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Natural Catastrophe or Man-Made Disaster ?

Not all natural catastrophes are the work of fate – some are man-made. However, the distinction is not always straightforward, particularly in the case of floods, landslides or wildfires.

Beyond common energy industry practices leading to the most human-made earthquakes across the globe, other quake-causing activities include building construction, carbon capture and storage, nuclear explosions, geothermal operations and research experiments that test fault stress.



Story on
Pages
30-34



Although natural earthquakes usually occur along fault lines, human-caused earthquakes can happen in areas unassociated with previous seismic activity. ... Scientists believe most human-induced earthquakes are the result of mining. Activities that have been proposed to induce earthquakes include the impoundment of water reservoirs, erecting tall buildings, coastal engineering, quarrying, extraction of groundwater, coal, minerals, gas, oil and geothermal fluids, excavation of tunnels, and adding material to the subsurface by allowing abandoned



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Indian-Origin Man In Singapore Jailed For Nearly 7 Years For Cheating, Fraud

An Indian-origin man was sentenced to six years and 10 months in jail in Singapore on Wednesday for running a fake investment scheme and cheating people, including his Indian-origin neighbour, of over 1 million Singapore dollars.

(Insider Bureau)- Sathish Nair Dhanabalan, 36, would convince his India-origin neighbour Elanngovan Pillai Munisamy, 56, to continue investing each time the "high returns from the investment" were due, The Straits Times reported. As part of the ruse, which took place from 2014 to 2016, Dhanabalan cheated Mr Elanngovan of more than 200,000 Singapore dollars. The Indian-origin neighbour even received text messages and calls from a person who claimed to be "Ho Ching", the CEO of the state-owned Temasek Holdings and wife of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, it said. Dhanabalan had used various investment scams to cheat nine people of more than 1 million Singapore dollars. He was jailed for upto six years and 10 months on Wednesday, the report said. In 2017, Dhanabalan used a similar tactic of a purported investment with another company Barclays Bank to cheat three other victims - Fadhilah Ibrahim; her husband, Aniz Sirajudin Shaik Abdullah; and her mother, Madam Barakathunisa of more than 400,000 Singapore dollars (\$3 lakh). He later gave excuses when they wanted their money back. Dhanabalan also forged documents of government organisations to show to his victims why they could not get their money back. In August 2017,



he stole four of his father's cheques and forged the elderly man's signature on them. He then issued two of them to Aniz, and one each to Fadhilah and Barakathunisa. Each cheque was for 150,000 Singapore dollars. The cheques, however, bounced due to insufficient funds in the bank account they were linked to. The court heard that Dhanabalan used similar methods to cheat his other victims, the report said. He pleaded guilty on Wednesday to 20 charges, including eight counts of cheating involving more than 700,000 Singapore dollars (\$5.2 lakh) in total, it said, adding that another 41 charges linked to the remaining amount were taken into consideration during sentencing. Deputy Public Prosecutor Lu Yiwei urged the court to sentence Dhanabalan to six years and 10 months in jail, stressing that he had taken "painstaking steps" to avoid the detection of his crime. "He perpetuated his ruse so well that the victims were fooled into continuously handing him monies for investments. The accused used the identities of real people as the purported senders of the letters to shore up the credibility of the letters," she said.

US Court Seeks Status Report On Visas To Family Members Of H1-B Holders

(Insider Bureau)- A US court has asked for a joint status report by March 4 on the prospects of work authorisation for H-4 visas, in view of the decision of the Biden administration to withdraw a Trump-era move to rescind work authorisation to certain categories of spouses of foreign professionals on H-1B visa. Spouses of Indian professionals on H-1B visas, mostly women, are the biggest beneficiaries of the Obama-era rule that gave employment authorisation cards. Judge Tanya S Chutkan, in the US Court of Appeals for District of Columbia Circuit, said that the report, to be submitted by March 4, shall be accompanied by a proposed order as appropriate. An H-4 visa is issued by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to immediate family members (spouse and children under 21 years of age) of the H-1B visa holders, most of whom are Indian IT professionals. It is normally issued to those who have already started the process of seeking employment-based lawful permanent resident status. The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. The technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China. In 2017, the Trump administration announced that it would rescind the Obama-era rule that gave employment authorisation cards to spouses of foreign professionals on H-1B visas. However, the Republican Party-led Trump administration was not able to complete the process in the four years of its rule. During the presidential election, the Biden campaign had promised to withdraw the Trump administration's move. Last month, US President Joe Biden withdrew the Trump administration's rule rescinding work authorisation for H-4 visa holders. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) had said that the proposed rule titled "Removing H-4 Dependent Spouses from the Class of Aliens Eligible for Employment Authorisation" was being withdrawn. Judge Chutkan said: "In light of recent Executive and Administrative actions, the parties shall meet, confer and file a joint status report by 3/5/21 advising the court: 1) whether the current dispute has been mooted or the parties anticipate that it will be mooted; 2) whether the parties wish to stay this action for any reason, including the parties' negotiations over resolving this dispute; or 3) whether the parties agree that this litigation should continue as anticipated pursuant to the federal rules,

local rules or a scheduling order". In 2015, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued a rule allowing certain H4 dependent spouses of H-1B visa holders to legally seek employment in the US, the letter said.



1 in 7 children faces hunger.

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Ex-South African Minister Cleared Of Charges In Gupta Family Citizenship Case

The Public Protector, however, said that the minister did not abuse his power while approving early naturalisation to the Gupta family.

(Insider Bureau)-A former South African minister was on Monday cleared of multiple allegations that he abused his power while granting early naturalisation to members of the controversial Indian-origin Gupta family.

Public Protector Busisiwe Mkhwebane found that former Home Affairs Minister Malusi Gigaba breached the executive ethics code by failing to table names in Parliament of persons who were granted citizenship under exceptional circumstances within the provisions of the South African Citizenship Act.

The Public Protector, however, said that the minister did not abuse his power while approving early naturalisation to the Gupta family. "I welcome the key finding of the Public Protector's report which clears me of the baseless allegations which were, partly, relied upon to hound me out of

Cabinet, in November 2018. I shall not be commenting on the rest of this report until I have consulted with my lawyers," Gigaba, 49, tweeted.

Gigaba has been accused at the Zondo Commission of Inquiry into State Capture, set up by President Cyril Ramaphosa, of having received large sums of money from the Guptas during several visits to their palatial former home in Johannesburg. Gigaba granted the citizenship to Ajay Gupta and other members of the family after recommendations from senior members of his department.

Mkhwebane has recommended that appropriate action be instituted against four of these senior officials, who were involved in the naturalisation of the Gupta family, for their failure to exercise due diligence.

They had recommended to Gigaba that the naturalisation be granted because of the family's

business investments, as well as the large number of jobs they had created for South Africans, among other factors.

"It was established that the verification process ... revealed material misrepresentations and inaccuracies with the information contained in the motivation, relied upon by the former minister, in approving and granting the certificates for naturalisation to Mr Ajay Gupta and family," the Public Protector said in her report.

Originally from Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh, the Gupta family amassed a fortune in IT, media and mining industries over the past two decades in South Africa, allegedly through their closeness to former president Jacob Zuma, who himself is facing corruption charges.

The bulk of Guptas' assets in South Africa are expected to be auctioned off to repay creditors as the brothers had fled to Dubai.



The three Gupta brothers - Ajay, Atul and Rajesh - and their families went into self-exile in Dubai after allegations surfaced of their companies illegally siphoning billions of rands from South African parastatal companies through their alleged closeness to former President Zuma.

The South African government has initiated extradition processes for them to return to face a wide range of charges related to alleged corruption after a number of people came forward at the Zondo Commission.

The South African Parliament recommended in March 2019 that the citizenship granted to the Guptas be revoked.

The Public Protector also found that Gigaba misrepresented facts after he said at a media conference in March 2016 that Atul was not a South African citizen. Gigaba corrected this at another media briefing the very next day. Since Gigaba had resigned from his position in November 2018, Mkhwebane said there would be no purpose in seeking remedial action against him.

