarding several financial questions that have arisen as a result of his business dealings in foreign countries -- most notably China.

"I learned yesterday for the first time that the U.S. Attorney's Office in Delaware advised my legal counsel, also yesterday, that they are investigating my tax affairs," Hunter Biden said on Wednesday. "I take this matter very seriously but I am confident that a professional and objective review of these matters will demonstrate that I handled my affairs legally and appropriately, including with the benefit of professional tax advisors."

Republicans -- led by President Donald Trump -- rushed to argue that the investigation, which has been reportedly ongoing since 2018, was proof positive that Hunter Biden should have been a bigger issue in the just-concluded 2020 campaign.

"10% of voters would have changed their vote if they knew about Hunter Biden." Miranda

Devine

@TuckerCarlson," tweeted Trump on Wednesday night. "But I won anyway!" (Fact check: He didn't.) Spin aside, it's worth asking the question: How much trouble could Hunter Biden actually be in?

The short answer is we simply don't know yet. And the reason is, at least in part, because it's just so hard to differentiate the spin from the facts. (Worth noting: Joe Biden is not implicated in any way in the investigation.) What we know is that Hunter Biden had dealings with Chinese companies both during and after his father served as vice president. Consider:

\* In 2013, he became involved with and eventually was placed on the board of a directors of a Chinese investment fund management company known as BHR. He resigned from that role in October 2019 and, in a letter posted to Medium by his lawyer, insisted he had never received any sort of compensation for his role.

\* In 2017, Hunter Biden worked on securing a deal with CEFC China Energy to invest in US energy companies. That same year, the founder of CEFC gave Hunter a 2.8-karat diamond during a business meeting in Miami. Hunter Biden told the New Yorker

@nypost

in 2019 that he hadn't kept the diamond. "I knew it wasn't a good idea to take it," he told the New Yorker. "I just felt like it was weird."

What we also know is that in 2019, the FBI seized a laptop purportedly belonging to Hunter Biden and alleged to include business documents and other personal materials.

Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani steered that information to media outlets in the closing days of the 2020 presidential race, insisting -- again, without any proof -- that the laptop was evidence of Hunter Biden's shady dealings with China, among other countries. As CNN's Evan Perez and Pamela Brown wrote of the back-and-forth:

"The involvement of Trump lawyers in the published news stories on the purported Biden laptop led to a flurry of activity by Republican lawmakers and the Trump campaign looking to amplify allegations of corruption ahead of the election. The FBI met with a former Hunter Biden business associate who publicly made claims about potential wrongdoing. The FBI issued a statement at the time saying that 'as a general matter when contacted, the FBI reviews



information from the public for consideration of any violations of applicable federal laws." "And well, that's about it. (Yes, we also know that Hunter Biden has struggled with addiction, but that seems to have very little to do with the investigation into his business dealings in China.) So, what can we conclude based on those facts? Well, first and most obviously, it's never a good thing to be the subject of a federal investigation. Like, you would rather not be under federal investigation -- all other things being equal. (For those who think they see the hidden hand of Attorney General -- and Trump consigliere -- Bill Barr in this, the investigation reportedly predates Barr's time as the nation's top cop.) And we know -- and have known -- that it was a bad look for Hunter Biden

to be sitting on the boards of foreign companies (Hunter was also on the board of Burisma, a Ukrainian energy company) while his dad was the sitting vice president of the United States. Hunter acknowledged as much in an interview with ABC News in October 2019. "I did nothing wrong at all," Hunter Biden said. "However, was it poor judgment to be in the middle of something that is -- it's a swamp, in many ways? Yeah. Did I do anything improper? No, not in any way. Not in any way whatsoever." Later in the interview he added this: "You know what? I'm a human. And you know what, did I make a mistake? Well, maybe in the grand scheme of things, yeah. But did I make a mistake based on some unethical lapse? Absolutely not."



# Body cam footage shows raid on former Florida Covid data scientist's home

Florida state police released body camera videos Thursday afternoon showing officers waiting before they entered the home of a former state data scientist and the testy confrontation that followed when she exited -- providing new context about a controversial police raid that has attracted national attention this week. Officers were serving a search warrant Monday morning at the home of Rebekah Jones, a coronavirus data scientist who was fired from the state and has accused Florida officials of covering up the extent of the pandemic. The state Department of Law Enforcement is investigating whether Jones illegally accessed a state messaging system to send her former colleagues a message urging them to speak out about coronavirus deaths. Jones, who has feuded with Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis for months, has denied sending the message. The two videos released by the department show that Jones didn't exit her

Tallahassee home until about 23 minutes after officers first rang the doorbell, and 15 minutes after they first announced themselves as police. Jones has claimed authorities waited 13 minutes while she got dressed. Officers are seen calling Jones' cell phone to ask her to leave the house, while one holds a large hammer. "Police search warrant, open the door!" officers yell several times. "Make sure the whole block hears us," one agent tells his colleagues. As Jones exits her house, one officer with his gun drawn appears to point the weapon in her direction, although it's unclear whether anyone pointed a firearm six inches from Jones' face, as she has claimed in interviews with CNN. Officers are seen holding her by her back and her arms as she shouts at them not to point a gun at her children. One of the officers scolds Jones for taking so long after she leaves the house. "That was not smart what you are doing," the officer tells Jones.

"You need to calm down and get your head (inaudible) because you are making all the wrong decisions." "All you had to do was answer the door -- there was no doubt who we were," the officer said. Jones replies that her lawyer had previously told her not to answer the door. She seems confused about what officers want. "What are they looking for? Are they looking for a person?" she asked at one point. Law enforcement department Commissioner Rick Swearingen said in a statement that "this video demonstrates that FDLE agents exercised extreme patience." "Agents afforded Ms. Jones ample time to come to the door and resolve this matter in a civil and professional manner," Swearingen said. "As this video will demonstrate, any risk or danger to Ms. Jones or her family was the result of her actions." But Jones, who has said she delayed in answering the door because she was getting dressed, responded on Twitter on



Thursday that the videos prove she was cooperating.

Officers "were ready to break my door down with a sledgehammer," she wrote. "This is 'restraint?' Really???"

The footage released so far mostly shows interactions outside Jones' home, although officers did enter and search the house. Jones has said that officers in the house pointed guns at her 2- and 11-year-old children and her husband, which

the department has denied, and released her own video of the raid showing officers inside with guns drawn. It's unclear whether those officers were also wearing body cameras.

In other developments, Jones has now raised more than \$200,000 on a GoFundMe page that she says will be used for her legal defense and for "moving expenses so my family can get out of the Governor's reach."

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# A Florida man just paid off the past dues for 114 families at risk of having their utilities shut off

(News Agencies)-A Florida business owner who was once down on his luck is giving back by covering the utility bills of 114 families who were facing disconnection. Michael Esmond's generosity started last year when he paid the utility bills of 36 households in his community of Gulf Breeze. This year, with both Hurricane Sally and Covid-induced economic turmoil hitting the city, he thought he needed to up the ante. "This year to me probably is more meaningful than last year with the pandemic and all the people out of work having to stay home," Esmond told CNN. "Hurricane Sally slammed us pretty good and hurt a lot of people. We still have a lot of the blue roofs here, where they're just

covered with tarps." Esmond donated \$7,615.40 to pay for the past-due bills of 114 households, according to Joanne Oliver, the city's utility billing supervisor. Holiday cards notifying the residents will be mailed this week, she says.

While Esmond's donation increased from the \$4,600 he paid last year, he says he was able to help about three times as many households. That's because there were many residents who had bills due of \$100 or less, so he was able to help more people.

"That really impacted me -- that people can't even afford to pay a \$100 bill on their utilities and things are so bad," Esmond said. "That's why I was able to pay for 114 families." Business was good

in 2020 for 74-year-old Esmond, owner of Gulf Breeze Pools and Spas. It's something he says he's "almost ashamed" to tell people because he knows how hard it's been for many.

"We've had a good year, and that's why I want to share what I have with the people who need it," he said. Beyond the coronavirus pandemic's economic toll, Gulf Breeze has dealt with the lingering effects of Hurricane Sally, which hit the panhandle hard.

A storm-related accident damaged a section of the newly built Pensacola Bay Bridge that connects to Gulf Breeze, authorities said in September.

A barge slammed into a portion of the structure, known to locals as the Three Mile Bridge, Brad



Baker, Santa Rosa County's public safety director, said in a September Facebook video.

Given the pandemic's havoc on the city, Oliver, the city's utility billing supervisor, said residents are getting a longer grace period before their utilities for water, gas and sewer are

disconnected. "We're not cutting customers off. We're not disconnecting them for nonpayment until they are more than 60 days past due," Oliver said. The check Esmond wrote covered the bills for people who were 60 days past due, she says.

## Smugglers threw seven pounds of chicken wings and 40 pounds of tobacco over a prison wall



(News Agencies)- Smugglers managed to throw a hefty haul of contraband items -- including 20 pounds of tobacco and seven

pounds of barbecued chicken -- over the fence of a Mississippi prison. They may have gotten away with it, if it weren't for the

prison's security technology. Officials at the South Mississippi Correctional Institution in Leakesville intercepted more than 25 packages containing a number of items including four pounds of marijuana, 38 cellphones, chargers and earbuds and cold medication, plus the chicken and tobacco. Some of the items were sewn into footballs so they could be easily thrown over the 18-foot-tall fence surrounding the prison, but new sensing technology alerted guards to the drop, according to a statement

released by the Mississippi Department of Corrections.

The unidentified smugglers attempted to throw the packages across a remote section of the prison's grounds, but officers were immediately alerted by the sensors and rushed to the scene, arriving in time to intercept the items and see their vehicle drive away. Authorities are searching for the suspects. The prison has struggled to contain violent gang activities within its walls, and the MDOC says items like these can be dangerous for the inmates'

safety. "We are making Mississippi prisons safer for inmates and Corrections officers by stopping the flow of contraband," MDOC Commissioner Burl Cain said. "Gang leaders use contraband as a way to control other inmates ... Now we're installing and using the latest security systems, drones overhead, and cameras and scanners everywhere."

Prisoners found to be connected to the incident will lose eligibility for early release, according to the MDOC.

## European Union agrees on \$2 trillion package -- but fudges deal on rule of law



(News Agencies)-The leaders of the European Union's 27 member states have reached a final agreement on the \$2 trillion package designed to rebuild the bloc's faltering economies in the wake of the coronavirus recession. The package comprises the EU's €1.1 trillion

(€1.3 trillion) Multi-annual Financial Framework, which is paid into by every member state and distributed across the bloc over a seven-year period, and a special Covid recovery fund of €750 billion (\$858 billion), for which the EU will centrally raise money on financial markets and

hand out as both loans and grants to member states.

The EU reached an agreement on the package back in July, but member states had since struggled to unanimously agree on the conditions attached to receiving funds.

Two member states, Poland and Hungary, had vetoed the agreement at previous meetings of member states in protest at EU demands that funds would be withheld from member states deemed to be in violation of the rule of law. Both countries are currently under investigation for exactly this, with charges ranging from suppression of political opposition to undermining the independence of judges. However, at a meeting in Brussels, a

compromise was found which satisfied the two delinquent states. If enough member states believe that Poland or Hungary, for example, are not meeting the EU's agreed rules and standards, they can trigger a vote which can be secured by a qualified majority. However, the latest agreement provides the country in question with the option to challenge that decision at the European Court of Justice.

Vera Jourova, vice president of the European Commission, said she was "satisfied that the legal text of the Regulation on Rule of Law conditionality remains untouched and that there is "qualified majority voting in

the decision of the Council." She also said she believes that "some Member States might want to seek full legal certainty on this important matter before the European Court of Justice. This is their right. I expect the proceeding to go fast. In my view, we are talking about months rather than years."

However, that might not satisfy critics of Hungary or Poland. Viktor Orban, the Prime Minister of Hungary, was quick to claim victory soon after the agreement was reached. "We've won. In a difficult period of pandemic, economic crisis, there's no time to continue political and ideological debates that prevent us from acting," Orban said.



# Merkel pleads with Germans to avoid a 'last Christmas with the grandparents,' as country smashes daily death record



(News Agencies)-Germany was praised among European nations for its handling of the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. But on Tuesday it suffered its deadliest day yet and infection rates are still rising. So what's gone wrong? Speaking in the German parliament Wednesday, Chancellor Angela Merkel warned that nationwide restrictions brought in on November 2 had not proven effective enough, with too many people now dead or in intensive care units with Covid-19.

A day after the country reported a record 590 deaths, Merkel grew emotional as she appealed to her fellow Germans to keep one another safe by reducing their social contacts before the holidays, especially if they plan to visit older people.

"If we have too many contacts now before Christmas, and that ends up making it the last Christmas with the grandparents, then we will have failed. We should not do that," she told a budget session in the Bundestag.

The Chancellor added that the daily death toll was a price too high for keeping some shops open, including much-loved waffle and mulled wine stands in the festive season. "There are still 14 days until Christmas and we have to do everything we can to prevent exponential growth again," she said.

Merkel urged federal state leaders to start the Christmas holidays sooner, on December 16 rather than December 19, to help people limit their contacts and allow them to isolate for longer before seeing older relatives.

The Chancellor also wants a full lockdown to be implemented for several days, possibly two weeks, after Christmas in order to bring down infection rates. But for that to happen, she needs to get the leaders of all 16 states on side.

As Europe's second wave of coronavirus infections gathered steam going into the autumn,

some European nations -- like France and England -- imposed national lockdown measures. However, Germany's state and federal leaders agreed on lighter restrictions.

A nationwide partial lockdown was imposed which required restaurant and bars to remain closed, but schools and shops remained open. People were urged to avoid travel, keep their contacts to an absolute minimum and limit public meetings to no more than five members of two different households.

These restrictions are due to be relaxed over the Christmas period in much of the country, allowing people to meet in groups of up to 10 people, not counting children.

While some states, like Bavaria, favor stricter measures, others are opposed. Meanwhile, Germany is struggling to contain a surge in new infections and death rates have continued

to climb. The country suffered its deadliest day of the pandemic Tuesday, with 590 known fatalities, the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) said Wednesday. The previous record was 487 known deaths, reported December 2, according to RKI, the country's disease and control agency.

The RKI also reported 20,815 new daily infections on Wednesday, about 3,500 more than the same day of the previous week. The total tally of Covid-19 infections in the country is now 1,218,524.

At least 19,932 people have died of Covid-19 in Germany, the public health agency's data shows. This figure is still much lower than that of fellow European nations such as the United Kingdom, France, Italy and Spain, reflecting Germany's success in handling the first pandemic wave.

## Seven dead in protests as Covid-19 hits Iraqi government worker salaries

(News Agencies)-At least seven people have been killed in ongoing violent protests since Sunday in northern Iraq, where government workers are demanding their salaries be paid as Covid-19 plunges the country into economic turmoil.

Six protesters were killed after local security forces opened fire to disperse crowds in various parts of Sulaymaniyah province. A security officer also died of his injuries after clashing with protestors. At least 12 other people were wounded.

Hundreds of protesters demonstrated in the city of Sulaymaniyah and nearby towns, saying they have not received their monthly pay checks since October. More than 1.25 million people are employed by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

In recent days, protesters have also set fire to government buildings and political parties' headquarters. Security forces have used live bullets and tear gas to disperse the demonstrations, witnesses and health officials told CNN on



condition of anonymity. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq condemned "acts of violence" in the province, saying in a statement on Monday that "the right to peaceful protest must be protected and it is imperative that demonstrations remain peaceful." Iraqi President Barham Salih said authorities were watching the situation in the province with "deep concern," in a statement urging local officials to listen to protestors' demands. "Solving these problems with

violence is a huge error," he said. "We need fast and radical solutions to resolve these issues around the payment of salaries and the conditions in which people are living. This includes taking swift and serious steps, based on transparency and better use of the country's resources, to serve the Iraqi people, as well as the undertaking of genuine reforms." Salih also called on the regional government to "work toward a comprehensive agreement with

Iraq's Federal Government, around salaries and other financial payments, so that we can all ensure that Iraq's citizens can live freely and with dignity." There is a long-standing dispute between the KRG and the federal government of Iraq over oil and gas shares and distribution. The pandemic has only amplified the crisis.

The Prime Minister of KRG, Masrour Barzani, said in a statement released Monday that "the Kurdistan government is

exerting all its efforts and capabilities to overcome the difficult financial situations that the region, Iraq and the world are going through."

Barzani added that the region "continues negotiations with the federal government to obtain the rights and financial dues for the region that it has not sent so far, unfortunately, although the regional government has shown complete flexibility in order to reach an agreement within the framework of the constitution." The Covid-19 pandemic and dramatic drops in oil prices have seriously impacted Iraq's economy, which depends on oil for 90% of its revenues.

Local governments in Baghdad and other parts of Iraq have also struggled to pay their employees on time.

Protests have taken place across Iraq for more than a year, as the country has failed to achieve stability following decades of sanctions and war, suffering from unemployment, government corruption and poor service delivery, including electricity and clean water.



# The gauntlet of New York City politics awaits Andrew Yang

Andrew Yang would bring celebrity status, fundraising prowess and an online army of devoted loyalists to the New York City mayor's race, which he's likely to jump into soon.

But the one-time presidential candidate faces a tough fight in the country's largest city. Some candidates in the already crowded field have spent their careers cultivating relationships with voters and the city's political machinery. Spending limits are strictly capped. And as the city emerges from one of the darkest moments in its history, the electorate may be clamoring for a more tested leader.

Yang hinted at his intention to join the race last week, as he was quietly reaching out to elected officials to gauge support for a possible bid in conjunction with the consulting firm Tusk Strategies, POLITICO first reported. A poll conducted on his behalf tested whether a third-party candidate could gain traction, but Yang has decided to run in the Democratic primary. "It's incredibly flattering that people are interested in my running. I love New York dearly; it's played an enormous role in my life and my wife's life and our kids go to school there," Yang, who lives in Manhattan, said in an interview. "So I'm just looking for how I can do the most good

and I believe I'll have a decision staked out in the next number of weeks."

But running for mayor in New York City traditionally requires rites of passage that will be unfamiliar to the tech entrepreneur.

He already has some work to do in impressing Errol Louis, the seasoned political journalist who grills candidates nightly on NY1's Inside City Hall and was dubious of Yang's plans during a segment this week.

"He got his clock cleaned in Iowa," Louis said. "By the time the race came around to New York he picked up I think a little over 12,000 votes, compared with half a million for Joe Biden. Is this somebody who's ready to run for mayor?"

Political advisers to New York City's top officials agreed.

"His national brand will give him a short-lived bump, but in this race I'd rather be famous with NYCHA residents and union workers than on Twitter," said Eric Phillips, a consultant and former press secretary to Mayor Bill de Blasio, referring to the city's public housing authority that is home to more than 400,000 residents. Phillips is unaffiliated with any of the mayoral hopefuls. A poll conducted by Slingshot Strategies and first reported by the New York Post this week

found Yang leading the field. In a question centered around the city's new ranked-choice voting system, 17 percent ranked Yang as their first choice in the Democratic primary and 12 percent as their second. City Comptroller Scott Stringer, who also comes from Manhattan, had 11 percent of voters rank him first and 9 percent rank him second, as did Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams, who is banking on widespread support in Central Brooklyn. The poll surveyed 1,000 Democratic voters between Nov. 30 and Dec. 6. As a candidate Yang would roll out a modified version of his universal basic income proposal, which called for monthly cash payments of \$1,000 to all Americans, according to people who have spoken to him.

One elected official, who had a lengthy conversation with Yang this week and is considering supporting him, believes he has "a real shot."

"Something is clearly broken, and we need real solutions to put cash in people's pockets," said the official, who would only speak on background to freely discuss Yang's likely plans.

The primary field is crowded and growing. In addition to Stringer, who hails from the voter-rich Upper West Side of Manhattan, and Adams, who has repeatedly



won elections in the borough that consistently has the highest turnout in citywide races, the race features many first-time candidates: Maya Wiley, a former attorney to de Blasio and MSNBC commentator; Ray McGuire, who worked at Citigroup; Shaun Donovan, who held top jobs in the Obama and Bloomberg administrations; Dianne Morales, who had an executive position at a prominent nonprofit; and Kathryn Garcia, who ran the sanitation department under the current mayor.

Other than Stringer and Donovan, each would bring personal diversity to an office that has never been occupied by a woman and only once by a Black person. Yang would also make history as the first Asian American mayor, something his supporters believe would energize that base of

voters throughout the city. "He's got an excellent shot. He's a known quantity," said state Sen. John Liu, the former city comptroller who was the first Asian American to hold citywide office. "I as well as many others are proud of what he's done."

Yang would also have to make inroads with Black voters, who are essential to victory for any Democrat running for mayor. With pandemic restrictions curtailing standard retail campaigning, the candidates will have to rely more on Zoom visits to churches and relationships with elected officials, unions and community leaders. His contenders have a head start in jockeying for the coveted endorsements of the Working Families Party, the large health care workers union 1199SEIU and Public Advocate Jumaane Williams.

## Cuomo to close indoor dining in New York City in another blow to a reeling industry

"In New York City you put the CDC caution on indoor dining together with the rate of transmission and the density and the crowding - that is a bad situation," he said. "The hospitalizations have continued to increase in [the city]."

Mayor Bill de Blasio applauded the decision on Twitter.

"As Covid-19 indicators continue to rise, it's time to shut down indoor dining. This is painful. So many restaurants are struggling. But we can't allow this virus to reassert itself in our city," he said. "I fully support Gov. Andrew Cuomo's decision. Together we'll fight back this second wave."

But the city's reeling restaurant industry said Cuomo was ignoring his own data in making a decision that could shutter even more city eateries during what would normally be one of their busiest seasons. "While public health and safety must be paramount, Governor Cuomo's announcement to once again shut down indoor dining in New York City is at odds with the State's own data that's been presented as driving these decisions, and it will be the last straw for countless more restaurants and jobs," said Andrew Rigie,

executive director of the NYC Hospitality Alliance, in a statement. "The restrictions begin on Monday with zero economic support for small businesses that are already struggling to survive."

Rigie pointed out that the Manhattan has more restaurants than anywhere in the state but has a positivity rate of 2.7 percent - less than half that of other areas where restaurants are still allowed to serve indoors.

The state is extending a commercial eviction moratorium, meaning restaurants that can't pay rent due to new restrictions cannot be tossed on the street. In response to outcry from industry advocates, Cuomo said he thinks this is a reasonable, temporary fix because restaurants still have additional options and 25 percent capacity wasn't that much anyway. If the state had any money to give small businesses he would offer it, he said, but it does not. "I understand the economic hardship and, look, I suffer every lost dollar with these businesses. They have a deficit, yeah I understand that, and [New York state has] a deficit and we are living with the economic consequences

also," Cuomo said. "It's not that I don't understand or appreciate - literally every dollar a business loses, we lose a percentage of that dollar."

Cuomo's new contact tracing numbers will mean good news for other business owners. The governor also announced gyms and salons in identified orange zones, where they were previously not allowed to operate, will be allowed to open with reduced capacity and more testing. Gyms are only responsible for 0.06 percent of infections and hair and personal care is responsible for 0.14 percent, according to the governor's office.

Cuomo will be announcing new red, orange and yellow regions next week based on the weekend's data, he said, and the qualifications for those are shifting slightly.

A red zone will mean a full economic shutdown and will be triggered if a region is 21 days from 90 percent hospital capacity. There are currently no red zones in New York, Cuomo said. An orange zone is determined if the region has a 4 percent positivity rate over 10 days, if hospitals are expected to reach 85

percent capacity in 21 days or if the infection rates are growing at such dramatic levels that the state Department of Health determines the classification is necessary. A yellow zone can be triggered by a 3 percent positivity rate over 10 days.

The zone indications should be a warning for communities, Cuomo said, that it's not somewhere else and it's up to residents to take action.

"You can make a difference in your community and you have to take it seriously," he said.

Amid the grim news for city restaurants, the first batch of vaccines are expected to arrive within days and the city and state are gearing up for distribution.

New York City will open a vaccine command center on Monday, de Blasio announced at his morning briefing, which will be designed as a "go-to location to make sure the vaccine distribution is fast and effective." The city is partnering with 200 community organizations to reach low-income people, public housing residents and communities of color - groups that were disproportionately affected by the pandemic.



# Can President Trump pardon himself?

And Trump might pardon himself. Can he do that? The short answer is yes. Here is the backstory. The pardoning power is expressly and exclusively granted to the president in the Constitution. Article Two, Section 2, Clause 1 states that the president "shall have Power to grant Reprieves and Pardons for Offenses against the United States, except in cases of impeachment." When unpacked, that broad language reveals that the president can only pardon for federal crimes, not for anyone's impeachment, and he does not need the approval of anyone else in the government. Trump is the subject of a criminal investigation for alleged or potential violations of New York state laws. But the existence of a state criminal probe of the president does not impair his ability to insulate himself from the legal consequences of a federal criminal probe, since it is clear that the president cannot pardon anyone - including himself - for state offenses.

As there has been little modern litigation over the validity and scope of individual pardons for federal offenses, there is little case law. What case law does exist broadly favors an expansive view of presidential pardon power. The leading case is *Ex parte Garland* from 1866. There, the Supreme Court upheld a pardon issued to Augustus Hill



Garland, a former Arkansas senator in the Confederate States of America. Garland, who supported his native Arkansas during the Civil War, was pardoned after the war of all offenses against the United States by President Andrew Johnson, even though the former senator had not been charged with any crimes. When federal officials, pursuant to a statute, refused to allow Garland to practice law in federal courts due to his support of the Confederacy and failure to renounce that support, he sued them. The Supreme Court ruled in Garland's favor and held that the presidential pardon power "extends to every (federal) offense known to the law, and may be exercised at any time after its commission, either before legal proceedings are taken, or during their pendency, or after conviction and judgment."

The language in the *Garland* case should put an end to speculation about the legal validity of prophylactic pardons, as should our collective memories. President Gerald R. Ford famously pardoned former President Richard M. Nixon in 1974, a pardon Nixon accepted even though he had not been charged with committing any federal crime. And in 1977, on his first day in office, President Jimmy Carter pardoned hundreds of thousands of young men who declined to be drafted into the military during the Vietnam War era, many of whom had fled to Canada, and nearly all of whom had not been charged with draft evasion. President George H.W. Bush pardoned six Reagan-era officials in the Iran-Contra affair in 1992, including former Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger - whose trial was

about to commence at the time of the pardon and at which the pre-presidential behavior of Bush was to have been laid before the jury. In 2001, President Bill Clinton pardoned his half-brother, Roger, over an old cocaine possession conviction. President Clinton pardoned his former business partner Susan McDougal over a land deal in which he and Hillary Clinton had arguably been involved. President Clinton also infamously pardoned Marc Rich for a conviction of income tax evasion, and then accepted a substantial donation to the Clinton Foundation from Mrs. Rich.

All of these pardons were and remain legally valid. It was well-known to the framers of our Constitution that British monarchs only pardoned for specific, already-charged offenses. Professor Aaron Rappaport of Hastings College of the Law at the University of California, Berkeley, has argued that the original understanding of the pardon power was that it would be used only for crimes that had already been charged. Others have argued that the concept of bilateral fairness - which certainly animated James Madison when he drafted the Due Process Clause of the Constitution's Fifth Amendment - mandates that no person shall be a judge in his own case. Both of these points are well-taken and

historically correct. If the president pardons for crimes not yet charged, is he exercising powers that the framers never understood that they were giving him? If the president pardons himself, is he acting as a judge in his own case? The answer to both of these questions is yes. Yet, the Supreme Court and history teach that while such pardons may be eviscerated politically, they will be upheld legally. Before the president pardons his children, his colleagues and himself, he should pardon all those convicted under federal drug laws for use and possession. They harmed no one. He should also pardon Julian Assange, who revealed the slaughter of innocent civilians and the cover-up by the U.S. military in Afghanistan, and Edward Snowden, who revealed that the feds have engaged in secret, unlawful and warrantless spying on hundreds of millions of innocent Americans. Assange and Snowden have been bitterly targeted and verbally savaged by the Deep State, but these heroes risked their lives and liberties so we might know the truth about government lawbreaking. Should pardons produce justice? Sometimes they do - as would be the case for Assange and Snowden. But the essence of a pardon is mercy, not justice - and they are often opposites.

By Judge Andrew P. Napolitano

## Vaccines on horizon as virus surges through Trump country. And the political debate is as heated as ever

As with masks, experts say that for the new Covid-19 vaccines to control the spread of the disease, a lot of people have to use them. That raises an obvious question: Will what happened to masks happen to the vaccine — will they become a political symbol instead of a public health tool?

**For some, the answer already is yes.**

"There's a lot of sincere people that are doing their best to put out a vaccine, but that doesn't mean I'm going to take it," says Greg Locke, pastor of Global Vision Bible Church in Mt. Juliet, Tennessee. "I don't believe the government can tell me when or how I can stick a needle in my arm or my kids' arms. It's super government overreach."

Inside an outdoor tent — which he says he's using not to limit the spread of Covid, but because the church building can't hold all the new people coming — Locke folded his political takes into a sermon about how Christians should not be cowed by public



criticism.

"Fear over faith. I'm not scared of some fake pandemic," he said, to a standing ovation. He often records Facebook videos with political views in a Walmart parking lot. "And I don't wear a mask when I go in either!" The crowd cheered. And by the way, "Donald Trump won the election by a landslide, and will be elected the president of the United States!"

Mt. Juliet is in Wilson County, to the east of Nashville. And like other more rural areas across the country, it's seeing a surge in coronavirus cases.

Over the last 14 days — through Wednesday — the county recorded an average 127.6 new cases reported per day. For the 14 days prior, the average daily number was 95.6, according to the Tennessee Department of Health. Wilson County voted overwhelmingly for President Trump in the 2020 election. A Pew Research Center survey over the summer found that Republicans are less likely to see coronavirus as a major threat to public health.