Indian Drugmaker To Pay \$50 Million Fine In US For Irregularities



(Insider Bureau)- An Indian drug manufacturer has agreed to plead guilty to concealing and

plant and pay USD 50 million in fines and forfeiture, the Department of Justice has announced.

In a criminal information filed in federal court in the District of Nevada and unsealed on Tuesday, Fresenius Kabi Oncology Limited (FKOL) was charged with violating the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act by failing to provide certain records to Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) investigators. As part of a criminal resolution, FKOL

agreed to plead guilty to the misdemeanour offense, pay a criminal fine of USD 30 million, and forfeit an additional USD 20 million. FKOL also agreed to implement a compliance and ethics programme designed to prevent, detect, and correct violations of US law relating to FKOL's manufacture of cancer drugs intended for terminally ill patients, a media release said.

"By hiding and deleting manufacturing records, FKOL sought to obstruct the FDA's

regulatory authority and prevent the FDA from doing its job of ensuring the purity and potency of drugs intended for US consumers," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Brian Boynton of the Justice Department's Civil Division.

"FKOL's conduct put vulnerable patients at risk. The Department of Justice will continue to work with FDA to prosecute drug manufacturers who obstruct these inspections," the statement said.

"Pharmaceutical companies that obstruct FDA inspections jeopardise patient safety," said US Attorney Nicholas A. Trutanich for the District of Nevada.

According to court documents, FKOL owned and operated a manufacturing plant in Kalyani, West Bengal, that manufactured active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) used in various cancer drug products distributed to the United States.

Biden Withdraws Nomination Of Indian-American Advocate For Associate Judge

(Insider Bureau)- US President Joe Biden on Thursday withdrew the nomination of Indian-American advocate Vijay Shanker to be an Associate Judge of the District of Columbia Court of Appeals. Shanker was renominated for this top judiciary position by former President Donald Trump on January 2, two months after he lost the presidential

elections and just a little over a fortnight before Biden was sworn in as the 46th President of the United States on January 20.

The withdrawal notification was sent to the Senate along with more than 30 such names, mostly judicial appointments announced during the last months of the Trump administration. Trump had first announced his nomination last

June. Currently he serves as Senior Litigation Counsel in the Department of Justice, Criminal Division, and as Deputy Chief of the Appellate Section.

Before joining the Department of Justice in 2012, Shanker was in private practice with the Washington, DC, offices of Mayer Brown, LLC and Covington & Burling, LLP. Upon graduation from law school, Shanker served

as a law clerk to Judge Chester J. Straub on the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit. Shanker completed his bachelors, cum laude, from Duke University and his Juris Doctor from the University of Virginia School of Law, where he served as a Notes Editor for the Virginia Law Review and was inducted into the Order of the Coif.

Indian-Origin Man Sent To Jail Over Racial Enmity In Singapore: Report

Sirajudeen Abdul Majeed pleaded guilty to one charge each of deliberately intending to wound racial feelings and promoting enmity between groups on grounds of race, according to The Straits Times.

(Insider Bureau)- A 52-year-old Indian-origin man was sentenced to two weeks' jail today for attempting to promote racial enmity in Singapore by claiming that the ruling People's Action Party wanted to "marginalise" Malays in the country, according to a report. Sirajudeen Abdul Majeed pleaded guilty to one charge each of deliberately intending to wound racial feelings and promoting enmity between groups on grounds of race, according to The Straits Times. Another two similar charges for promoting enmity were considered during his sentencing, it said.

On June 12 and 13 last year, the Singaporean of Indian ethnicity sent messages to three acquaintances claiming that the ruling party "wants to make the Malay community a sub-minority", and that other races were introduced to the country to "just dilute the original race of Malay."

He also told them to share the messages. One of the acquaintances later informed the police about it.

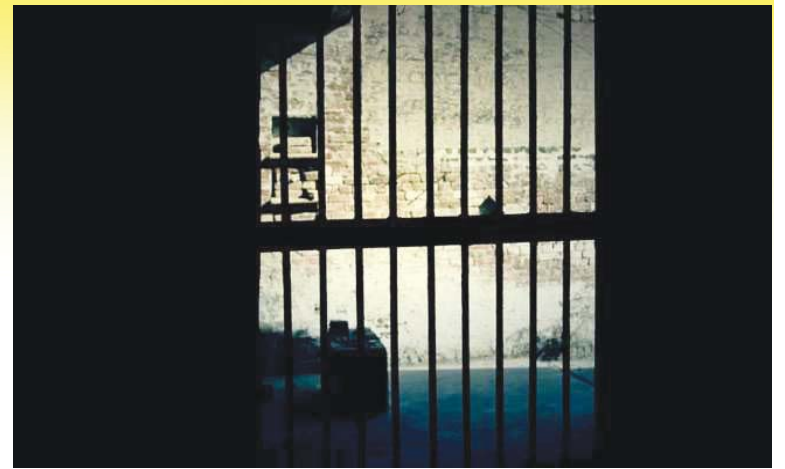
Deputy Public Prosecutor Ng Yiwen said Sirajudeen intended to stoke fears that the People's Action Party was seeking to marginalise the Malays in the country by allowing more

immigrants into the country. "These messages would promote ill will between different racial groups, a fact that the accused must have objectively known when he sent the said messages," he added.

Sirajudeen was also slapped a fine of 7,000 Singapore dollar (\$5,240).

On August 5 last year, Sirajudeen called the police on "999" (hotline) twice and made racially insensitive comments targeting Malays, Singapore's second-largest ethnic community.

Malays account for 15 per cent of the country's population. Sirajudeen also made



remarks about police officers being incompetent because of their Malay ethnicity.

On Monday, District Judge Salina Ishak said Sirajudeen noted that the racially insensitive remarks were made during the election period and that they could have led to significant uproar. Singapore's general

elections were held in July last year. Sirajudeen is currently out on 5,000 Singapore Dollar (\$3,743) bail. He is expected to surrender himself on February 22 to begin serving his sentence.

For attempting to promote enmity between racial groups, he could have been jailed for up to three years and fined.

Biden Plans To Name New York Fed Market Chief Daleep Singh As National Security Deputy

According to a February 5 statement by the New York Fed, Daleep Singh will be leaving the bank in mid-February to join the Biden administration.

(Insider Bureau)- The Federal Reserve Bank of New York has said that Daleep Singh, the Head of the Markets Group at the bank is set to join US President Joe Biden's administration as deputy national security adviser. According to a February 5 statement by the New York Fed, Singh will be leaving the bank in mid-February to join the Biden administration. In his new role he

will serve as the deputy National Economic Council (NEC) Director as well and report to both National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and NEC Director Brian Deese.

Singh, 45, had worked at the US Department of the Treasury from 2011 to 2017, in the Obama administration serving as Acting Assistant Secretary for Financial Markets and Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Affairs,

helping to shape the Treasury Department's crisis response to Ukraine, Russia, Greece, and Puerto Rico. "Daleep brought his dedication to public service and leadership skills to the New York Fed and had a meaningful impact during his tenure," said John C. Williams, president and chief executive officer of the New York Fed. "Over the past year, Daleep has played a critical leadership



role in the emergency facilities the Fed launched in response to COVID-19. I'm thrilled that he will

continue to leverage his knowledge and expertise in support of economic policy at this important time." Anne Baum, Head of Central Bank and International Account Services, will serve as interim Head of the Markets Group in place of Singh, while the Fed will launch a search for his successor in the coming weeks. Singh joined the New York Fed in February 2020 and also served as a member of the Executive Committee. As Head of the Markets Group, he focused on bringing together policy, strategy, analysis and operational effectiveness. Previously, Singh was Senior Partner and Chief US Economist at SPX Capital, a global investment firm. Born in Olney, Maryland and raised in Raleigh, North Carolina Singh holds a bachelor's degree with Duke University in economics and public policy and a master of business administration/master of public administration from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Harvard University, with a focus on international economics. Singh's great grand-uncle was Daleep Singh Saund, the first Asian-American elected to the US Congress.