"There's nobody in those rural counties who doesn't know someone who has acquired

Covid been hospitalized. And many people know someone who's died of Covid. But they still, interestingly enough, are not all that concerned," said Dr. William Schaffner, professor of preventive medicine at Vanderbilt University in Nashville.

"They're not likely to wear masks. It's very attitudinal. And it will not be easy to change those attitudes, it will be like turning the proverbial ocean liner — it takes persistence, and it will happen slowly."

Locke does not deny the existence of Covid-19, but he does reject the World Health

Organization's designation of it as a pandemic, which happened in March. "I'm saying the sickness is real. I'm saying the pandemic is not," Locke said. Asked what he meant when he said the pandemic was not real, Locke said, "Pandemic is not real." Asked what he thought a pandemic was, he said, "Not covid-19."

As CNN continued to ask this question, Locke's publicist interjected, saying "I think we're stuck on the pandemic question." Asked why he couldn't answer the question, Locke said, "I did. There's no pandemic. Covid. 19. Is. Not. A. Pan. Dem. Ic." Asked once again what a pandemic is, Locke said, "Not what we're experiencing. I'm 44 years old, we've not had one in my lifetime. So I don't know. And this is not it." A couple attendees of Locke's service told CNN they'd seen him on Facebook recently and come to check him out.



# Missouri, 5 more states ask to join Texas Supreme Court election case against Georgia, others

(SAI Bureau)- Missouri and five other states on Thursday threw their support even further behind the Texas lawsuit aiming to prevent Georgia, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin's electors from casting their electoral votes by asking the Supreme Court to let them join the Texas suit. Missouri on Wednesday led a group of 17 states in filing a brief that supported the Texas lawsuit, which alleges that the four key swing states that voted for President-elect Joe Biden violated the Constitution by having their judicial and executive branches make changes to their presidential elections rather than their legislatures. But the Thursday filing led by Missouri Attorney General Eric Schmitt, which also includes Arkansas, Utah, Louisiana, Mississippi and South Carolina, would make those states parties before the court in the case rather than just outside voices weighing in. President Trump's campaign did the same on Wednesday.

"The intervening states do not doubt that plaintiff state of Texas will vigorously and effectively litigate this case, but the attorney general of each individual state is best situated to represent the interests of that state and its people," the six states said in their request.

The states led by Missouri on Thursday also said they back the arguments so far made to the court by Texas and the president's campaign, which have argued that not only are the actions taken by Georgia, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Michigan unconstitutional, but they also open up the potential for widespread voter fraud.

"All the unconstitutional changes to election procedures identified in the Bill of Complaint have two common features: (1) They abrogated statutory safeguards against fraud that responsible observers have long recommended for voting by mail, and (2) they did so in a way that predictably conferred partisan advantage on one candidate in the presidential election," the Missouri brief from Wednesday, which was joined by 16 other states, said.

It continued: "When non-legislative actors in other states encroach on the authority of the 'Legislature thereof' in that state to administer a presidential election, they threaten the liberty, not just of their own citizens, but of every citizen of the United States who casts a lawful ballot in that election -

including the citizens of amici states."

The Texas suit is unique in that it seeks to take advantage of the Supreme Court's rarely used original jurisdiction for cases in which states sue other states.



Despite the backing of so many state attorneys general, most legal experts say the Texas suit is fatally flawed in several ways and nearly certain to fail.

"This is political posturing through litigation. Not one of those attorneys general believes they are entitled to win," Harvard Law professor Lawrence Lessig told Fox News. Lessig is a former clerk for the late Justice Antonin Scalia and currently works with Equal Votes, a nonprofit that seeks to end winner-take-all allocation of electoral votes in states. Lessig continued: "As lawyers, that should stop them from signing onto such an action. But they are acting as politicians, not lawyers here - to the detriment of the rule of law."

Walter Olson, a senior fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute, said the only question at this point is the manner in which the Supreme Court will hand Texas a loss in the case.

"This set of lawsuits has met with rejection, so far as I know, from every single federal judge to have ruled on them," Olson said. "The Supreme Court will reject this one too, and the only real question is whether it will do so through orders declining even to hear the case (which is what I predict) or by taking up the case and promptly dismissing on the merits." Ilya Shapiro, the director of the Robert A. Levy Center for Constitutional Studies at the Cato Institute, pointed out that Texas Solicitor General Kyle Hawkins, the person who would normally be leading his state's

litigation, has not worked on the suit. "[It is] basically a political maneuver more than a real legal lawsuit," Shapiro said. "There's a reason why the Texas solicitor general's name isn't on the case."

could have been addressed in an orderly fashion before "at exactly the time most disruptive and prejudicial to the rights of third parties (such as, in this case, innocent voters who relied on their states' approved methods)." There is also the fact the "safe-harbor" day for elector selection has already passed, which Olson says harms Texas' case too. "Standing," or whether a party is permitted to bring a suit in a certain case, also goes against Texas, according to Lessig. "Not without a radical (and hence, certain to be perceived a politically motivated) change in standing doctrine," will the Supreme Court say that Texas and the other states may sue.

And on the merits of the case specifically, Olson says, Texas would also lose because "the imagined 'rule' is universally ignored since states have in fact allowed their governors, judiciaries or both to make rulings and determinations affecting the manner in which presidential elections are held and electors thus chosen." "Texas has done this too," Olson added. Also of note Thursday is that Ohio, a state with a Republican attorney general in

David Yost, filed a brief in support of neither Texas nor the defendant states Georgia, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin. Although Ohio does not endorse Texas's proposed relief, it does endorse its call for a ruling on the meaning of the electors clause," its brief says, mentioning that such a ruling would clear up controversies for future elections. "Ohio urges the court to decide, at the earliest available opportunity, whether state courts and state executive actors violate the electors clause when they change the rules by which presidential elections are run." Shapiro also said he believes it could be positive if the Supreme Court weighs in on the Texas case to quash doubts about this election. "It might even be good for the country if the Supreme Court took this case and unanimously ruled against the claim because that might provide some closure for the supporters of the president," Shapiro said.

He added, however, that the court will more likely simply decline to hear it because the "weakness" of the Texas case would prevent the court from needing to even go so far as unanimously dismissing it.

## Dabur, Patanjali among 13 brands adulterating honey with sugar syrup: CSE study

The CSE said almost all the top brands passed the tests of purity while a few smaller brands failed the tests to detect C4 sugar or basic adulteration using cane sugar. However, when the same brands were tested using NMR - laboratory tests currently being used globally to check for such modified sugar syrups - almost all the big and small brands failed. Out of the 13 brands, only three passed the NMR test conducted by a specialised laboratory in Germany. The three brands are Saffola, MarkfedSohna and Nature's Nectar (one out of two samples). "What we found was shocking. It shows how the business of adulteration has evolved so that it can pass the stipulated tests in India. Our concern is not just that the honey we eat is adulterated, but that this adulteration is difficult to catch. In fact, we have found that the sugar syrups are designed so that they can go undetected," said Amit Khurana, programme director of CSE's Food Safety and Toxins team, said. Dabur rejects study A Business Today report said Dabur has refuted the findings of the study. As per the Dabur's statement, it is the only company in India to have an NMR testing equipment in its own laboratory. It is worth mentioning that Dabur's statement also included an attachment of an NMR test report from Germany-based Bruker BioSpin GmbH, dated July 16, 2020. It stated that Dabur Honey had passed the NMR test. The NMR tests have been made mandatory in India for honey that is meant for export as of August 1, 2020. This suggests that the government had an idea about

the adulteration by some companies and sought advanced tests to determine the purity of honey. An Emami spokesperson said that the Zandu Pure Honey "conforms and adheres" to all protocols and quality norms and standards laid down by the Government of India and its authorised entities such as FSSAI. However, unlike Dabur, it did not comment on the NMR test which is considered the global standard. Meanwhile, an Apis Himalaya spokesperson replied saying that the company will not comment immediately but will hold a press conference. CSE Director-General Sunita Narain said an additional undercover operation was conducted to find out more details. "Chinese companies informed CSE that even if 50-80 per cent of the honey is adulterated with syrup, it would pass all stipulated tests. A sample of the syrup that can bypass tests was then sent by the Chinese company as paint pigment to get through customs," she said. Impact of adulterated food during Covid-19 pandemic Sunita Narain also mentioned in the study that consuming adulterated food "compromises" public health during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. "Indians today are consuming more honey because they believe in its intrinsic goodness antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties and to build immunity against the virus. But if it is adulterated honey, what we are really eating is sugar, which will add to the challenge of overweight and obesity, which in turn makes us more vulnerable to severe COVID-19 infection," she said.



# 'A historic event for humanity': US reaches turning point in fight against COVID-19 as FDA authorizes Pfizer vaccine

In what is hoped to be the beginning of the end of America's COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration on Friday night authorized the first vaccine to prevent the disease.

The vaccine, developed by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech, appears to be extremely safe and highly effective.

It was developed faster than any previously approved vaccine in the United States - not by compromising safety or accepting a mediocre vaccine as some feared - but by spending billions of taxpayer dollars and taking advantage of recent scientific advances.

The vaccine could start to be delivered into people's arms as soon as Monday, if not earlier. About 2.9 million frontline health care workers and nursing home residents are expected to receive the vaccine in the first few days.

More vaccine will be rolled out in the weeks and months to come, with both of two front runners expected to deliver a combined 300 million doses of their vaccines by the middle of next year, enough to vaccinate nearly half the population of the U.S.

"Today is truly a historic event for humanity as a whole," said Moncef Slaoui, an immunologist and retired pharmaceutical executive who helped lead the government's vaccine development effort.

"Eleven months almost to the day after a pandemic virus sequence was identified and devastated lives and livelihoods across the globe, science, industry and government working together were able to discover develop and manufacture in a record time the first of a series of potent vaccines that undoubtedly will be pivotal to ridding us of this plague."

The FDA's emergency use authorization for the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine BNT162b2 in people ages 16 and up comes as the nation's COVID-19 death toll tops the number of Americans who died on the battlefield in World War II.

President Donald Trump, who announced the decision in a 3-minute video on Twitter, said he

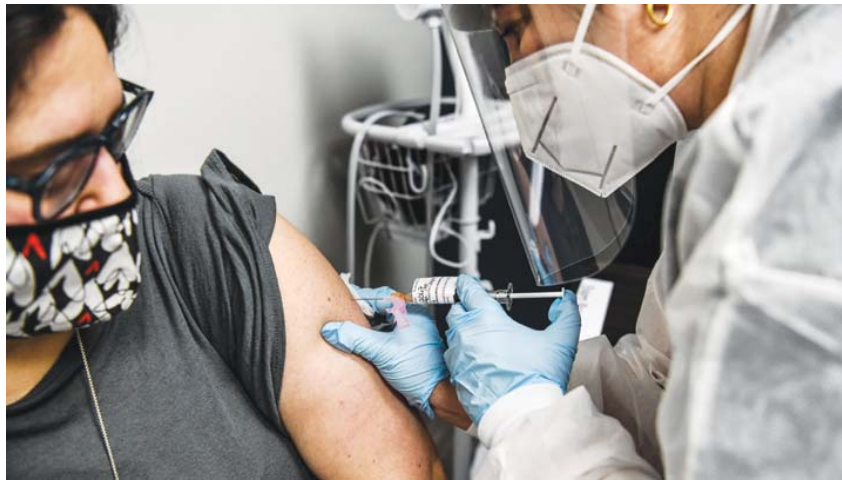
was extremely proud of his administration's accomplishment in collaboration with scientists and the private sector.

"Today's achievement is a reminder of America's unlimited potential when we have the will and the courage to pursue ambitious goals," he said. Other members of the administration were equally enthusiastic.

"It is nothing short of a medical miracle to have FDA authorization of a vaccine for COVID-19 just over 11 months since the virus was made known

Data from Pfizer's trial of 44,000 people, half of whom received the active vaccine and half a placebo, found no major safety concerns. The vaccine was 95% effective across the board, with various groups predisposed to a severe case of COVID-19 - such as people over 70, those with certain medical conditions including diabetes and lung disease, and people who are Black and/or Hispanic - seeing nearly equal protection.

"No better demonstration could be made that we as humans hold our future in our hands," Slaoui said. "We can destroy it



to the world," said Alex Azar, head of the department of Health and Human Services in an emailed statement.

Dr. Stephen Hahn, the FDA commissioner, called the authorization "a significant milestone in battling this devastating pandemic that has affected so many families in the United States and around the world."

Next week, a second candidate COVID-19 vaccine, developed by the Cambridge, Massachusetts-based Moderna, will go through the same review process and is expected to be swiftly cleared for use.

The FDA will stop short of fully approving either vaccine. The agency has received all the standard short-term safety and effectiveness data, but the vaccines have not been tested for the two years typical of an approved vaccine so it is not yet clear how long protection will last. "With science guiding our decision-making ... the vaccine's known and potential benefits clearly outweigh its known and potential risks," said Dr. Peter Marks, director of the FDA's Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research.

or we can restore it ... the choice is ours."

Others were equally exuberant about the scientific achievement, but remain cautious about the future, particularly in the short-term, when vaccines won't be widely available and the virus continues to sicken more than 200,000 Americans a day and kill several thousand.

"I think it's remarkable," said Dr. Paul Offit, a pediatric infectious disease expert and director of the Vaccine Education Center at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

The virus was genetically sequenced for the first time in January. "I don't think you would have found a scientist on this planet who would have predicted this 11 months ago," he said.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases agreed that the speed of vaccine development was almost unbelievable.

"It would have been inconceivable to me a year or two or three ago to think we were going to be successful in that," he said in an interview Friday with the editor of the Journal of

the American Medical Association.

"Now it's our challenge to convince people that it wasn't rushed in a reckless way, that it was an expression of the extraordinary scientific advances made with vaccine platform technology and the investment that was made," Fauci added.

Both China and Russia have been vaccinating their residents for several months with home-grown vaccines but they have not been fully vetted. Both countries began distribution before completing large-scale trials designed to confirm safety and determine effectiveness.

Although a committee meeting Saturday will make a final determination, the vaccine should first be available to frontline health care workers and nursing home residents.

As more vaccine is manufactured in late January or February,

vaccination will likely be expanded to include first responders, home health care workers, teachers, grocery store clerks, other essential workers, people at high risk for a bad infection either because of age or health status, and those in prisons and homeless shelters, which have seen particularly devastating outbreaks of COVID-19.

Younger, healthier people in low-risk professions will likely get access to vaccination in April or May, depending on demand and how many vaccines receive FDA authorization.

How RNA technology works in COVID-19 vaccine

The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, like the one developed by Moderna, depends on so-called messenger RNA technology never before used in an approved vaccine or drug.

The technology takes advantage of the natural function of mRNA, which acts as a go-between or messenger, ferrying a recipe from the DNA to make the proteins responsible for every one of the cell's functions.

With the vaccines, the mRNA is encapsulated in tiny, protective balls of fat that keep the mRNA

from being chewed up by enzymes.

Once injected, the fat ball delivers the mRNA into a cell, triggering production of a protein found on the surface of the virus that causes COVID-19.

The fat balls are very fragile, which is why the vaccines have to be stored at very cold temperatures. Once they disintegrate, the mRNA doesn't hang around very long to cause safety concerns.

The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine has to be kept at subzero temperatures, with dry ice or a special freezer until five days before use, while Moderna's can be refrigerated for a week before use, and at room temperature for up to 12 hours.

Moderna and BioNTech, a biotech firm based in Mainz, Germany, both have been developing mRNA vaccines for the last decade, but had not passed early trials in people. The COVID-19 pandemic provided them the funding and scientific support to put their novel approach to work.

Moderna was able to design its vaccine in just over a month, after receiving the DNA code of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes COVID-19, last January. BioNTech began developing its vaccine around the same time. COVID-19 vaccine Q&A: Are there side effects to a COVID-19 vaccine? What are the 'ingredients'? The cost?

Both vaccines underwent animal testing and trials in people, starting small and building to large-scale, recently completed trials.

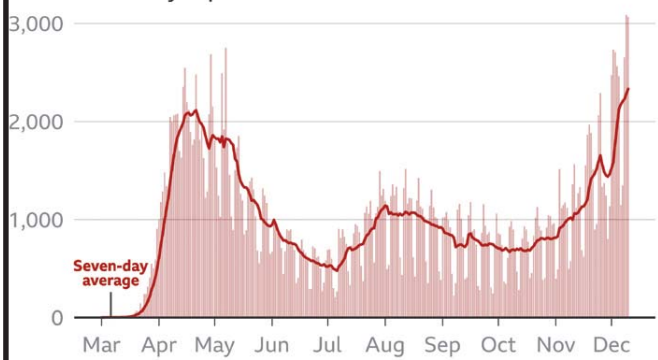
In typical vaccine development, each of those steps would have proceeded in sequence, taking years. Instead, this time, many of the steps were done simultaneously, allowing the vaccines to complete development, testing and manufacturing in record time. Nearly all the vaccines being developed in the United States target a protein on the surface of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, called the "spike" protein. Researchers in the U.S. government, led by Barney Graham at NIAID, discovered the precise configuration of the protein, allowing vaccine developers to take aim at a highly effective target.



# Covid-19 in the US: Bleak winter ahead as deaths surge

## Deaths now above levels seen in spring

Number of daily reported coronavirus deaths in the US



Source: COVID Tracking Project

B I B I C

## Cases have risen to record levels

Number of daily confirmed coronavirus cases in the US

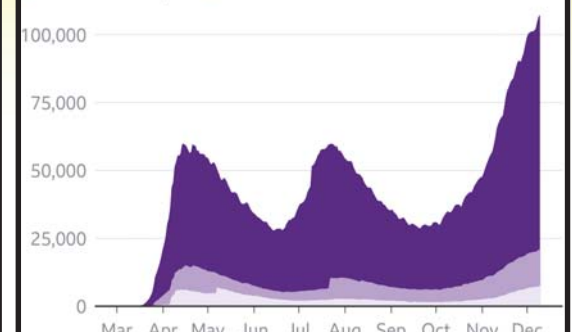


Source: COVID Tracking Project

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## More than 100,000 Americans are currently in hospital with Covid-19

Patients in hospital In intensive care units On a ventilator



Source: COVID Tracking Project

B I B I C

Americans should start being vaccinated against coronavirus in the coming days, providing some light at the end of the tunnel for the country with the highest death toll in the world.

But the good news about vaccines comes as the US is experiencing its toughest period of the pandemic so far. The number of daily reported deaths is at a record high while both the number of infections and admissions to hospital continue to rise.

Robert Redfield, the head of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, has warned that the next few months will be "the most difficult in the public health history of this nation".

So why is the outlook so bleak and what will next year bring? Deaths are now surging across the US

The number of daily reported deaths began to increase substantially in November and it has now passed 3,000 for the first time since the start of the pandemic. The highest number of deaths in one day during the spring outbreak, which was limited to states in the Northeast, was just below 2,800. If you ignore the recent

slight drop in the seven-day average, which was caused by the limited reporting of data around the Thanksgiving holiday on 26 November, the trend does not look good. Earlier this week, Dr Redfield told the Council on Foreign Relations think-tank that he expected the daily death toll to be higher than the 3,000 killed in the 9/11 attacks "probably for the next 60 to 90 days".

At the moment, the US death toll stands at nearly 300,000 - the highest figure in the world and about a fifth of the global total of confirmed coronavirus deaths.

Cases are still rising quickly. One of the reasons the death toll is expected to rise at such a fast rate is because the number of infections is also still on the way up.

With more than 15 million confirmed cases, the US has the highest number of infections in the world and the spread shows no sign of slowing down. The chart below shows that the current wave is still growing at a faster rate than the previous two - although some of that is down to increased levels of testing. During the spring wave, testing was mostly limited to confirming

cases in people who were already in hospital, meaning the true scale of that outbreak wasn't fully captured. The latest data compiled by the COVID Tracking Project shows the number of cases was up by nearly 30% week on week, while testing was up by just 10%.

Dr Anthony Fauci, the top US infectious diseases expert, has said we'll have to wait until mid-December to gauge what effect Thanksgiving gatherings have had on the numbers. But he warned that Christmas will inevitably bring another increase in travelling and social contacts, which will lead to "a very challenging period".

The strain on hospitals is growing. Because of the change in the level of testing, a better way to compare waves is to look at the number of people being admitted to hospital because of Covid-19. This data shows that roughly the same number of people across the US were in hospital during the first and second waves of the outbreak.

But the current wave has seen far more Covid-19 patients admitted to hospital - more than 100,000 at the moment. The number of patients with

coronavirus who are in intensive care units and on ventilators is also rising, which is another worrying sign - although treatments have improved since the spring outbreak.

In a recent study in New York, researchers found that the probability of death among coronavirus patients was down 18 percentage points from the spring, in part due to new treatments and better knowledge of the virus among medical staff. But these improvements are dependent on the quality of care being received, which is put at risk when hospitals reach capacity and staffing levels are put under pressure. Recent analysis of hospital admissions data by the New York Times found that one in 10 Americans lived in an area where intensive care units were either full or fewer than 5% of beds were available.

One travel nurse's journey to US Covid hotspots

This wave is hitting every US region

The current wave of infections is the third one to hit the US this year but the one major difference is that it's affecting every region at the same time.

The spring wave was predominantly in the Northeast, while the summer one hit the South and West hardest.

This time around, it was the Midwest where infections rose fastest - but every region has seen a spike in cases.

The Covid Exit Strategy group, which is run by public health experts, ranks the progress each state is making in tackling the outbreak. At the moment, every state but Hawaii is categorised as having an "uncontrolled spread".

The only region where the numbers are looking somewhat positive is the Midwest, although

we'll have to wait another week or so to see whether cases continue to fall once the post-Thanksgiving data stabilises.

The mask-wearing US city that bucked the trend. Some normality by end of 2021? Several states have brought in increased measures in recent days in a bid to reduce the spread of the virus, including California and New York.

In Pennsylvania, Democratic Governor Tom Wolf banned dining inside restaurants and introduced limits on social gatherings indoors, saying: "We need to slow the spread right now in order to save lives. If we don't, we're going to be in big trouble." Mr Wolf is himself isolating after testing positive for Covid-19.

Dr Fauci has called on Americans to "hang on" until the vaccines arrive, saying key public health measures like social distancing and the wearing of face masks are crucial over the next few months.

President-elect Joe Biden has vowed to make tackling the pandemic a top priority when he enters the White House on 20 January. He has set a goal of vaccinating 100 million people - nearly a third of the US population - within the first 100 days of his administration. Dr Fauci, who has accepted a role as Mr Biden's chief medical adviser, said last week that if 75% of Americans can be vaccinated by next summer, the country may be able to return to "some degree of normality".

However, a recent survey by the Pew Research Center suggests that may be a challenge, with only 60% of people saying they would probably or definitely get the vaccine.

## Cases have increased quickly across the US

Number of daily confirmed coronavirus cases by region

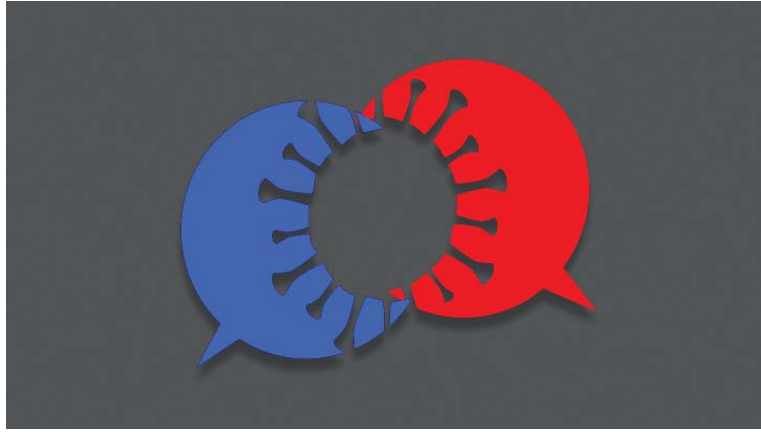


Source: COVID Tracking Project data, using Census Bureau regions

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# American Elites Still Don't Understand How COVID-19 Works



Nine months into the pandemic, government leaders can't comprehend-or refuse to clearly say-what this virus is or how it spreads.

The United States has been overwhelmed by vectors of misinformation throughout the pandemic. But it's not just Donald Trump, many Republican state leaders, and several thousand COVID-19 deniers who have waged a war against scientific comprehension. America's virus illiteracy spans the partisan divide.

In Florida, Republican Governor Ron DeSantis chirped about his state's superior performance and mocked COVID-19 worriers-only for Florida to become the site of one of America's worst outbreaks several weeks later. Deep-red North Dakota similarly resisted commonsense measures such as mask mandates before it suffered an even worse outbreak. Even if we narrow our focus to blue territories, however, nonsense abounds-nonsense, granted, that is more likely to

result in mass confusion and annoyance than mass infection. In Los Angeles, a new order prohibits two friends from going on a socially distanced walk at the beach. At one point in early December, the city's playgrounds were closed while its malls were open. In Philadelphia, an ordinance makes it illegal for neighbors to sip beer outside, yet indoor drinking and dining at bars and restaurants is permitted by state law. In New York, bars, restaurants, and gyms have been ordered to close, but not until 10 p.m.-as if the virus keeps to a hard vampiric sleeping schedule. In the ninth month of the coronavirus pandemic, America's public-health response makes as little sense as ever. These public orders don't seem to be operating off of a clear-eyed understanding of what this disease actually is. So let's review: The SARS-CoV-2 virus spreads most efficiently among unmasked adult speakers who spend time together in close, unventilated indoor spaces. The virus can also spread through

nonverbal activities. Sneezing and coughing obviously produce virus-encased globs of spit, and even heavy breathing-especially during a run or a set of pull-ups-can spray aerosolized droplets that can linger in the air before slipping inside a person's nose or mouth. The virus does not seem to spread reliably via surfaces. Put simply, COVID-19 is mostly a talking disease-one that could be brought to heel with universal mask wearing, a national campaign that emphasizes quiet in public spaces, and harsh laws about indoor gatherings.

None of this is breaking news. We've known most of it for a while. In the spring, a raft of CDC studies-from a Chinese restaurant, a Korean call center, and an American choir practice-made it clear that talking, laughing, and singing in close quarters for many hours is the perfect storm for a super-spreader event.

The epidemiological evidence was never that complicated, and neither was devising a sensible national strategy to get us through the winter.

- If viral aerosols from talking are the most common vector of COVID-19 transmission ... we should encourage universal mask wearing, social distancing among people from different households, and quiet in public spaces.- If these aerosolized particles spread easily in

unventilated indoor spaces ... we should shut down and bail out indoor businesses that naturally invite crowding and talking, such as bars.

- If symptomatic individuals don't just talk but also often cough and sneeze ... we should create a national quarantine system to separate them from their families and a contact-tracing system to identify potentially infected individuals and ask them to isolate.

- If a large number of infected people will be asymptomatic ... we should invest early in a mass-testing apparatus to quickly identify silent carriers.

- If, no matter how well we respond, this pandemic is going to last for a while ... we should encourage people to reclaim normalcy by spending as much time outside as possible, while still stressing the importance of mask usage and social distancing when gathering with those outside of one's household. Read: Sorry to burst your quarantine bubble

This sort of straightforward, rules-and-reasons approach would treat citizens like they're intelligent people who care about the motivations of public-health laws. Instead, we've gotten a lot of bad rules with equally bad or nonexistent justifications.

Federal health guidance has oscillated between being a vacuum and being an epistemic horror show. In the absence of

federal leadership, many major cities are restricting outdoor gatherings, despite their low risk of transmission among young children and ambulating adults, even as they permit indoor activities with a much higher risk. Imagine if the U.S. announced a new war against automobile casualties, and we watched California ban all transmission technology, leading to millions of confused and angry homebound residents, while North Dakota took out all its traffic lights, leading to a redoubled epidemic of car deaths. That's essentially what we have today-a clueless seesaw between overly restrictive and overly accommodating policies. The laboratories of democracy have become specialists in reactive ad-hocracy, as hospitalizations spike to an all-time high.

To be fair to American leaders, or at least inclusive of non-American incompetence, it's not just the U.S. where elites have made a mockery of their authority. The World Health Organization took months to declare that the coronavirus was airborne in the first place. Czechs held a "farewell party" for COVID-19 one month before their nation became home to one of the world's worst outbreaks. The city of Madrid anticipated Los Angeles's silliness by closing parks while permitting indoor dining. Most bizarrely, perhaps, South Africa banned the sale of open-toed shoes and many short-sleeved shirts.

But incompetence somewhere is not a justification for incompetence everywhere. In the medieval ages, people had no idea how most diseases worked, so they resorted to bloodletting leeches, skin-eating maggots, and an assortment of magical charms to combat illness. They had an excuse. But after 500 years, a couple of scientific revolutions, scores of medical discoveries, and dozens of vaccines-not to mention nine months of 21st-century plague-too many American leaders are still practicing the equivalent of legislative bloodletting, as they oversee scientifically unsound and poorly explained laws that are immiserating the populations they've sworn to protect.

## ***U.S. government buys another 100 million doses of Moderna vaccine***

The United States will buy 100 million additional shots of Moderna's Covid-19 vaccine - doubling its initial order of the vaccine, which the FDA is expected to authorize later this month.

The expanded order would ensure continuous vaccine delivery through the end of June 2021, at a total cost of \$3.2 billion, the Trump administration said.