Mahatma Gandhi's 73rd Punyatithi

(By our staff reporter) New York: Consulate General of India, New York in collaboration with various organizations observed the 73rd Punyatithi of Mahatma Gandhi on Saturday, January 30th 2021. Following social distance protocol, limited guests were invited to the Consulate. A number of people joined online. Consulate General of India and Gandhian



Society USA organized a prayer meeting and paid homage to the Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi on his 73rd Death Anniversary on January 30, 2021 from 11:30 am – 01:30 pm at the Consulate premises. Mahatma Gandhi's favorite Bhajans were sung on the occasion. Mr. Eric Adams (Brooklyn Borough President), Ms. Ela Gandhi (Granddaughter of Gandhiji),

Mr. Upendra Chivukula (Commissioner NJ Board of Public Utilities), Mr. Arun Gandhi (Grandson of Mahatma

Gandhi) and other dignitaries remembered the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. Consul General gave his remarks and noted that a number of leaders around the world including in the USA were inspired by Gandhiji's message of peace and non-violence. In respect of the Later, he specifically highlighted how Martin Luther King Jr followed



the path of non-violence preached by Mahatma Gandhi and the impact both leaders had on John Lewis. The second event was held the same day from 03:00 – 04:00 pm in collaboration with Shanti Fund. Representatives of different faiths held an inter-faith prayer meeting to pay tribute to Mahatma Gandhi. They sang devotional songs, hymns and faith prayers to celebrate the Mahatma's belief in universal brotherhood and harmony. Council of Heritage and Arts of India, Inc. (CHAI) organized an event to observe Gandhiji's Punyatithi. The event was conducted virtually. Mr. Randhir Jaiswal, Consul General, was the Chief Guest. CG spoke about the ever increasing relevance the increasing importance of Gandhiji's message in the contemporary world.

Chamoli glacier burst: 67 from UP still untraceable, 23 safe, 3 dead

(News Agencies)- Sixty-seven people from Uttar Pradesh remained untraceable till Wednesday evening while 23 others were located or rescued and three confirmed as dead after a glacier burst in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district on February 7, relief commissioner Sanjay Goel said. Uttar Pradesh ministers Suresh Rana, Dharam Singh Saini and Vijay Kashyap were camping at Uttarakhand's Haridwar to coordinate relief and rescue work.

Three deaths were confirmed, Rana said over the phone from Haridwar, adding two of them were from Lakhimpur Kheri and one from Aligarh.

The dead included Awadhesh, 19, resident of Ichhanagar village, and Suraj, 20, resident of Babupurwa village, both from Lakhimpur Kheri district's Nigahasan tehsil, and Ajay Sharma, 32, resident of Aligarh district.

"A massive exercise is underway to trace others. We had alerted all the district magistrates to issue appeals to anyone whose friends or relatives had travelled to Uttarakhand, especially Chamoli. Throughout the day, we have been coordinating and collating information," Rana said.

"Teams of the National Disaster Response Force, State Disaster Response Force, Indo-Tibetan Border Police and the Army is working round the clock. We are in touch with them and gathering information. Along with this, we are also collecting photographs of all the missing people from UP and checking with Uttarakhand authorities about their safety. Simultaneously, we are also besieged with calls from kin of the missing who are aware we are here," Rana said. Goel said the emergency control room established by the state government in various districts received

information about 93 missing people till Wednesday. Out of them, 23 were rescued or located and three were dead.

Among the 67 missing people, 31 are from Lakhimpur Kheri, 12 from Saharanpur, five from Shravasti, four from Gorakhpur, two each from Kushinagar and Rae Bareilly and one each from Amroha, Azamgarh, Bulandshahr, Chandauli, Deoria, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Mathura, Mirzapur, Moradabad, Shahjahanpur and Sonbhadra. A report from Lakhimpur Kheri said district magistrate Shailendra Kumar Singh confirmed the death of Awadhesh and Suraj. The bodies were recovered from the debris at the Tapovan hydro power project in Chamoli. Awadhesh's body was brought to his village on Tuesday night, while the body of Suraj was expected to arrive early Thursday morning. Both of them



had been working at the Tapovan project as labourers. Nigahasan tehsil officials visited the family members of Awadhesh on Wednesday to assure them all assistance. The last rites of Awadhesh were performed at his native village on Wednesday. Rana, along with UP's Ayush minister Dharam Singh Saini and minister of state for revenue and flood control Vijay Kashyap, had rushed to the hill state on Tuesday to

aid the relief and rescue work. The ministers, after meeting Uttarakhand chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat, had camped in Haridwar. A team of Uttar Pradesh officials is also camping in Joshimath and Dehradun. They include administrative and police officials from Saharanpur, Bijnor, Lakhimpur Kheri and a flood expert from the relief commissioner's office.

Farmers to intensify protest, 'Rail Roko' on February 18 for 4 hours

Samyukta Kisan Morcha, the farmers' union spearheading the ongoing agitation, held a meeting on Wednesday

(News Agencies)- Farmer leaders took major decisions to further intensify the movement against the Centre's three new farm laws.

The protesters have decided to organise 'Rail Roko' across India from 12 pm to 4 pm on February 18. As part of the agitation, the protesting farmers have decided to free all road toll plazas in Rajasthan starting February 12. On February 14, a candle march and 'mashaal juloos' will be held across the country to honour the

sacrifice of soldiers martyred in the Pulwama attack, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha said in a press release.

The protesting farmers have also decided to show solidarity on the birth anniversary of Jat leader Sir Chhotu Ram on February 16. Addressing the Lok Sabha on Wednesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "The farm laws are optional, not compulsory."

"Farmers agitation is pious but is important to differentiate

between Andolanjivis and agitators," PM Modi added.

While asserting that there is a need for investment in the farming sector, the Prime Minister quoted farmer leader Chaudhary Charan Singh to say, "The entire country should be treated as one agricultural market." "We cannot deal with 21st-century agriculture with an 18th-century mindset," the PM said while reiterating his government's commitment to doubling farmers' income. Amid



slogans in support of the farmers' agitation, Congress MPs staged a walkout from Lok Sabha on Wednesday. "The government should have brought a law for the

benefit of all, that is what the farmers want, take it back," Congress MP and Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury said.

Covid-19: Justin Trudeau dials Narendra Modi for vaccine supplies



(News Agencies)-- In what could be a turning point in relations between New Delhi and Ottawa, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Wednesday reached out to

sought by Canada. We also agreed to continue to

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and requested a shipment of Covid-19 vaccines. Modi later took to Twitter to say that he "was happy to receive a call from my friend, @JustinTrudeau". He added, "Assured him that India would do its best to facilitate supplies of Covid vaccines

collaborate on other important issues like Climate Change and the global economic recovery." Indian officials said the vaccines manufactured in India will be those from AstraZeneca and sourced from the Serum Institute of India. The start of shipments of the vaccines to Canada is believed to be "imminent" and only awaiting emergency-use authorisation of the AstraZeneca vaccine by public health authorities in Canada. There is optimism that the coronavirus vaccine deal

will result in an improvement in ties between the two countries, which were adversely affected after Trudeau had made controversial remarks about the ongoing farmers' protests late last year during a virtual event. The Trudeau government has faced criticism in recent weeks for its handling of the pandemic as its projected inoculation programme has run into difficulty due to shortage of vaccine shipments from Pfizer and Moderna.

Cong will scrap farm laws if it comes to power: Priyanka Gandhi

At a 'kisan panchayat' organised by the party in Saharanpur, the Congress general secretary accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other BJP leaders of "insulting" farmers who are protesting against the laws.

(News Agencies)- Attacking the Centre over the new farm laws, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Wednesday told a rally in western Uttar Pradesh that if voted to power her party would scrap them. At a 'kisan panchayat' organised by the party in Saharanpur, the Congress general secretary accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other BJP leaders of "insulting" farmers who are protesting against the laws. "The three laws are demonic.