Moderna's vaccine, which is based on messenger RNA technology and about 95 percent effective in trials, will be discussed by an expert FDA panel on Thursday. Emergency authorization could come within days, potentially making the shot the second vaccine cleared

for use in the United States. The FDA is expected to authorize the first, from Pfizer, as early as Friday evening. Operation Warp Speed, the government



initiative to accelerate coronavirus vaccine development and delivery, has already said that between the two options there will be 20 million doses available in December. The government's

original \$1.5 billion purchasing agreement with Moderna secured 100 million shots, with the option to buy 400 million more. While the Trump administration isn't ordering the maximum amount, the expanded agreement brings U.S. funding for Moderna up to about \$4.1 billion, a figure that includes some money for development of the shot."This new federal

purchase can give Americans even greater confidence we will have enough supply to vaccinate all Americans who want it by the second quarter of 2021," HHS Secretary Alex Azar said. The government still

has an option to buy another 300 million shots at a later date. Warp Speed has secured 100 million doses of Pfizer's vaccine, which is also based on mRNA technology. But recent reports that the government did not expand its order for that shot - despite inking a deal with Pfizer this summer that includes an option for 500 million additional doses - raised fresh concerns that there could be a supply shortage in early 2021 after the initial wave of doses.

Warp Speed has signed deals with six manufacturers for 800 million doses, but it is not clear yet which ones will be proven effective and authorized for use.



# U.S. remains in top spot for new COVID cases



The U.S. continues to lead the world in new COVID-19 cases, according to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report from earlier this week. The U.S. was averaging 48.54 cases per 100,000 residents over the seven days leading up to the Dec. 8 report, which was obtained by Yahoo News. The number of weekly cases was down 7.3 percent from the prior week, but the CDC noted the drop was likely due to reporting delays from the Thanksgiving holiday, rather than actual reductions in the spread of the virus.

While the U.S. has the highest rate of new cases according to the internal CDC numbers, it's not the only nation struggling: Italy, Turkey and Ukraine all had

over 30 cases per 100,000 residents. Turkey and Brazil saw the highest increase in cases week-to-week.

As cases rise across the U.S., so do hospitalizations and deaths. Medical facilities across the country are straining to make space for sick patients as intensive care units become swamped with patients. The country also set a new record for single-day deaths this week, with the 3,124 people who died from COVID-19 on Wednesday topping the number of those killed in the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

On Thursday, the COVID Tracking Project reported 214,000 new cases, 3,067 deaths and more than 107,000 people currently hospitalized.

More than 292,000 Americans have died from COVID-19 so far, according to tracking from Johns Hopkins University, meaning that at the current rate the country is likely to officially cross the 300,000 dead threshold early next week. CDC Director Robert Redfield said Thursday that he expected "probably for the next 60 to 90 days we're going to have more deaths per day than we had at 9/11."

If Redfield is correct in his estimate, that would add another 180,000 to 270,000 total to the dead, surpassing half a million lost to the virus.

While rates have also shot up in Europe, the difference between how the U.S. is handling the virus versus some other governments is stark. In Germany, whose

case rate per 100,000 is roughly half that of the U.S. over the timeframe in the CDC report, Chancellor Angela Merkel spent this week pleading with citizens to socially distance in the lead-up to Christmas.

"If we have too many contacts now before Christmas, and that ends up making it the last Christmas with the grandparents, then we will have failed. We should not do that," Merkel said, adding, "There are still 14 days until Christmas, and we have to do everything we can to prevent exponential growth again."

President Trump in recent days has been focusing on his attempts to overturn the results of President-elect Joe Biden's election. His most recent tweets on COVID-19 are about getting

credit for the vaccines that are about to begin distribution in the U.S.

Congress, in the meantime, is attempting to settle on a deal for another COVID-19 relief bill, having failed to pass any follow-up to March's CARES Act. Two important deadlines loom that could exacerbate the problems of millions of Americans: A federal eviction moratorium is set to expire on Dec. 31, which could result in many losing their homes, and extended unemployment benefits put in place by the CARES Act end on Dec. 26, potentially cutting off the only remaining income streams for those who've lost their jobs due to the economic downturn caused by the virus.

## India's mRNA vaccine candidate advances to human trial phase

**An mRNA vaccine uses a synthetic RNA (genetic material) encoded with instructions to make specific proteins of the Sars-CoV-2 virus so that the body can generate an immune response without getting the disease.**

India's first mRNA vaccine candidate - developed by Pune-based Gennova in collaboration with the USA's HDT Bio - has been granted approval to conduct human trials to determine whether it's safe and produces immune response protective against coronavirus disease (Covid-19).

The Subject Expert Committee under India's apex drug regulator recommended that the vaccine candidate -- HGCO19 -- to proceed to human trials in a meeting on Wednesday.

The candidate uses the messenger RNA platform to generate immune response just like the vaccines developed by Pfizer and Moderna, which have

been found to be 95% efficacious.

Currently, Pfizer has applied for emergency use authorization of its vaccine in India.

Gennova's candidate, HGCO19, has already demonstrated safety, immunogenicity, and production of neutralising antibodies (antibodies that directly attack the virus) activity in animals. The neutralising antibody response of the vaccine in mice and non-human primates was comparable to the convalescent or recovered patients of Covid-19.

In addition, the mRNA used in the vaccine is attached to a nano-lipid carrier that enhances the release of it inside cells. This self-amplifying platform means

requirement of a lower dose of the vaccine.

The vaccine candidate also solves one of the biggest problems with the Pfizer vaccine, which can be stored only at -70 degrees Celsius. Gennova's vaccine is stable for two months at 2 to 8 degrees Celsius, which is the temperature at which other vaccines used under universal immunisation programme in India is stored.

Gennova has received a seed grant under the Ind-CEPI mission of Department of Biotechnology, which is aligned to the global Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI). An mRNA vaccine uses a synthetic RNA (genetic



material) encoded with instructions to make specific proteins of the Sars-CoV-2 virus so that the body can generate an immune response without getting the disease. When it comes to manufacturing,

mRNA vaccines are synthetically made and do not need cell cultures, bacteria, or other hosts for growing it. This means it can be manufactured quickly and inexpensively.



# How much has Reliance contributed to India's record-breaking stock market rally

**At the moment, stock markets in India are peaking new highs every day as sentiments remain strong on hopes of an early coronavirus vaccine. But there is another factor that cannot be ignored - the growth of India's largest company, Reliance Industries Limited**

Domestic stock markets in India have performed exceptionally well over the last few months and most experts predict the record-breaking rally to continue next year - a huge feat considering the dreaded impact of the coronavirus pandemic on global markets, with some still struggling to recover.

At the moment, stock markets in India are peaking new highs every day as sentiments remain strong on hopes of an early coronavirus vaccine. But there is another factor that cannot be ignored - the growth of India's largest company, Reliance Industries Limited (RIL).

RIL and India's stock market growth - Reliance shares have grown handsomely during the pandemic against all odds. Mukesh Ambani, the chairman of RIL, has been on a mission to

expand the conglomerate from its traditional energy and oil business.

According to data compiled by Bloomberg, RIL accounted for nearly a fifth of the 75 per cent surge in the S&P BSE Sensex since March. That is literally double the contribution of Apple Inc has made to gains in the S&P 500 index over the same period.

Market experts said Reliance's recent fundraising drive has sharply increased its stock market valuation. They expect RIL's valuation to further rise next year, indicating that the company's stockholders are in a sweet spot at the moment.

Reliance 2020 growth story

The reliance growth story in 2020 has been largely about transitioning its traditional energy business to become a more

digitally-focused company. Despite all the challenges, including the economic slowdown triggered by the pandemic, experts say Reliance has done extremely well in outlining its future goals and working towards the transition.

As of today, Reliance stock is trading over Rs 2,000 after a 2.5 per cent upward rally.

The fresh rally comes after Ambani announced that Jio 5G will be available from 2021 during his address at the fourth edition of the India Mobile Congress. Ambani said the company plans to roll out the service in the second half of 2021. But this is just a fraction of what Reliance has managed to do in 2020.

Over the year, Ambani has reduced the company's debt substantially, launched a mega rights issue and even managed



to find prominent global investors to invest in his new technology and retail ventures.

These companies have invested billions of dollars in RIL's Jio Platforms and Reliance Retail Ventures Limited (RRVL), both of which are expected to become flagship businesses of the conglomerate.

Ambani, who is the richest man in Asia, had started transitioning his business a few years ago with the launch of Reliance Jio - a network that led to drastic changes in India's telecom sector.

While Jio has now become a hit among millions of Indian, its new offerings including 5G, JioTV+ and JioGlass are likely to have a similar impact on the industry. Moreover, Reliance is also working on a model to capture a substantial chunk of India's vast retail sector, especially the lucrative online grocery business.

At the moment, the future seems bright for the country's largest company and it could prove to be a key factor behind India's stock market boom in future.

## Dabur, Marico move advertising regulator over honey purity claims



*Both Dabur and Marico have approached advertising regulator ASCI over claims made in their honey ads. The complaints have emerged days after CSE's 'Honeygate' investigation.*

against 'NMR TESTED PURE HONEY' claim by Dabur for its product Dabur Honey. The claim 'NMR tested' was considered false and misleading by implication and omission and UPHELD under Chapter 1.4 of the ASCI Code," a Marico

spokesperson told news agency PTI. Furthermore, Marico has also filed another complaint before ASCI on December 3, 2020 wherein it challenged the claim made by Dabur and added that its honey brand has passed the German NMR test. "The

complaint has been admitted by ASCI and taken on record for further hearing," said Marico. ASCI said it has received four complaints against honey brands over the past few months without naming any of the brands.

Two leading homegrown rival FMCG brands have been involved in a spat after environment watchdog CSE's investigation claimed that top brands in India were adulterating honey with sugar syrup. Dabur and Marico have also approached advertising regulator ASCI over claims regarding their honey brands. On Sunday, Dabur said it will be filing a complaint against rival Marico before the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) for claiming that its Saffola honey has passed through the Nuclear Magnetic Resonance (NMR) test, which is the gold standard for deterring the purity of honey.

Noida-based Dabur claimed Marico's Saffola honey has failed NMR test and is misleading

consumers. "Dabur is filing a complaint in ASCI against Marico as their Saffola Honey sample from the market has failed the NMR test. Test reports clearly indicate the presence of sugar syrup in Saffola honey. Their claim on NMR test is misleading the consumers," Dabur claimed in a statement. Marico, however, refuted Dabur's claim and said Saffola Honey is also "compliant with each of the quality parameters mandated by FSSAI". It may be noted that Marico had earlier filed a complaint before the ASCI on October 1 over Dabur's claim against its Saffola Honey brand. The regulator had upheld the industry complaint before ASCI,

## Flipkart's PhonePe becomes separate entity, valued at \$5.5 billion

Walmart Inc-controlled Flipkart said on Thursday that it was partially spinning off PhonePe into a separate unit. The move is aimed at widening its digital payments platform to access capital for future expansion. Following the spin-off, PhonePe will raise \$700 million in primary capital, according to a statement issued by Flipkart. The funds will be raised at a post-money valuation of \$5.5 billion from existing Flipkart investors led by Walmart. Sameer Nigam, founder and CEO of PhonePe, said the partial spin-off will give the digital payments business access to dedicated long-term capital, aimed at providing financial inclusion to a billion

Indians. While Flipkart's ownership in PhonePe will reduce after the spin-off, it will still remain a majority shareholder. The development comes at a time when digital payments services are



becoming ultra-competitive in India. Other major players like GooglePay, Softbank and Alibaba-backed Paytm, WhatsApp Pay and Amazon Pay are also competing hard to get a larger share of India's vast digital payments market. PhonePe is one of the leading digital payments companies in India with over 100 million monthly active users. GooglePay has also managed in successfully capturing the market, leading to a drop in Paytm's share.



# Tatas reject SP Group's share-swap proposal, call it 'nonsense'

**The Tata Group has rejected the SP Group's share-swap separation proposal. Tata Group's counsel told Supreme Court that the valuation proposed by SP Group for its holdings does not make sense.**

The Tata Group has categorically rejected the Shapoorji Pallonji (SP) Group's share-swap separation proposal and called it "nonsense".

SP Group had proposed that its 18.37 per cent stake in Tata Sons, which it claims to be worth Rs 1.75 lakh crore, be swapped with the shares in Tata Group's listed company. However, the Tata Group has rejected the proposal before a bench of the Supreme Court, headed by CJI SA Bobde.

At the moment, the court is hearing final arguments on the cross-appeals filed by Tata Sons and Cyrus Investments with regards to the appellate tribunal NCLAT's order.

Last year, NCLAT had restored Cyrus Mistry, 52, as the executive chairman of Tata Sons. He was unceremoniously ousted in 2016 after a bitter boardroom battle. The bitter clash between Tatas and the Mistris has been going on for four years, but both parties are looking to break their decades-old partnership now. Tata's counsel, Harish Salve, told the court that this kind of relief cannot be granted to SP Group. "It is nonsense," he added.

Salve, on behalf of the Tata Group, also said that accepting such an offer could affect other listed firms of the

salt-to-software conglomerate. He argued that SP Group will again become a minority shareholder in other listed companies of Tata Group. On Thursday, after Harish Salve concluded his arguments on behalf of Tata Group, senior advocate CA Sundaram appeared for Cyrus Investments and started his submissions to the court. Referring to legal provisions, Sundaram said, "The whole conduct by which Tata Sons was made a private limited company showed that minority shareholder (SP group) was being sidelined."

On the feud between the Tata Sons and Mistry, Sundaram said the main issue was that the final



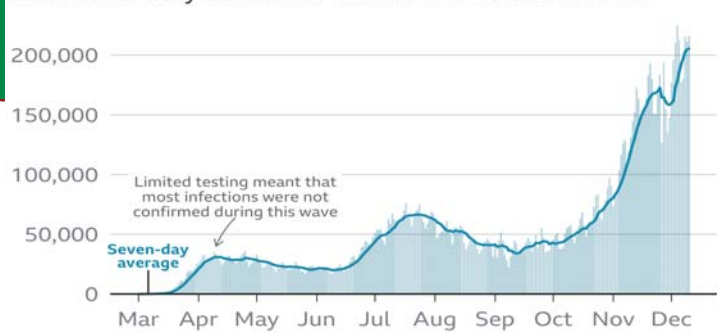
decision on any call taken by group companies like TCS or Tata Motors is taken by Tata Sons. He also mentioned that Tata Sons is just an investment company which does not have any business of its own, adding that its directors still take the calls for downstream group firms. "If these companies want to take a decision, then Tata Sons has a role to play in these decisions," Sundaram said. He went on to

say that Tata Sons is "effectively not a board-managed company". The hearing is expected to resume on Monday but the share-swap proposal seems to have hit a roadblock over mismatched valuations. While SP Group claimed that its stake in Tata Sons is worth Rs 1.75 lakh crore, Tata Sons maintains that the value of SP Group's holdings is not more than Rs 80,000 crore.