If voted to power, the Congress will scrap these laws," she said. She said the party's fight will continue till the laws are scrapped. The rally is the first in a series of such farmers' meetings planned by the Congress in western Uttar Pradesh, a year before the assembly elections in the state where the opposition party is struggling to revive itself.

The Congress leader was presented with a pair of ploughs at the meeting. "These three laws

were drafted in such a way that government 'mandis' will eventually close down, the farmers will not get the MSP (minimum support price) and there will be hoarding," she said. "In other words, the farmers' voice will become weak and the voice of billionaires will grow stronger," she said.

Earlier, she tweeted in Hindi, "To listen to the farmers' 'dil ki baat', understand them, share my feelings with them and support



their struggle, I will be in Saharanpur today. The BJP government will have to withdraw

the black farm laws. "When asked to comment on the Congress event, UP minister Anand Swarup Shukla said a "drama" is being enacted in the name of farmers. He claimed that "gangs" opposing the government have gone international, and referred to tweets on the farmers' protest by foreign celebrities. He asked Congress leaders to "oppose Prime Minister Narendra Modi, but not the country". Law Minister Brijesh Pathak said the BJP government was committed to help farmers and termed Priyanka Gandhi's tour an "eyewash".

Uttarakhand glacier burst: No headway in rescue work at Tapovan tunnel

(News Agencies)- Days after the glacier burst in Uttarakhand, agencies continued their rescue work on Friday by clearing muck from the tunnel in NTPC's hydel power project in Tapovan, Chamoli, to rescue about 35 workers trapped inside. As of now, there has been no breakthrough because of heavy boulders and muck

beyond 100m in the tunnel, said officials.

Rescue workers have so far recovered 35 bodies of which 10 have been identified. They are yet to find bodies of about 169 persons out of the total 204 missing in last Sunday's disaster. State director general of police Ashok Kumar said, "The rescue workers are putting in all efforts to clear the muck from the tunnel

but are unable to make any progress. We are failing to get beyond 100m as the heavy muck inside fills up the area as soon as we clear it. Rescue workers tried to get into the tunnel by drilling inside on Thursday, but to no avail."

On Thursday, the rescue operation had to be stopped for about half an hour after the water level in the Dhauliganga river

rose to about one and a half feet. Officials said that it was likely that the water level rose due to depositing of sediments upstream, blocking the water flow.

"A team of rescue workers and experts went to check it on Thursday but couldn't get a clear picture. They will go again on Friday for a recce to know what has happened," said Kumar.

SC notice to Centre on plea seeking repeal of provisions criminalising begging

A bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan and R S Reddy issued notices and sought replies from the Centre as also Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab, Haryana and Bihar on the plea which claimed that sections of the statutes criminalising begging is violative of Constitutional rights.

(News Agencies)- The Supreme Court Wednesday asked the Centre and some states to respond to a plea which has sought direction to repeal the provisions criminalising begging saying it leaves people with "unreasonable choice" of committing crime or starving. A bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan and R S Reddy issued notices and sought replies from the Centre as also Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab, Haryana and Bihar on the plea which claimed that sections of the statutes criminalising begging is violative of Constitutional rights.

"Issue notice returnable in six weeks," the bench said, while hearing the petition filed by Meerut resident Vishal Pathak. The plea, filed through advocate H K Chaturvedi, has referred to

the August 2018 verdict of the Delhi High Court which had decriminalised begging in the national capital and said that provisions of the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959 which treats begging as an offence cannot sustain constitutional scrutiny.

"The provisions of the statutes criminalising the act of begging puts people in a situation to make an unreasonable choice between committing a crime or not committing one and starving, which goes against the very spirit of the Constitution and violates Article 21 i.e. Right to Life," the plea filed in the top court said. Referring to the Census 2011, the plea said the total number of beggars in India is 4,13,670 and the number has increased from the last Census.

It said that government has the mandate to provide social security for everyone and ensure that all have basic facilities as embedded in Directives Principles of State Policy in the Constitution.

"However, the presence of beggars is evidence that the states have failed to provide these basic facilities to all its citizens, thus instead of working on its failure and examining what made people beg, criminalising the act of beggary is irrational and against the approach of a socialist nation as embedded in preamble of our Constitution," the plea said. It said that a person, who is compelled to beg, cannot be faulted for his actions in such compelling circumstances. "Furthermore, by enforcing such legislations,



state is simply failing in its duty to provide a decent life to its citizens and adds insult to injury by arresting, detaining and if necessary, imprisoning such persons who beg in search for essentials of bare survival which is even below sustenance," it said. The plea claimed that 'The Abolition of Begging and Rehabilitation of Beggars Bill 2018' was introduced in the Lok Sabha but "till date this bill is not passed and is wedged in length parliamentary procedures which has resulted in thousands

of poor face more hardships because of present arbitrary statutes".

The petition has sought directions to declare as "illegal and void" all provisions, except some sections, of the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959, Punjab Prevention of Beggary Act, 1971, Haryana Prevention of Begging Act, 1971 and Bihar Prevention of Begging Act 1951.

It has also sought to declare all other similar Acts prevailing in any part of the country as illegal.

Bangladeshi terrorist gets 29-yr jail term for Khagragarh bomb blast in Bengal

The bomb blast on October 2, 2014 killed two suspected terrorists and injured a third and exposed a network of Bangladeshi terrorists in the state.

(News Agencies)- A National Investigation Agency (NIA) court in Kolkata on Wednesday sentenced Kausar, a Bangladeshi national and an operative of the banned Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) to 29 years in jail for his role in the 2014 bomb blast in a rented house at Khagragarh in Bengal's East Burdwan district. Kausar was convicted under Sections 120B (criminal conspiracy) and 125 of the IPC (waging or attempt to wage war against the government of any Asiatic power in alliance or at peace with the government of India). He was arrested from a guest house in Bengaluru in August 2018 in a joint operation by the NIA and local police. As many as 31 people were named in the charge-sheet. Most of them have

been convicted. Kausar, 31, is an accused in the 2018 Bodhgaya blast as well. He is also named in a case being investigated by the Special Task Force (STF) of the Kolkata Police, officials said. Kausar had formed a third faction of the JMB that operated out of West Bengal, a senior state intelligence officer told HT on condition of anonymity. The faction is often referred to as the New JMB.

"Kausar sneaked in and out of India several times. He was close to Salahuddin who ran the second faction of the JMB. Kausar's plans to carry out big terror attacks suffered a setback after the IED blew up in Khagragarh, killing two of their own operatives. It is the third faction of the JMB that allegedly masterminded the Holey Artisan

Bakery attack in Dhaka in 2016. It is suspected that the faction has links with the Islamic State. Kausar was part of the modules that carried out more than 70 terror attacks in Bangladesh," the IB officer said.

On October 2, 2014, when Bengal was celebrating Durga Puja, an improvised explosive device (IED) explosion killed two suspected terrorists and injured a third person while they were making bombs and explosive devices at a rented house in Khagragarh locality of Burdwan town. The blast exposed a network of Bangladeshi terrorists in the state. The NIA took over the probe later that year and submitted the first charge sheet in March 2015. "The rented house was occupied by the members of JMB, ostensibly for



burkha-stitching, though in reality it was being used for the nefarious activity of bomb-making," the NIA had said in a statement that year. In the chargesheet in the Khagragarh case, the NIA mentioned a conspiracy to overthrow the Sheikh Hasina government in Bangladesh.

A large number of IEDs, explosives, hand grenades and training videos were seized during the investigation which also pointed at sleeper cells in the districts of Bengal.

In August 2019, a special NIA court in Kolkata convicted 19 people, including four Bangladeshis, in the Khagragarh blast case.

The accused persons were convicted under the Indian Penal Code, Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, Explosive Substances Act and Arms Act. All of them were charged with waging or attempting to wage war against the state.

The Union home ministry banned JMB and its factions in May 2019.