# Walmart commits to source \$10 billion of India-made goods by 2027

## Cases have risen to record levels

Number of daily confirmed coronavirus cases in the US



Source: COVID Tracking Project

BBC

**Walmart Inc on Thursday said it will triple its exports of India-made goods to \$10 billion each year by 2027 in a move that will help expand the global reach of goods from the South Asian nation.**

"By significantly accelerating our annual India exports in the coming years, we are supporting the Make in India initiative and helping more local businesses reach international customers, while creating jobs and prosperity at home in India," Walmart's chief executive officer Doug McMillon said in a statement.

Walmart announced it's tripling its commitment to India by sourcing \$10 billion annually

from the country by 2027, bringing more high-quality, India-made goods to shoppers worldwide. <https://t.co/514Tjj5iWt> pic.twitter.com/YLzepGfKVH - Walmart Inc. (@WalmartInc) December 10, 2020

Bentonville, Arkansas-headquartered Walmart acquired about 77% of Indian e-commerce firm Flipkart for roughly \$16 billion in 2018, marking the biggest deal for

India's e-commerce sector where it competes with its U.S. rival Amazon.com Inc's local unit. Earlier this year, Bengaluru-based Flipkart bought the US retail giant's wholesale business in India.

On Thursday, Walmart said its commitment to deeper sourcing from India will include helping develop hundreds of new suppliers across categories such as food, pharmaceuticals, consumables and apparel.

Walmart Inc on Thursday said it will triple its exports of India-made goods to \$10 billion each year by 2027 in a move that will help expand the global reach of goods from the

South Asian nation. India is already among Walmart's top sourcing markets for products such as jewellery and homeware, with annual exports of about \$3 billion.

# Year after founder's suicide, wife Malavika Hegde appointed CEO of Coffee Day group

**Malavika Hegde, the wife of deceased Cafe Coffee Day founder VG Siddhartha, was on Monday appointed the CEO of Coffee Day Enterprises. Last year, VG Siddhartha had mysteriously disappeared in Mangaluru and later found dead by suicide.**

More than a year after Cafe Coffee Day founder VG Siddhartha died of suicide, his wife Malavika Hegde was appointed as the CEO of the coffee chain on Monday. Last year in July, Cafe Coffee Day came in the news after VG Siddhartha mysteriously disappeared after stepping out of his car for a walk at a bridge near Mangaluru in Karnataka.

Two days later, authorities recovered his body from a nearby river. His death was declared a suicide. VG Siddhartha had reportedly taken the step after coming under immense financial strain, reportedly to the tune of Rs 11,000 crore. In an unverified letter, Siddhartha had also alleged harassment from Income Tax officials.

After his death, Coffee Day Enterprises named independent board member SV Ranganath as interim chairman of the group. On Monday, VG Siddhartha's wife Malavika Hegde was appointed as the CEO with immediate effect. Malavika Hegde is the daughter of former Karnataka chief minister SM Krishna. Bengaluru-based



Cafe Coffee Day runs hundreds of coffee shops across India that brew cappuccinos and lattes for India's booming moneyed class

and compete with the likes of Starbucks Corp, Barista and Coca-Cola Co-owned Costa Coffee.



# Biden's Cabinet picks give Kamala an edge in 2024



from Massachusetts who served in senior roles for John Kerry, Biden's incoming special envoy on climate change. "Obama had a team of rivals, other presidents have had a team of rivals. He's not interested in conflict as much as he wants to have people who have done the job before and they can all work together to get all the work done."

"That," Marsh added, "benefits Kamala Harris."

Several Democratic operatives argued Harris cleared the primary field of other moderate Democrats for 2024 the moment Biden chose her as his vice president. Even if Biden does elevate a 2020 rival to a high-profile Cabinet position, that person would have to resign midway through the term and then mount a challenge against the current vice president.

Harris's mostly dormant political operation was subsumed by Biden campaign aides when he chose her as his running mate. Since their election last month, she's focused on governing nuts and bolts: hiring her own staff, familiarizing herself with the new role and working to integrate with

Biden and his camp. She participates in private Cabinet nomination discussions, meets with elected officials and activists and speaks at proposed nominee rollouts and events on the coronavirus and the economy. One aide, offering an early assessment of her involvement, said Harris has been integral in the transition - "she's been involved across the board" - and that there have been preliminary talks about how Harris could "split the work" of organizing the federal response to the pandemic.

While Obama ultimately put Biden in charge of the economic recovery, Harris has yet to be tasked with overseeing any one area. Nor has she made an explicit ask for specific assignments. Biden also served as Obama's chief Senate liaison, in large part because of Biden's personal and deep ties in the chamber. Harris joined the Senate nearly four years ago.

Harris's earliest work is anchored in four of the biggest issues facing the new administration: public health, the economy, racial injustice and climate

change. Aides said she could take on more defined responsibilities on any of the issues, but they stressed that wouldn't pull her away from being a "full partner in the room for everything," as another Biden transition official put it.

Biden still could bring in people with presidential aspirations. Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, who is close with the president-elect, is expected to join the administration in what was described as a "significant role," though it might not be a Cabinet-level position, two officials told POLITICO. Garcetti expressed a particular interest in Commerce secretary and has been talked up as a prospect to head the Transportation Department. Two sources said Garcetti is under consideration to serve as an envoy to U.S. governors and mayors on climate change and another said he could be under consideration to be put in charge of the Navy.

Former South Bend, Ind., Mayor Pete Buttigieg and former Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick, who both ran in 2020, are also in the mix for posts.

Joe Biden hasn't picked any of the nearly two dozen Democrats who ran against him to serve in his administration - and that bodes quite well for the former rival he did elevate as his No. 2, Kamala Harris.

Biden's decision to forgo a Cabinet of ambitious pols in favor of a group heavy on seasoned loyalists and technocrats contrasts with Donald Trump and Barack Obama's appointment of next-generation officials to top posts. And it could deny a springboard to potential Harris competitors in 2024 if Biden decides to retire after one term rather than running for reelection in his 80s. While several people

around Biden and Harris were reluctant to speak publicly about a topic they view as taboo, they acknowledged Biden's choices for top positions reinforce Harris's status as president-in-waiting.

While several people around Biden and Harris were reluctant to speak publicly about a topic they view as taboo, they acknowledged Biden's choices for top positions reinforce Harris's status as president-in-waiting. Biden has built an administration free of political threats to Harris. "He's not putting together a team of rivals, he's putting together a team. That sets him apart from everybody," said Mary Anne Marsh, a Democratic strategist



Donald Trump lost the presidency, but his opponents so far have not achieved the victory they want most: A fatal puncturing of the Trump movement, a repudiation so complete that it severs his astonishing grip on supporters and leaves him with no choice but to slink offstage and into the blurry past. For now, Trump dominates conversations about both present and future. His outlandish claims that he won the election except for comprehensive fraud have helped raise more than \$200 million since Election Day. Many of his partisans share his dream of recapturing the presidency in 2024. For those who despise him, to paraphrase a famous Democratic speech, it seems clear the work goes on, the

cause endures, the fear still lives, and the nightmare shall never die. Except it will die - most likely with more speed and force than looks possible today.

There are three primary reasons to be deeply skeptical that Trump's moment of dominating his party and public consciousness will continue long after Jan. 20. Most important are the abundant precedents

## Relax, A Trump Comeback In 2024 Is Not Going To Happen

suggesting Trump does not have another important act in national politics. The perception that Trump will remain relevant hinges on the possibility that he is a unique historical figure. Trump, however, is singular in one sense only: No politician of his stripe has ever achieved the presidency. In multiple other ways, he is a familiar American type, anticipated by such diverse figures as Joseph McCarthy, George Wallace, and Ross Perot. Like Trump, they all possessed flamboyant, self-dramatizing personas. They tapped into genuine

cults of personality in American politics are quite common. But they never live long, and Trump has offered no reason to suppose he will be an exception. That's the second reason Trump is not well-positioned to retain his hold on public attention: He has largely abandoned any pretense that he thinks about anything other than his personal

resentments, or that he is trying to harness his movement to big ideas that will improve the lives of citizens. When he vaulted into presidential politics five years ago, Trump's still-potent gifts - for channeling anger, for mockery, for conspiracy theory - were once channeled to an agenda that fellow Republicans were largely neglecting, over trade, immigration, globalization, and perceptions of national decline. These days, no one can follow Trump's Twitter feed and believe that he cares more about the public's problems than his own, and that is not a recipe for sustaining political power. Here is the third reason to be bearish on Trump's future: Politics never stands still, but Trump largely does. As he leaves the White House, Trump should be haunted by a stark reality - if he had any capacity for self-calibration, he wouldn't be leaving the White House at all.



# The market has rarely been this expensive - and nobody cares

Stocks are near record highs, with the market trading at levels last reached during the 1999-2000 tech bubble and just before the historic 1929 crash. And yet investors seem unconcerned.

The market has rarely been this expensive. A measure known as the CAPE Shiller P/E ratio -- which looks at stock prices divided by adjusted earnings over 10 years - is around 33. That is nearly double the historical average.

It's a tad pricier than the 1929 ratio of 27, just before the Great Depression era, according to research from Jim Reid, a strategist at Deutsche Bank. Reid is worried that this means stocks are due for a major pullback. He's not alone.

"Mean reversion is like gravity. You can only resist it for so long," said Todd Lowenstein, equity strategy executive of The Private Bank at Union Bank, in an interview with CNN Business. "Valuations eventually will come back into vogue. They still matter."

But what if this time is different? Some experts argue that stocks can trade at such lofty levels for



extended periods of time, especially since interest rates are so low and are likely to remain near zero for several more years. And the current P/E ratio is still below the peak of near 50 during the dot-com boom. What's more, investors seem more than willing to forgive, or even ignore, high prices and valuations for companies that consistently post strong earnings and sales growth. Just look at Amazon, which has never been a bargain stock since going public in 1997.

Expensive tech stocks have lived up to the hype. Amazon (AMZN) trades at a nosebleed valuation of 70 times expected 2021 earnings. But that

hasn't deterred investors, including old-school value fans - probably because analysts expect Amazon to post annual earnings gains of more than 35% for the next few years. Even Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway (BRKB) owns a small stake in Amazon.

"There definitely been a lot of momentum in the market, but that is indicative of what is expected in the future," said Charlie Ripley, senior investment strategist with Allianz Investment Management, in an interview with CNN Business. "Valuations are in focus in the tech sector but the pandemic has

accelerated some trends, and at the end of the day, these companies are generating strong earnings," Ripley added. Deutsche Bank's Reid conceded in his report that "it can take a lifetime of investing and structural shifts" for valuations to move back to historical norms. In other words, expensive stocks can stay at frothy levels for years - even decades.

As long as big tech companies, which dominate the major indexes, continue to report solid earnings gains, stocks may still rise higher.

In short, two acronyms sum up the current market mentality: FOMO, the fear of missing out, as investors sitting on the sidelines realize that stocks are going up in a so-called TINA trading frenzy. TINA stands for There Is No Alternative to the US stock market.

"There is still a lot money on the sidelines waiting to get in," said Chad Oviatt, director of investment management with Huntington Private Bank. "And while some individual stocks are overbought, the whole market

isn't." Oviatt told CNN Business that investors may be underestimating the extent to which earnings will bounce back in 2021, saying that current forecasts for about a 20% increase might be too low and that profits could climb more than 25% next year. What goes up must eventually come down?

Still, Oviatt recognizes that the market is not cheap. Conservative investors should look for dividend-paying companies, he added, since many investors starving for consistent income won't find much in low-yielding bonds. But a reckoning could be coming for pricey growth stocks.

"I'm troubled by high valuations," said John Lynch, chief investment officer with Comerica Asset Management. "I would love to say that the recent gains are justified, but growth may not be as good as investors expect in the first quarter of 2021."

Lynch worries that investors are underestimating the possibility that the market will finally cool off next year.

## Billionaires made \$1tn since Covid-19. They can afford to protect their workers



There are few scenes more sordid than the surging wealth gains of the world's billionaire class during an unprecedented pandemic when millions have lost their lives, health, and livelihoods.

As the US heads into another wave of Covid-19 infections, the wealth of 650 American billionaires has increased by over \$1tn since mid-March, the beginning of the pandemic lockdowns.

Who's generating all this wealth? In many cases, it's frontline retail, healthcare, and food

workers who are underpaid and under-protected from the virus.

These workers risk their lives every day to do the work that increases already obscene corporate wealth. And going into a holiday shopping season with cases exploding, the risk is only increasing.

Who are the prime offenders?

In a new report we co-authored for the Institute for Policy Studies, Billionaire Wealth vs Community Health, we profile what we call the "Delinquent Dozen" - companies whose owners and executives

have seen their wealth and profits surge but have been laggards in protecting their workers.

Most notoriously, the wealth of Amazon's Jeff Bezos has increased by over \$70bn since mid-March, while an estimated 20,000 Amazon workers have been infected with Covid-19.

Yet Bezos is hardly alone. Three owners of Walmart - Rob, Jim, and Alice Walton - have seen their combined personal wealth increase by over \$48.2bn since the beginning of the pandemic. Walmart refuses to provide hazard pay to its workers. Things aren't much better for the workers who may do your shopping for you or provide food for the grocery aisle. Apoorva Mehta, founder of Instacart, is now worth \$1.6bn, and his wealth will surge when Instacart goes public in 2021. Yet workers at Instacart, which hired hundreds of thousands to meet surging demand, have

said that the company failed to provide sufficient protections.

John H Tyson, the billionaire owner of Tyson Foods, has seen his personal wealth increase by over \$600m since the beginning of the pandemic. Meanwhile, thousands of Tyson workers have been infected with Covid-19.

At one Tyson plant in Iowa, supervisors have been accused of literally taking bets on how many workers would catch the virus. More than 1,000 workers at the now-shuttered plant were infected, and at least five died. Other scofflaws are big private equity firms like Blackstone, KKR, Cerberus Capital, BC Partners, and Leonard Green Partners, which own hundreds of companies. Their billionaire owners have seen their fortunes surge while the companies they own have repeatedly failed to protect their workers.

Blackstone, for example, owns TeamHealth, a company that demoted a whistleblower doctor

who went public about the company's lack of Covid-19 safety precautions. The company's founder and CEO, Stephen Schwarzman, has seen his personal wealth increase by \$4.1bn since March.

Cerberus Capital owns Albertsons and Safeway supermarkets, which employ thousands of essential workers. Hazard pay ended many months ago at Safeway, even as Covid-19 infections have increased by 161% at Safeway stores in the DC metro region alone. Meanwhile Steve Feinberg, the billionaire co-founder of Cerberus, has seen his personal wealth increase by \$276m.

Corporations and their billionaire beneficiaries must do more to protect essential workers going into this winter of pain.

They should immediately provide, regularly replace, and upgrade high quality personal protective equipment (PPE) at no cost to all their essential



# China's extensive 'honey trap' spy network could involve thousands of ploys underway now, ex-operative says

**'There are many more of these women out there,' retired CIA officer Daniel Hoffman says**

It is the stuff of a James Bond blockbuster: a young, attractive woman lures a rising political star into a romantic web, all the while collecting critical information to trickle back to her handler or big bosses back home.

Axios revealed this week that more than six years ago Rep. Eric Swalwell, D-Calif., began a relationship with a woman suspected of being a Chinese espionage operative. He was alerted by federal investigators in 2015 and given a "defense briefing," which resulted in him breaking off ties to the suspect. However, Swalwell wouldn't be the first or last political figure to be "honey-trapped" - with multiple former intelligence officials surmising that such schemes carried out by Chinese spies have long played out on U.S. soil, and remain ongoing.

"I can say with a high level of confidence that there are many more of these women out there," Daniel Hoffman, a retired CIA Senior Clandestine Services Officer, told Fox News. "China's MO is to flood the zone."

While several current and former intelligence and security officials and experts interviewed by Fox News said that it was impossible to put a number on just how many honey trap scenarios might be in motion at present, one former defense and intelligence operative noted that it could be well into the hundreds - if not thousands. Such spies are assumed to be at top universities, known to speak perfect English, and routinely use social media platforms such as LinkedIn and Facebook to connect with their prey. But it is not only about enmeshing big

names - it is about having an eye for talent, and starting when one's star is about to begin rising. In Swalwell's case, he was seemingly ensnared by a woman named Christine Fang or Fang Fang, who helped raise money for his 2014 congressional re-election campaign and recruited at least one intern in his office. However, U.S. investigators in the northern California Bay Area believe Fang was also circling close to numerous up-and-coming politicians between 2011 and 2015, engaging in sexual relationships with at least two mayors in other states.

According to the report, Fang was sent to gather information and attain influence on those rising in the ranks at the direct behest of China's Ministry of State Security, with a "handler" based out of the San Francisco



consulate. In 2015, her most high profile associate - Swalwell - became a member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. However, around that time, Fang abruptly fled the U.S. as the FBI was homing in. But unlike Fang, whose communications with the consulate came under scrutiny, Hoffman asserted that there are likely many more who have zero links to any officials. "The goal is to become a trusted

individual with who (the target) can share information. The spy here would have wanted to learn everything she could about his personality, every little detail of his leadership style to build a profile," Hoffman said. "The idea here is to latch on to someone like a Swalwell when they are a junior and make contacts. It is much harder to do that when someone is already big and well-known. (This spy) recognized that."

## Hunter Biden fiasco shows dishonesty, arrogance of mainstream media elites

**If the press doesn't start doing its job, another special counsel becomes inevitable**

In October, the New York Post, the oldest daily newspaper in this country, published a trove of documents showing that members of Joe Biden's family have been selling access to the former vice president to a number of foreign governments, including the communist government of China.

That's a blockbuster, but the rest of the media decided to kill it before you could read it. Social media companies banned their users from sharing the Post's reporting. Other news organizations simply ignored it. On Oct. 22, 11 days before the presidential election, National Public Radio -- an organization that is literally state media, funded against your will by your tax dollars -- explained that they would not say anything negative about the Bidens.

"We don't want to waste our time on stories that are not really stories," NPR managing editor

Terence Samuel was quoted as saying, "and we don't want to waste the listeners' and readers' time on stories that are just pure distractions."

If you think that's the single dumbest, most dishonest, high-handed, infuriatingly arrogant thing you've ever heard, you didn't see RNC spokeswoman Liz Harrington submit to an interview with CNN chief international anchor Christiane Amanpour. Here's how that went.

AMANPOUR: As you know perfectly well, I'm a journalist and a reporter and I follow the facts and there has never been any issues in terms of corruption. Now, let me ask you this. Yesterday, the FBI -- HARRINGTON: Wait a minute, wait, wait wait. How do you know that?

AMANPOUR: I'm talking about reporting and any evidence. I'm talking to you now --

HARRINGTON: OK, I would love if you guys would start doing that digging and start doing that verification.

AMANPOUR: No, we're not going to do your work for you. I want to ask you a question. The FBI -- HARRINGTON: It's a journalist's job, it's a journalist's job to find out if this is verified!

"I'm a journalist and a reporter," says Christiane Amanpour, who of course is neither of those things and never has been. She is a celebrity script reader, a half-wit whose self-esteem far outpaces her accomplishments. She is also, it turns out, the personal flack for the Biden family international finance corporation. And so it went across the entire American news media until the presidential election. Now, six weeks later, it is finally safe to speak freely. We now know the New York Post was right all along, and so was poor Liz Harrington of the RNC.



Wednesday, millions of Americans learned -- some for the very first time -- that the Biden family has indeed been deeply enmeshed in a series of sleazy international business deals that undercut America's core interests. We learned that there is an active federal criminal investigation into Joe Biden's son, Hunter, for that very reason. What's interesting is how we found this out. The media didn't tell us, and neither did the Justice Department. Hunter Biden has far better connections than, say, Roger Stone. Hunter Biden was

allowed to tell his own story. He wasn't roused from bed at 5 a.m. by dozens of armed paramilitaries in front of a live CNN audience. He's a prominent Democrat, so he was spared those humiliations. Instead, the Biden-Harris transition team broke the news in the form of a bizarre press release that informed us with a straight face that Joe Biden was "deeply proud" of his boy Hunter, who, by the way, may have had some minor tax trouble that he will clear up the minute his accountant returns from Cabo. No big deal, and Happy Holidays.

**By Tucker Carlson**



## A Call to Spy movie review:

# Are you Raazi for more Radhika Apte?

**A Call to Spy movie review: With a complete absence of conflict, a confused screenplay and lacklustre direction, the new spy drama, co-starring Radhika Apte, does a disservice to the incredible women that it wants to honour.**

A Call to Spy

Director - Lydia Dean Pilcher

Cast - Sarah Megan Thomas, Stana Katic, Radhika Apte, Linus Roache

Dramatically inert and oddly unaffectioning, A Call to Spy does a disservice to the incredible women that it wants to honour, and despite brimming with plot, feels strangely empty. It's always difficult to write about films as bland as this, but the problems are invariably easy to identify.

Here, they arise mostly out of a confused screenplay, and an utter lack of resources to realise it. A Call to Spy, available on Amazon Prime Video in India, tells the story of three women - each of whom played a vital role in the Allied resistance against the Nazis during World War 2 - but has no idea whom to focus its attention on. And by attempting (and failing) to do all three of them equal justice, the film ends up short-changing them all. Stana Katic plays British 'spymistress' Vera Atkins, who is tasked with

recruiting new agents to send into France. And so she picks a cripple and a pacifist, with the hope that their unassuming appearances would help protect their cover.

Sarah Megan Thomas, in addition to playing the film's meatiest role - the wooden-legged go-getter Virginia Hall - is also credited as the film's writer and producer. A Call to Spy can, therefore, be described as a 'vanity project' - a term with distinctly negative connotations, often interchangeable with the infinitely more positive 'passion project'. But deciding which to use is a matter of personal taste.

'Passionate' wouldn't be the first word I'd use to describe this movie; it wouldn't even be the 10th. A Call to Spy has a distinct 'made for television' quality, which could either be because director Lydia Dean Pilcher had to cut corners, or because, besides a fuzzy feminist spirit, the movie has little personality.

Since the money's tight, so are

the shots. This robs the picture of scale, and the environments of all atmosphere. It feels like it was filmed on a couple of soundstages, with the location work restricted to medium shots and close-ups, thereby relieving the movie of the pressure to fill the frame with period-accurate details, such as cars and storefronts. I wouldn't be surprised if the production stitched up only a dozen or so Nazi uniforms, which the extras had to exchange between them on the day. Joining Virginia in her mission is Noor Inayat Khan, played by Radhika Apte. Noor is described as the daughter of an American woman and an Indian man, a British citizen who was born in Russia but grew up in France. If anything, this gives Apte an excuse to utilise her culturally vague real-life accent in the movie as well.

In theory, the film could've chosen any of these three women as its sole protagonist and there would have been enough material (and perhaps an even greater amount



left over) to sustain the story. Noor's Gandhian values, her identity as an outsider, and the tragic nature of her life would have made for a particularly solid biopic. But by sprinting between the characters and merely touching upon their noble contributions to the war effort, A Call to Spy runs out of breath, and ends up having all the emotional heft of a Wikipedia entry.

A large reason for this is Thomas' incredibly dry script, which is completely devoid of any real tension. Characters are prone to making declarations such as, "We have to get this right!" And, "What we do here changes the course of the future!" But the

clunkiest exchange involves Vera coming up with a seemingly spontaneous code name for one of the operatives, and relaying it to her boss. "Philomena," she says, "It means 'strength'." Subtle. At no point do you fear for these women - they are, after all, in enemy territory - and at no point do you get a sense of what is at stake. This is unfortunate, because, a lot of the time, they are in very real danger of being caught, and the stakes, as we know, were rather astronomical. None of these problems would have mattered had A Call to Spy been a good film, but it isn't a good film precisely because of them.

## The Last Color Movie Review:

# Neena Gupta is the soul of Vikas Khanna film



The Last Color is meant to be viewed with patience and savoured like your favourite dish, bit by bit. Michelin-star chef Vikas Khanna makes his directorial debut with the film. Sooraj toh roz hi jeet ta hai, chaand ka bhi toh din aata hai na," says a white-saree clad widow, Noor (Neena Gupta) to Chhoti (Aqsa Siddiqui). The Last Color is meant to be viewed with patience and savoured like your favourite dish, bit by bit. Michelin-star chef Vikas Khanna makes his directorial debut with the film which is based on his book of the same name. Each scene in

The Last Color is carefully crafted. Right from the first scene where a diya floats on water, till the last when widows enjoy the festival of colours, Holi, in its full glory, you will feel a piece of art is being unfolded in front of you. This may feel a tad overdone at times and with a crispier edit, the film's duration could have been shortened even more. But...

Set in Varanasi, the holy city of light, The Last Color brings out the dark side of the society. The film attempts to touch upon various issues such as domestic violence, casteism, treatment of

transgenders, misuse of power by the police, and so on. With so many issues at hand, at times it feels like the plot has lost its direction. Its major focus is to highlight the plight of widows in some parts of the country, where they are forced to practice complete abstinence after the death of their husbands.

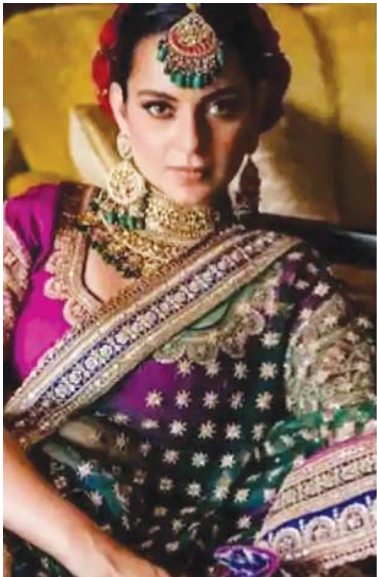
The Last Color begins with visuals of a little girl walking on a rope. We are then taken to 2013, where Noor Saxena, a lawyer, is telling a few journalists that this is only the beginning and there is a long battle that lies ahead. They are all hailing the Supreme Court's verdict after which Holi celebrations would be different as widows of Vrindavan and Varanasi can partake in it in the open. [In August 2012, the Supreme Court had passed orders for the rehabilitation and empowerment of widows. After the historic decision, in March 2013, around 800 women had gathered together

and celebrated the festival of colours for the first time in Vrindavan. Coming back to the plot of The Last Color, Noor Saxena goes back to her hometown, Varanasi, after 24 years. The story then moves to flashback mode and we meet Chhoti, an orphan who earns money as a flower seller and a rope walker. She has a friend named Chintu and often asks him to stay away from the area's cop, Raja (Aslam Shekh) and gamblers. One day she meets Noor, a widow, and forms an unusual bond with her. The friendship between Chhoti and Noor forms the rest of the story. The first half of the film appears to be a bit stretched as nothing much really happens except the little exchanges between Chhoti and Noor. It is the second half where things begin to happen and several other themes start kicking off. The scenes are deep, layered and at times full of symbolism and one needs to look beyond the

surface. For instance, there is one scene where Noor is sitting and praying with her eyes closed. Near her are two pink dupattas. The contrast between Noor's white saree and the deep pink dupattas in a single frame is hard to ignore. You know the filmmaker is trying to tell you something - that widows like Noor are so close, yet so far from a life full of colours and happiness. But The Last Color's script leaves a few questions unanswered and at times we wish some characters were better woven into the main story. Coming to the performances, Neena Gupta exudes a divine positivity right from the first shot. Wearing a white saree throughout the film with a rudraksha bracelet, she essays her part with utmost finesse and allows you to connect with her character in such a way that even you feel like a part of her life towards the end of the film. She is the very soul of The Last Color.



## Kangana Ranaut slams Diljit Dosanjh and Priyanka Chopra, says they're 'misleading and encouraging' farmers' protest



**Kangana Ranaut, in her new tweets about the farmers' protest, lashed out at 'people like Diljit Dosanjh and Priyanka Chopra' for allegedly misleading the farmers.**

After Twitter users shared pictures of protesting farmers demanding the release of a few activists arrested for allegedly inciting violence, Kangana Ranaut trained her guns on Diljit Dosanjh and Priyanka Chopra. Notably, Diljit and Priyanka extended support to the farmers protesting against the new farm bills. In a series of tweets, Kangana wrote, "Problem is not just them but each and every individual who supports them and opposes #FarmersBill\_2020 they are all aware how important this bill is for farmers still they provoke innocent farmers to incite violence, hatred and Bharat Band for their petty gains." Kangana also claimed that Diljit and Priyanka were 'misleading and encouraging' farmers' protests, but would be 'hailed by the left media' and given awards. In multiple tweets, she wrote, "People like @diljitdosanjh and @priyankachopra will be hailed by the left media for misleading and encouraging farmers protests, pro Islamists and anti India film industry and brands will flood them with offers and English/living in colonial hangover media houses will felicitate them with awards, the problem is whole system is designed to make anti nationals flourish and grow and we are too less in numbers against a corrupt system, but I am sure magic will happen in every fight of GOOD versus EVIL, evil has been much stronger, JAI SHRI RAM." Sharing another tweet on the farmers' protest supposedly being hijacked,

Kangana wrote, "When I see such disturbing images I tell myself to take deep breaths and remind myself the world was doing

fine before me it will continue to do so after me, world was never fair it will never be, at times all we need is acceptance, everyone who feels pangs of helplessness, BREATHE." Earlier, Kangana was involved in a war of words with Diljit Dosanjh. It started with him referring to a tweet posted by her on November 27, in which she wrongly identified an old woman at the ongoing farmers' protest as Bilkis Bano, the face of the Shaheen

Bagh protest. After claiming that Bilkis was 'available (for hire) in 100 rupees', Kangana deleted the erroneous tweet. However, Diljit said that one should not spread misinformation and that she 'keeps on saying anything'. This soon snowballed into a massive Twitter spat. Diljit has been tweeting in support of the protesting farmers and even joined the agitation at the Delhi border.