Iqbal Singh, arrested for Red Fort violence on Republic Day, sent to 7-day police custody

Earlier, the police had identified Singh as one of the persons who did a Facebook Live from the Red Fort during the violence on Republic Day.



(News Agencies)- A Delhi court on Wednesday sent Iqbal Singh, arrested in connection with the Red Fort violence on Republic Day, to seven-day police custody. Singh

was arrested from Hoshiyarpur in Punjab on Tuesday night. The Delhi Police had announced a ₹50,000 reward against him. Producing him before Metropolitan Magistrate Poorva

Mehra, the police said Singh's custodial interrogation is required to show him videos of January 26 violence and identify other accused persons.

The police also said that Singh one of the main conspirators of the violence.

Singh claimed he did not go to Red Fort to cause violence and whatever he did or said was in the heat of the moment, according to news agency PTI.

"I did not come to cause violence. I reached Red Fort just like that and had not planned to go there. When I reached emotions flared up. Whatever I did is on my live video. I did not instigate anyone," PTI quoted Singh as saying. Earlier, the police had identified Singh as one of the persons who did a Facebook Live from the Red Fort during the violence on Republic Day. Singh's arrest came hours

after the police caught actor Deep Sidhu. Sidhu was arrested on Monday around 10.30 pm. Police claimed Sidhu played a key role in instigating protesters on January 25 -26 during the violence at Red Fort. He had also congratulated the men who had hoisted religious and farmers union's flag at the fort and also did a Facebook Live.

A cash reward of ₹1 lakh was announced on Sidhu's arrest.

French envoy meets RSS' Suresh Bhaiyyaji Joshi in Nagpur

(News Agencies)- French ambassador Emmanuel Lenain met the general secretary of the RSS, Suresh Bhaiyyaji Joshi, in Nagpur on Wednesday. As per a report in the Organiser, a publication affiliated to the Sangh, the meeting was held at noon. There was no statement from the French embassy about the meeting.

Earlier the Australian high commissioner to India Barry O'Farrell AO met Mohan Bhagwat, the head of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in November last year. Tweeting about the meeting,

O'Farrell had said the RSS has been "actively supporting the community during Covid-19". "... I met with sarsanghchalak Dr Mohan Bhagwat who shared relief measures the organisation has adopted during these challenging times," he tweeted. In 2019, a meeting between Bhagwat and German ambassador Walter J Lindner took place in Nagpur. The German ambassador had also tweeted about the meeting, which set off a storm on social media with many criticising it. The RSS describes the meetings as part of the organisation's outreach.



India to continue talks with China for disengagement: Minister in Lok Sabha

Earlier today, China's defence ministry announced in Beijing that Indian and Chinese troops had begun disengaging on the southern and northern banks of Pangong lake.

(News Agencies)-India will continue discussions with China to achieve disengagement at all friction points along the Line of Actual control (LAC) and to restore peace and tranquillity at "an early date", minister of state for external affairs V Muraleedharan told Parliament on Wednesday. Replying to a question from Congress MP Manish Tiwari in the Lok Sabha, Muraleedharan said the Chinese side made "several attempts to unilaterally alter the status quo" in the western sector of the LAC since April-May 2020. "These attempts have been responded to appropriately by our armed forces. It has been made clear to the Chinese side that such unilateral attempts are unacceptable. These actions have seriously disturbed the peace and tranquillity along the LAC in the western sector," he said in a written reply. The government will "continue discussions with the Chinese side to achieve the objective of

disengagement from all friction points and restoration of peace and tranquillity in the India-China border areas at an early date", Muraleedharan said.

The written answer was submitted in the Lok Sabha at around the time China's defence ministry announced in Beijing that Indian and Chinese troops had begun disengaging on the southern and northern banks of Pangong lake. People familiar with developments said in New Delhi that both sides were pulling back armoured elements, including tanks, from heights around the lake.

Muraleedharan also said external affairs minister S Jaishankar had spoken on telephone with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi on June 17 last year, and the two ministers had met in Moscow on September 10.



"The two foreign ministers agreed that the current situation in the border areas is not in the interest of either side. They agreed therefore that the border troops of both sides should continue their dialogue, quickly disengage, maintain proper distance and ease tensions," he said.

Jaishankar and Wang also agreed both sides "shall abide by all the existing agreements and protocol on China-India boundary affairs, maintain peace and tranquillity in the border areas and avoid any action that could

escalate matters", Muraleedharan said.

Diplomatic and military engagements with the Chinese side have continued in order to ensure complete disengagement at all friction points on the LAC and full restoration of peace and tranquillity in the border areas, he said. Six meetings of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) on border affairs and nine meetings of military commanders have been held so far.

PM Modi has given away Indian territory to China, alleges Rahul Gandhi

(News Agencies)-Congress leader Rahul Gandhi launched a fresh attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and claimed that "the PM has given away sacred Indian territory to China", arguing that the Indian army held Finger 4 area in Ladakh along the contested Line of Actual Control (LAC) but now it will move back to its permanent position near Finger 3. Gandhi's salvoes come a day after defence minister Rajnath Singh informed the Lok Sabha that the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) will retreat to its base east of Finger 8 on the north bank of Pangong Tso, the Indian Army will move back to its permanent position near Finger 3. "Indian government's position was status quo ante in April 2020. Now, defence minister comes and makes a statement. We find Indian troops will now be stationed in Finger 3. Finger 4 used to be our territory. Why has PM Modi given our land to the Chinese?" Gandhi said on Friday. "Why they have been asked to move back? There is no word on our most strategic area of Dopsang plains. The government is mum on Gogra post and Hot Springs. PM Modi has stooped before China and given away the land between Finger 3 and Finger 4 to the Chinese," Gandhi alleged. "There is no strategic advantage. Chinese were in our land. Our soldiers risked everything they had to go to Kailash ranges. Now PM has given back land and status quo ante is irrelevant.

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Real Estate Broker/Notary Public

Nlight Real Estate

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The Role Of Hydro Projects Of Uttarakhand In The Chamoli Avalanche Disaster

The Chamoli disaster of February 2021 once again shows that there are multiple ways in which hydropower projects tend to act as force multipliers in disasters.

The hydropower projects, in this case, may not have been the direct cause of the origin of the floods in the Rishiganga river basin in Chamoli District of Uttarakhand. But as the flood storm travelled down and went past the obstacles in the form of the barrage, dam or hydropower station, the storm flowed down with greater power and greater quantum of debris.

The construction of hydropower projects involves deforestation, submergence, construction of dams, power stations, roads, townships, tunnelling, blasting, destruction of aquatic and terrestrial biodiversity, mining, dumping of millions of cubic meters of muck, among others. Each of these has an adverse impact on the local ecology and local capacity to withstand/ adapt to the impact of disasters, each such adverse impacts increases the disaster potential of the area.

Where did the maximum number of deaths occur during the disaster? At Hydropower projects. Where did the maximum economic damage happen? At the hydropower projects.

It's clear that in the case of most disaster events, hydropower projects are force multipliers where they are located. This is in addition to all the direct ecological and social impacts of the hydropower projects. None of the project appraisals or impact assessment reports even mention this, in spite of SANDRP writing to the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) and the members of the Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) on River Valley projects that appraises the hydropower projects.

It should be added here that the Environment and Social Impact Assessments of these projects are never an accurate, honest, rigorous account of the likely impacts. Most such reports, in any case, are cut and paste jobs. No project has ever been rejected by the EAC, MoEF or judiciary in spite of bringing such numerous cases before these bodies.

So the hydropower projects were never ecologically viable or socially acceptable.

Now they are not even economically viable. The surest sign of this is the en masse exit of the

private sector from the hydropower projects. It's now only the public money that is pushing these unviable projects. The cost of power from any hydropower projects that are under construction or proposed would not be less than Rs 6-7 per unit, while we are able to get solar or wind power at less than Rs 3 per unit. The rapidly falling cost of energy storage is discrediting any claim of justification for such projects for peaking power. In any case, considering that existing hydro projects are not even optimally operated for generating peaking power, nor are a number of even existing pump storage projects not operating in pump storage mode for lack of viability, there never was any sound case for hydro for peaking power in India. This is also true considering that there is no attempt at managing the peak power demand.