## Ellen DeGeneres tests positive for Covid-19, says she's 'feeling fine right now'

Talk show host Ellen DeGeneres said on Thursday that she had tested positive for the coronavirus but was feeling fine. The American comedian said on Twitter that all her close contacts had been notified. "I want to let you all know that I tested positive for Covid-19. Fortunately, I'm feeling fine right now," she said in a Twitter posting. DeGeneres, 62, host of the popular daytime show The Ellen DeGeneres Show, said she was following health guidelines and would return to her show after the holidays. A



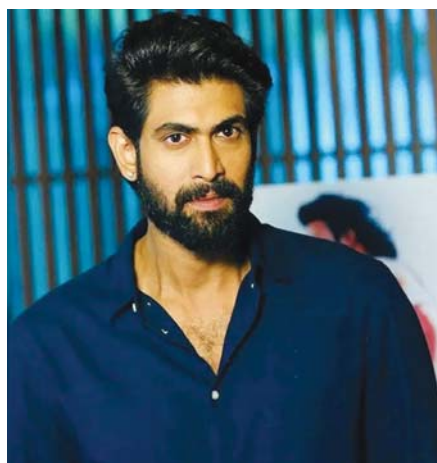
representative said production of the show had been halted until January. DeGeneres is the latest celebrity to test positive for the disease. Actors Tom Hanks, Idris Elba, Bryan Cranston and Hugh Grant along with singers Kanye West, Bad Bunny and Gloria Estefan are among those who have said they were diagnosed with the virus or had suffered symptoms. The Ellen DeGeneres Show is filmed in the Los Angeles area which this week re-imposed restrictions on household gatherings and shut down indoor and outdoor dining amid a surge of coronavirus cases.

## Akshay Kumar Accounces Launch of India's Firest Influencer-LED online Market Place Alongside Rana Daggubati

International megastar Akshay Kumar has announced that he and fellow star Rana Daggubati will be coming together to launch Socialswag, India's first influencer-led online market place.

Socialswag, which is being hailed by many as an innovation that could change the digital landscape, will enable users to connect with celebrities, influencers, bloggers and other notable figures through personal interactions and learning forums. This will enable interactions in a number of ways such as masterclasses, live-chats, shoutouts and virtual selfies.

The new venture between Akshay Kumar and Rana Daggubati will certainly excite fans as the platform looks to bring the best of sport, entertainment and vocational opportunities to the forefront. The app is set to launch across India in February 2021 and will no doubt provide an experience for fans like no other.

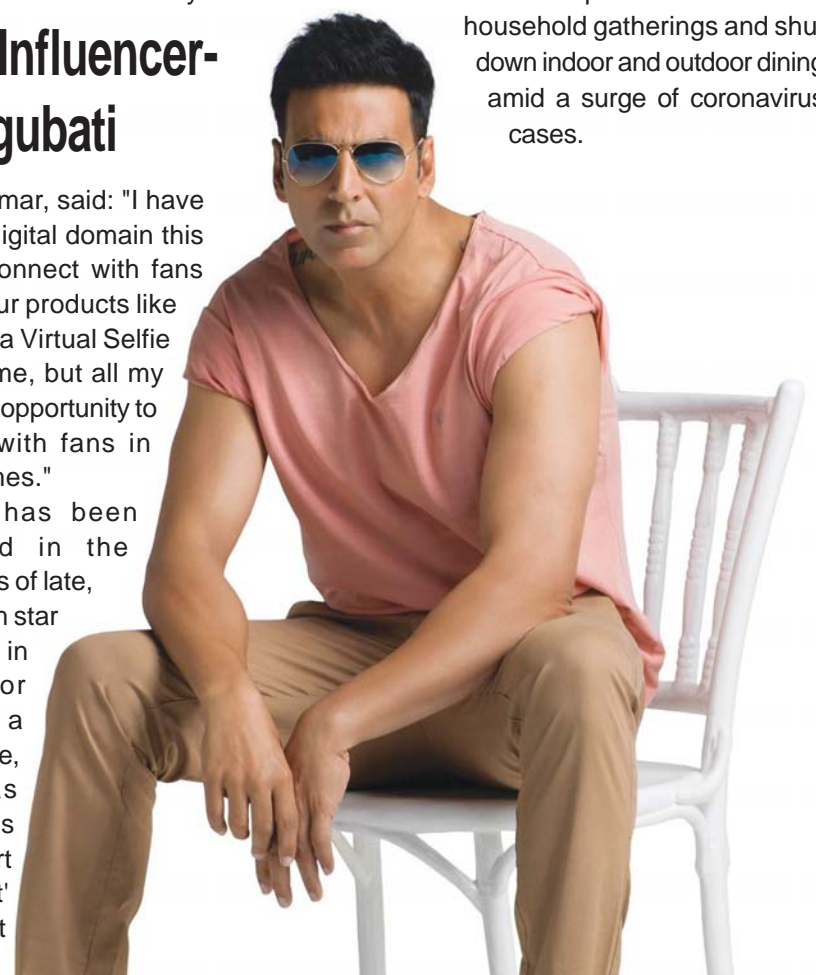


Speaking about the app, Akshay Kumar, said: "I have seen so many opportunities in the digital domain this year and I believe being able to connect with fans through this platform with some of our products like

my Masterclass or a Virtual Selfie will give not only me, but all my peers an additional opportunity to closely connect with fans in these changing times."

Akshay Kumar has been heavily involved in the technology world as of late, with the Bell Bottom star recently appearing in an advert for PagarBook, a government initiative, which was formulated by India's

Prime Minister Narendra Modi as part of his policy of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' to help make India more self-sufficient and sustainable.





# Mira Nair's **A SUITABLE BOY**

**Now Streaming in US/Canada Exclusively on Acorn TV**



The acclaimed miniseries hit **A SUITABLE BOY** has now premiered in North America and is currently streaming exclusively on the streaming service Acorn TV. The first two episodes of the Mira Nair-directed series are now available to watch with new episodes debuting weekly through January 4, 2021. More information on Acorn TV is available at <http://signup.acorn.tv> where a free trial is also being offered. Mira Nair sat down to discuss how she made this epic series in this new interview below. An Interview with Mira Nair - Director and Executive Producer of **A Suitable Boy**

**What is **A Suitable Boy** about?**

**A Suitable Boy** is a massive yet intimate saga of four interwoven families across northern India in the year 1951; four years after Indian independence from the British. It's an extraordinary tale of love and friendship across class and certainly across religion. Vikram Seth is able to reach the depths of human relationships - the heart, the mind and love in all its peculiarities. It's universal and affects and relates to everyone. One level of our story is the journey of Lata finding herself, her own voice, finding love and being loved. At the same time, India goes on its own journey towards its first national election. Besides the

affairs of the human heart, what interests me in this story is the interweaving of the personal story of Lata and her family but also the political story of our country, finding its own voice.

**How did you cast the character of Lata and what has Tanya Maniktala brought to the role?**

I searched all over India to cast Lata and I must have seen more than 500 young women, and they were all extraordinarily talented. But when I saw Tanya Maniktala, I just knew this was Lata. She has a sense of wonder in her eyes, a sense of being curious about the world and yet, a very self-

possessed sweetness. That is very real and genuine and not acted. It was very difficult in modern India to find a young woman who had not seen the world, and so was protected from it, and yet had this intelligence about it.

**What has Ishaan Khatter brought to the role of Maan Kapoor?**

When I found Ishaan Khatter, which was almost a year ago, there was just no going back. He was Maan to the core and I knew I would have been so lucky to have him. It took some months until our

show really got off the ground and he was confirmed as our Maan. We have a great relationship and he has a real understanding of the part. He worships Tabu who plays Saeeda Bai, the courtesan he falls in love with. I'm just thrilled that he is our Maan, because I'm not exaggerating when I say that there was no other Maan, but Ishaan.

**What attracted you to **A Suitable Boy**?**

**A Suitable Boy** has been one of my favourite novels since the day it was written. I read it repeatedly and felt as if it was my best friend. I felt a sense of great companionship and understanding and a sense of evoking a time in India in which I longed to have lived. I just vowed to direct the adaptation of it but it was too big at the time for me to get my hands on it. It really gives me extraordinary pleasure and pride to have the privilege of directing this show because it is something that has inspired me so much. It also gives me this vast canvas as I have 113 actors in the show and six hours to let the story unfold.

**Randeep Hooda makes his web series debut in Jio Studios' & Gold Mountain Pictures' cop thriller – in & as Inspector Avinash, based on super cop Avinash Mishra's life, directed by Neerraj Pathak**

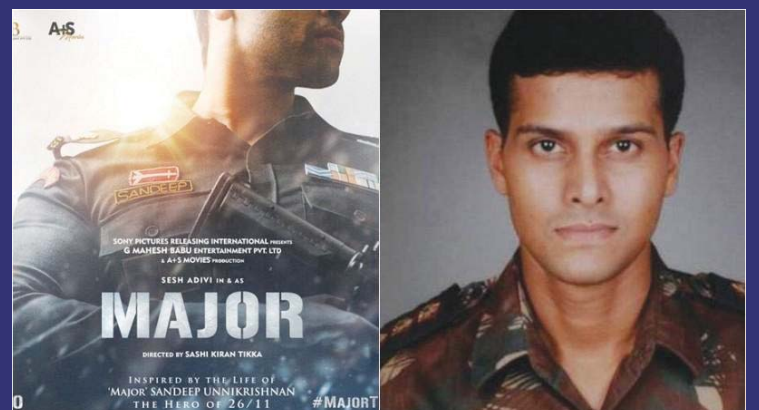


Jio Studios in association with Gold Mountain Pictures, has roped in versatile actor Randeep Hooda to essay the role of a police officer in its web series – Inspector Avinash, a cop thriller based on real life events of super cop Avinash Mishra. Helmed by Neerraj Pathak and produced by Neeraj and Krishan Chowdhary, the show also marks Hooda's debut in the web series space. Set in Uttar Pradesh, Hooda's cop avatar will see him in action in a dramatic retelling of the life of the famed cop dealing with criminal activities of the state. The series is all set to hit the floor in December 2020. Taking about the web series, Randeep

says, "I look forward to exploring new challenging roles with each of my characters and Inspector Avinash gives me a fabulous opportunity to do that. It's a highly inspiring and interesting role based on true life events of a super cop. I believe in Neerraj's vision for the show and can't wait to begin filming this thrilling cop drama. This is also my first collaboration with Jio Studios and I am looking forward to this association."

"I am very glad Jio Studios believed in my vision and came on board to back the project. Randeep Hooda is ideal for reprising the role of a super cop & will add an interesting dimension to the character, we are very excited to have him play the lead. We commence shooting next month in December", director Neerraj Pathak signs off.

**The first look has premiered for the upcoming 2021 film MAJOR.**



**MAJOR** is a biopic based on the life of the real-life hero Major Sandeep Unnikrishnan and it talks about his childhood, his personal life, his life in the academy and also shows how this valiant soldier saved the lives of numerous hostages before being martyred by the terrorists who wreaked havoc in the Taj Mahal Palace Mumbai, India on the 26th of November, 2008.

12 years back on 27th November, Major Sandeep lost his life and we take pride in his life, his battles, his daredevilry and his supreme sacrifice. On the death

anniversary of Major Sandeep Unnikrishnan, a new image has been released where you can see an uncanny resemblance between the reel life Adivi Sesh and real life hero Major Sandeep Unnikrishnan.

**MAJOR**, the bilingual Hindi and Telugu film is produced by Sony Pictures Films India in association with GMB Entertainment and A+S Movies. It is directed by acclaimed Telugu director Sashi Kiran Tikka and stars Adivi Sesh (as Major Sandeep Unnikrishnan), Sobhita Dhulipala, Saiee Manjrekar, Prakash Raj and Revathi.





## Joe Biden, Kamala Harris named Time Magazine's 'Person of the Year'

(SAI Bureau)- US President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris have been named as Time magazine's 2020 'Person of the Year'.

"Joe Biden and Kamala Harris named Time Person of the Year," AFP reported on Friday.

Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris were chosen ahead of three other finalists: frontline health care workers and Anthony Fauci, the racial justice movement, and President Donald Trump. The publication put pictures of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris as its cover photo, with the title 'Changing America's story'.



record-breaking turnout. Essential workers -- nurses, doctors, delivery people, grocery-store employees and others who risked their lives on the frontlines during the Covid-19 pandemic earlier won TIME's 2020 Person of the Year Reader Poll.

TIME said "these heroes" won with 6.5 per cent of the more than 8 million votes cast in this year's poll, that had asked readers to select the person or group of people who had the greatest influence on 2020.

"Essential workers beat out some 80 other candidates, including famed figures like (US) President Donald Trump, Facebook CEO

US President-elect Joe Biden beat incumbent Donald Trump in a historic presidential election that saw

Mark Zuckerberg and Pope Francis, for the readers' top pick," TIME said.

## Can President Trump pardon himself?



(SAI Bureau)-Most presidential pardons - indeed all pardons that President Trump has issued - have been for specific crimes of which the subject of the pardon has already been charged and convicted. Yet, Trump - never one to be restrained by precedent - has let it be hinted that he might issue prophylactic pardons to relatives and colleagues who have neither been convicted nor charged with any crimes.

(Contd on page 30)

## Dabur, Patanjali among 13 brands adulterating honey with sugar syrup: CSE study



(SAI Bureau)Environment watchdog Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) claimed on Wednesday that honey sold by 13 major brands in India including Dabur has been found adulterated with sugar syrup. Dabur, however, has rejected the allegation in a statement issued today. Food researchers at CSE selected 13 top brands and some smaller brands that sell processed and raw honey in India to check their purity. The researchers found that 77 per cent of the samples were adulterated with sugar syrup. Out of the 22 samples that were checked, only five passed all the tests. The CSE study said honey samples from leading brands such as Dabur, Patanjali, Baidyanath, Zandu, Hitkari and Apis Himalaya failed NMR (Nuclear Magnetic Resonance) test. The samples of these brands were first tested at the Centre for Analysis and Learning in Livestock and Food (CALF) at the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) in Gujarat.

(Contd on page 31)

## Joe Biden considering New York governor Andrew Cuomo for attorney general

(SAI Bureau) President-elect Joe Biden is considering New York Governor Andrew Cuomo to

be his attorney general, a person familiar with the matter said Friday night. Cuomo, a former attorney general of New York State, joins a small list of other candidates who Biden is weighing, including Alabama Senator Doug Jones, US Circuit Court Judge Merrick Garland and former Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates.

If Cuomo were selected and confirmed, it would be his second stint in a presidential cabinet, after serving as Housing and Urban Development secretary during the Clinton

administration. The Associated Press first reported that Biden is considering



obstacles in New York City because of his strained relationship with Mayor Bill de Blasio. By contrast, Jones, who lost his re-election race in November, would likely draw bipartisan support.

a \$15 minimum wage and restrictions on guns. But he has enemies on the left, who say he's been insufficiently progressive. He drew national attention this year for his televised daily briefings on New York's handling of the nation's worst coronavirus outbreak. Critics pin responsibility on Cuomo for mishandling the state's response and for creating unnecessary