Each time there is a disaster like the Chamoli disaster, this gets discussed, and soon forgotten. That also shows how little is the capacity of our system to learn any lessons from such disasters. The Justice Radhakrishnan verdict of Supreme Court dated Aug 13, 2013, in the context of the June 2013 Uttarakhand deluge got derailed from its intent following his retirement. If that verdict was taken to a logical conclusion in letter and spirit, we may have seen much-reduced disaster proportions this time.

Chamoli disaster, however, provides another opportunity to learn these lessons afresh. One immediate step that can be taken is to scrap the damaged or destroyed hydropower projects including Rishiganga project, Tapovan Vishnugad project and also Vishnugad Pipalkoti Project. Also, review the rest of the under-construction projects. In years to come, we will soon have to consider decommissioning of other existing hydropower projects, as they would continue to be force multipliers in years to come, as a recent UN report also highlighted.

This is also an implication of the PMO decision in Feb 2019, where it was decided in a meeting chaired by the then Principal Secretary to Prime Minister Shri Nripen Mishra that no new hydropower project will be taken up in Uttarakhand, where this author was also present. Will the government show courage to take these steps urgently?

The Problem Isn't Just One Insurrection. It's Mass Radicalization.

This week's impeachment trial of Donald Trump for inciting an insurrection refreshed many Americans' sense of shock at what took place on January 6, when thousands of pro-Trump extremists surrounded the U.S. Capitol, stormed into the building, bludgeoned police officers and sent congressional leadership into hiding.

But experts say the attack is hugely worrying for reasons beyond what the Senate is debating. Unlike other recent spasms of American violence, this was not the work of a lone wolf nor of a small cell of radicals. The pathway to an attempted government overthrow unfolded in public, out loud on the internet, in a process that experts call mass radicalization. The protest was likely just the tip of an iceberg; nobody knows how many Americans—tens of thousands? more?—would willingly have joined them if they'd been in Washington that day. It's a new challenge for America, and a serious one: At times and places when large groups of people have been inspired to embrace violence, it often leads to long-term unrest, if not outright civil war. And right now, experts think, it's happening faster than ever.

"Historically, mass radicalization took time," says Michael Jensen, an expert on extremism who leads the domestic radicalization team at the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism. "But that's not our reality anymore."

Jensen's research has found that over the past roughly 15 years, the average time span of radicalization in the U.S. has shrunk from 18 months to 7 months, largely because of how much of our lives have shifted online. In the 1980s or '90s, a would-be far-right

extremist had to "know somebody in your real-world life who was involved in it," says Jensen. "They had to recruit you in or introduce you to the ideas. That tended to be a pretty slow process."

Jensen has emerged as a leading figure in the fight against domestic extremism. And though it might be tempting to draw parallels between the insurrectionist movement and other extreme groups, he says America's far-right extremists are different from what you might expect. Compared to extremists animated by far-left or jihadist beliefs, they radicalize later in life, are substantially more likely to have a violent criminal background and are more prone to substance-use disorders. And where you may expect far-right groups to compete against one another for recruits, attention and resources—as has long been the case—that dynamic is currently evolving into a reality that poses an even greater threat. They are joining forces.

"The most concerning thing that we've seen in the last couple of years is that competition [on the far right] is actually eroding to some extent, and there has been more of an effort for these groups to link and to cooperate with each other," says Jensen. "To some extent, January 6 was these groups coming together." What should we know about mass radicalization? Should we expect the future of American extremism to look a lot more like January 6? And is there something about American politics at the moment that is helping to fuel all of this? To sort through it all, POLITICO Magazine spoke with Jensen this week. A condensed transcript of that conversation follows, edited for length and clarity.



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Editor in Chief & 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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Phone: 917 612 3158

editor@thesouthasianinsider.com, thesouthasianinsider@gmail.com

www.thesouthasianinsider.com

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Has China bitten off more than it can chew?

What China did not expect was that India would not confine its response to managing the border dispute but would extend it to attacking Chinese commercial interests in India and aligning itself more closely with its Quad partners. The Indian side has upped the ante by taking two steps, one military and one economic - occupying the heights in south Pangong and by permanently banning 59 Chinese apps

I have argued before that in advancing its territorial claims, China uses carefully calibrated tactics. Each move it makes may not be threatening enough to invite a significant military response, but several incremental actions cumulatively lead to a material change in the situation. Small nibbles lead to a giant bite. We have seen this unfold on our borders. It has been practised with success in the South China Sea (SCS). In earlier track-2 meetings, Chinese interlocutors would say that they did not claim the whole of SCS but only the various islands and waters around them. When asked about the nine-dash line, they said that it was a legacy of the Guomindang government. It will be recalled that when Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had pointed out to Chinese premier Zhou Enlai that Chinese maps were showing large chunks of

Indian territory as part of China, Zhou explained that these were old Guomindang maps that had not yet been revised. Sounds familiar? Chinese interlocutors later began to assert that SCS were "historic waters" where China had certain legacy rights, but did not explain what these were. They still maintained that China was not claiming the entire stretch of waters as sovereign territory. Once formal submission to this effect was made to the United Nations, the obfuscation could no longer stand. The process of actual occupation, dredging and militarisation then began in earnest and still continues. At each step of this creeping process of occupation, neither the Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean) nor the United States (US) felt threatened enough to take countermeasures. Reversing the changed facts on the ground will

require large-scale military action, which is not realistic. The lesson to be drawn is that the counter must come swiftly and at an early stage before the map has been redrawn through such tactics. India changed its pattern of response to Chinese nibbling with the Doklam operation in 2017. There is no doubt that this came as a rude surprise to the Chinese side. The sharp and aggressive official reaction and the flood of vituperative Chinese media commentary reflected that. Here was a nibble that had invited an unexpected and out-of-character "disproportionate" response. The impasse lasted for over two months, but was eventually resolved. The Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS) summit hosted by President Xi Jinping at that time was an important reason for the resolution. In contrast to Doklam, the



operations in eastern Ladakh were not the usual nibbling kind, but backed by deployment of a large number of troops and weaponry. The aim would have been to substantially change the alignment of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) to China's advantage, making any Indian effort to reverse the gain a risky and costly affair. The skirmish at Galwan with unprecedented loss of life may have been unexpected and not necessarily part of the original script. This is why the rhetoric on the

Chinese side, compared to a smaller incident at Doklam, was much more muted and remains so. The plan would have been to occupy territory falling within the category of "differing perceptions" of LAC and prevent any Indian presence and patrols in these areas. Another aim would have been to neutralise any Indian advantage from improved border infrastructure such as the Darbuk-Daulat Beg Oldi (DBO) road and revived Advance Landing Grounds (ALG) at DBO, Fukche, Chushul and Demchok.

Digital Sovereignty: Who Died And Made Twitter Emperor Of The World?

The cocky challenges to India by digital monopolies need to be addressed quickly



India's digital sovereignty has been challenged once again within a span of just three months. The challenge is not from another sovereign nation, but another corporation, albeit with a budget larger than many nations. Digital Sovereignty: Who Died And Made Twitter Emperor Of The World? The cocky challenges to India by digital monopolies need to be addressed quickly India's digital sovereignty has been challenged once again within a span of just three months. The challenge is not from another sovereign nation, but another corporation, albeit with a budget larger than many nations. What is Technological Sovereignty? As I had coined the term and defined

it over 15 years ago, it is the loss of ultimate authority of the elected government on aspects of our society and economy that are controlled by technology and by digital. Essentially, it means the government is left with very little manoeuvrability when threatened by digital giants that challenge our way of life and safety and security of our people. This is because we as a nation have become bereft of technological sovereignty. It would have been a cocky "I told you so" moment, except that it severely impacts the sovereignty of our nation, and hence impacts each one of us deeply. So, what were these transgressions by digital giants and digital monopolies in the last three months? It started with

Google, towards the end of the last year when they suddenly started charging 30 per cent for all transactions by startups that are on Google's Android play store (usual payment transaction fees are maximum 3%). That essentially included every startup in India that has an app. Of course, Google gave a choice. You can opt-out of Google Playstore and go into oblivion. That is not much of a choice. Unfortunately, there are no regulatory provisions which the government could force Google to heed. After enormous hue and cry from the startup community over this extortion, Google has "magnanimously" postponed their decision to charge those usurious rates from startups. Last month, another Digital monopoly, WhatsApp, decided to suddenly shred its users of data privacy. As usual, they gave a choice. One can give up their privacy and all pretence of

dignity, or preserve one's dignity and not surrender their privacy by quitting the platform. Not much of a choice when people thought that there was only Whatsapp available for app-based messaging which they used to communicate with people they knew who used it too. Fortunately, people discovered Signal and Telegram as alternatives and started migrating in hordes. That is when Whatsapp's moment of being magnanimous came in, wherein they said they will postpone the harvesting of people's privacy for a few months for "people to understand their privacy policy". In this saga, the government again could do precious little as Whatsapp followed government regulations and got "consent" from its users to part with their privacy. It is a moot point that the "consent" was received through digital arm-twisting. Now, in a fresh assault to our Technological Sovereignty, Twitter has decided to overrule the letter

and spirit of a government order that was issued to maintain internal law and order and to check an external security threat. On January 31, the Government invoked the provisions of section 69A of the IT Act to direct Twitter to block 257 handles that were identified by the intelligence agencies to be driven by secessionist Khalistan sympathizers or backed by Pakistan, known for its not so friendly disposition towards India. What was Twitter's response to this order from our elected representative government? Twitter blocked the accounts for one day, and then promptly unblocked them the next day in absolute defiance to the government's order. These accounts were spreading disinformation and spewing hatred, including hashtags such as #FarmerGenocide. Has there been a farmer genocide or anything close to it in India? The answer clearly is NO.

The DNA bill will cement a disturbing link between tech and policing

It potentially entrenches systemic issues of access to justice and unequal socio-economic status leading to the persecution of a disproportionate number of disadvantaged people.

Recently, the technology has been used scientific varnish to existing parliamentary committee on (without proper regulation) under science and technology criminal procedure codes, the bill will institutionalise its use within the justice system with the maintenance of databases. Experts believe that the bill leaves ample room for misuse, and that its consent provisions are not strong. A more fundamental concern is that DNA technology for identification derives from antiquated and discredited methods. Scientists confirm that much of DNA analysis involving statistical modelling algorithms embed judgments of the people behind the creation of these tools. This means that DNA samples collected are used to statistically create composites of "types" of people - racial, ethnic and so on. These methods, in their composition of types, in the inferences drawn, and the mathematical fact of computing averages to arrive at the estimates of types, have the scope for giving a

Every new advancement in technology does not necessarily ensure automatic justice delivery, especially when our criminal justice system is one of the main modes of State repression. We have seen activists, students and journalists face police excesses. Where CCTV evidence contradicts official accounts, it has been ignored, or has been explicitly destroyed in cases where it might implicate the police. Imagine the same spaces being classified under the bill as "crime scenes" and the DNA of persons from these sites included within indices maintained by the State. This is what the bill will facilitate as standard procedure. It potentially entrenches systemic issues of access to justice and unequal socio-economic status leading to the persecution of a disproportionate number of disadvantaged people. Another question is that



of openness. Already, denial of access to DNA laboratory records is affecting the rights of individuals in defending themselves, as highlighted by the work of Project 39A. With a new system of indexing DNA profiles of undertrials, criminals, missing and deceased persons, it becomes all the more important to think about the openness of the algorithmic techniques used in these methods. With no shield in the form of data protection and privacy laws, or the cross-dialogue with anti-discrimination laws like SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act, we are potentially moving towards automating, invisibilising and legitimising already existing biases in society, all in the name of technology. The DNA profiling bill follows a long list of bills that are being introduced without the data protection law in place. In any case, what kinds of protections would a data protection bill allow? Possibly not a lot more, as government use of data for law enforcement is already grounds for wide exemption within the last known draft of the data protection bill. A data protection bill would not allay any concerns about biological surveillance and an imminent algorithmic turn in criminology.

Biden's foreign policy lacks strategic clarity



The US is stuck in the Cold War-era thinking on Russia and lacks a road-map on China. Partners will be concerned

Trump on Russia, Biden stated: "I made it clear to President [Vladimir] Putin, in a manner very different from my predecessor, that the days of the United States rolling over in the face of Russia's aggressive actions... are over." Underlining his intent "to raise the cost to Russia and defend our vital interests," Biden linked it to America's democratic values and the need to rebuild "the muscles of democratic alliances that have atrophied from four years of neglect". But the Trump administration, for all of Trump's fondness for Putin, sanctioned Russia across the spectrum for the last four years. As such, it is not entirely clear what else Biden will be able to do. Other major announcements from Biden included ending all support for Saudi Arabia's offensive operations in Yemen, urging Myanmar's military leaders to halt their coup, freezing troop redeployments from

Germany, raising the cap for refugees allowed into the US from 15,000 for this fiscal year - the lowest since 1980 - to up to 125,000, and reaffirming US support for LGBTQ rights worldwide. Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin is to conduct a "global force posture review" so as to ensure America's "military footprint is appropriately aligned with our foreign policy and national security priorities". Biden also underlined his administration's recent decisions of elevating cyber by appointing the first national deputy security adviser for cyber and emerging technology, integrating climate as a central facet of national diplomacy, and rejoining the World Health Organization and the Paris climate agreement. But some key issues were conspicuous either by their absence or in their framing. Iran was not mentioned, nor were the nuclear negotiations,

while the broader "Middle East" geopolitical terrain was also not invoked, perhaps underscoring a shift away from the region for American foreign policy priorities. And then there was China. Biden argued that America will confront Beijing's "economic abuses, counter its aggressive, coercive action to push back on China's attack on human rights, intellectual property, and global governance". But how this will be done, once again, remains in the realm of speculation. Biden is right that China's President Xi Jinping doesn't have "a democratic, small D, bone in his body" and his Secretary of State is also right in letting Beijing know that Washington "will continue to stand up for human rights and democratic values, including in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong".

Last week, the newly elected president of the United States (US), Joe Biden, delivered his first foreign policy speech, with the aim of resetting America's foreign policy agenda after four years of Donald Trump's disruption. Biden's choice of the State Department as the venue for his address was a show of support to the foreign service bureaucracy, and a signal to the world that standard diplomatic engagement and multilateralism would be the preferred mode of operation. Announcing "America is back" and declaring the return

of diplomacy in US foreign policy, Biden was perhaps hoping to underscore the divergences with his predecessor. But for all the rhetoric, the speech was a mélange of the Democratic Party's standard talking points without a cohesive agenda for the changing global realities. The fact that China was hardly mentioned in his remarks and that Russia remained the obsession was also a reminder of how sections of the American establishment are still struggling to come to terms with the post-Cold War period. Trying to strike an explicit contrast with

Daniel Pearl - and Legal News too: Why Logan Act is Un-Constitutional

I was recuperating from Coronavirus without any taste or smell, having then just-survived it on March 29, 2020, after a two-plus weeks of Twilight Zone hell - that included a multi-day fever of 104.3 that brought me face to face with Death. Later, on April 14, 2020, I wrote an Open Letter to POTUS Trump (its in the public domain), after an intensive deep dive over twelve days into biochemistry and epidemiology, whereby I determined that Coronavirus, aka SARS-CoV2, was a lab-created (biowarfare agent, created in the PLA-run) Wuhan Lab by transplanting "Spike Glycoprotein (S)" - the master key that unlocks every auto-immune system and only found in Bats (as Bats are both warm-blooded and cold-blooded, and still, they can cross-procreate) - and grafting it on to a virus, as the "Spike" makes the protein-string virus falsely appear to our auto-immune system as a non-threatening friend, so our soldier T-Cells remain in their barracks sleeping undisturbed.

Indeed, I credit and thank President Trump, who the very next day, after NSC received my Letter at 8:31pm, for checking my science and then launching an investigation of CCP's China's "Pearl Harboring" us, as well as the rest of the world, in her megalomaniac desire of global domination and rejuvenation of the Ming Dynasty's Tribute System (aided by OBOR and AIIB).

Reader's familiarity with former NSA H.R. McMaster's "What China Wants" in The Atlantic (May 19, 2020) is presumed. Of course, given the fatalities, its well over 150 Pearl Harbors, and Stalin's Principle - "[d]eath of one is a tragedy; death of a thousand is a statistic" - sadly kicks in to shield in-action by our Leaders. While I am grateful for that Investigation, I am not in agreement that "[w]e are fighting 'an invisible enemy.'" Truth is, we did not rise to the occasion to defend our nation from enemies foreign and domestic. We have not - collectively - honored our Oath to the Constitution. Indeed, exasperatingly, we did not embrace Churchill, as Chamberlain's appeasement is, by its very policy terms, always seems more reasonable to the faint-hearted, even as it is always ineffective in face of planned tyranny. As we moved from Trump to Biden as POTUS, we remain pregnant with hope that Churchill will grace the chair behind the Resolute Desk. But, I digress.

End of March/early April 2020 was for me "...the best of times, it was the worst of times...". It was Charles Dickens gone spiritual and geopolitical at the same time, respectively. You see, when I was facing Death, aka God, in the third week of March last year, I had to confess that I had been Blessed from birth with a mother, whose love for me was unqualified as it was

endless, and a father, whose wisdom, endless success, unlimited compassion for strangers in-need, and his vision of me that caused him to uproot our family from enjoying merit-based success, power and position - as my late great Dad took a page from the life of Saint Francis of Assisi by voluntarily embracing poverty - and left India to become poor while gifting his then-fortune to his best friend, Haji Meih Meharali, in New Delhi.

This, despite my family having come to India, from what is now Pakistan, as refugees and my mom being shot in her left foot by a Muslim soldier during the needlessly bloody Partition of 1947, proximately caused by The Raj, and tens of millions crossing over a blood-drenched line-on-a-map for safety. My birth in India, post-Partition, was the start of a very special and Blessed life that included: unlimited familial love and adoration; the privilege of money and power, and its voluntary abandonment, as "poverty builds character" per my Dad. All of that was my birthright, which ended during the sizzling fever of Coronavirus in March 2020 when I was at Death's door. At Death's Open Door, during a calm conversation that lasted a couple of days, I thanked God for my very special and Blessed life - as I could ask no more for myself, as I had no unrealized items on my personal "Bucket List" - but, as a primary fiduciary of my amazing wife, Ranju, our miracle daughter Angela, and our precious son, Neal, I argued that to take me away would fracture their lives, in varying degrees, and therefore, I should be allowed to live so as to honor my high fiduciary duties owed to them. Indeed, I even argued - still calmly - that if God viewed my interventions in the lives of others, be it as a Lawyer or geopolitically, as enhancing the greater good, and peace and security, respectively, it ought, and I used this exact word, militate, in favor of my continuing to live so that I may continue to also serve the greater good. My high fever broke, and by March 29th I was 98.6.

Daniel Pearl's killers being released in Pakistan was God's first test a few days later. My Oath to Him - that I will intervene - fresh in my soul. So, after a little due diligence, and I was horrified that Pakistan was not going to appeal, which meant that his video-proofed Killers would stay free. I can only imagine our State Department being in frustrating overdrive. Weakened as I was, but in body alone, I acted - comfortable with my old moral imperative, courtesy of Edmund Burke, and as refined by Thomas Becket (God over King). I called a good man, a friend in London, whose moral compass is well calibrated, and

argued for his necessary help. That he is the dear friend of a world famous cricketer, then and now-Prime Minister Imran Khan, was key. He had proven his political bona fides, when I had impressed upon him two years then-earlier, in 2018, to also support my dear friend, Pakistan's then-former United Nations Security Council Ambassador, the indomitable Abdullah Hussain Haroon, as the Interim Foreign Minister in the run up to the election that Imran Khan won.

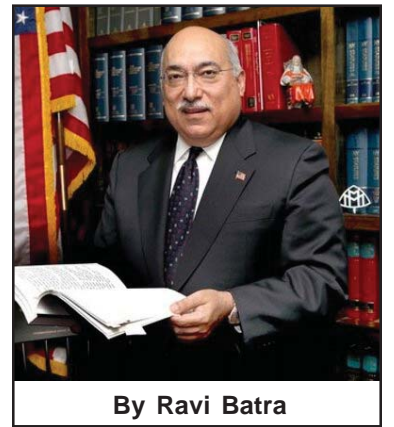
Speaking to my London friend, as I recall, close to twenty minutes or so, a conversation that included, the reason why Freedom of Speech, Freedom of the Press, and Jewish people must be protected, that the Holocaust proved that even good people's soul was susceptible to the latest Big Lie, that the lesson of Kristallnacht is perpetual as amnesia is generational, "Charlie Hebdo" and "Je Suis Juif," and Pakistan, to escape the pull of becoming a rogue nation ruled by modern day feudal lords whose loyalty was to Beijing, she must protect the First Amendment right of the free press in general, and Daniel Pearl in particular. That he was Jewish was the proximate cause of his brutal and savage death at the hands of Pakistan's well-funded and well-applauded domestic terrorists was shameful. That, this had to stop, and Pakistan needed to reclaim Muhammad Ali Jinnah's Dream of Purity for a Secular State of Pakistan,

consistent with his lawyerly and gentlemanly upbringing and a Freedom Fighter. That Pakistan was better than this.

To my great delight, dear Imran Khan soon re-engaged and an appeal was filed, and the video-bragging Killers were re-arrested. I thanked my London Friend. But, knowing how the rule of law can be neutralized by design, like a "fixed" boxing match where one player simply will fight to lose, I Tweeted off dear Eliot's HFAC's Tweet, now-chaired by our dear friend Greg Meeks:

"[d]ear @ImranKhanPTI - time for Pakistan [Pakistan's flag] to redeem her honor and ensure the appeal by your Govt is well pled to win a reversal and the guilty are never free. #DanielPearl #JeSuisJuif #We_are_all_Jewish! [our Flag; hug; kiss]." (Emphasis added)

Now, its 2021, and dear Joe Biden is POTUS. While I remain happy to intervene, albeit, the available path now - after the avoidable loss in the Supreme Court of Pakistan - is extradition of the Killers to these United States. This, however, is a purely bilateral issue. The Logan Act of 1799, passed a mere 12 years after the Constitution, remains unacted upon, as, if I may make some legal news, it remains un-constitutional. After all, it was not until 1803, when Chief Justice John Marshall in *Marbury v Madison*



By Ravi Batra

established the concept of "Judicial Review" and the federal court's ability to rule laws passed by the Congress and signed by the president to be null and void, ab initio, due to its "unconstitutionality." The difference for me in 2020 versus now, is that in 2020 I was trying to help Pakistan reclaim her honor by engaging in optional internal action. Now, since it is a bilateral matter, and we have a new Velvet Hammer in Secretary of State Tony Blinken, who appears to me to be more akin to Teddy Roosevelt ("walk softly, but carry a big stick") than James Baker III, I feel I must give him time to achieve the desired result. Otherwise, he is warmly invited to call upon me, one patriot to another, and I shall not hesitate to assist. I have learned that its always better to be a Good Samaritan, when the actors on the field seem unable, rather than be a bull in a china shop. And, I do so abhor broken glass: Kristallnacht."

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Rethinking run-of-the-river hydro projects

We recognise hydropower is a low-emission energy source, but by design, these projects are not environmentally benign

In 2012, I was part of a study investigating the impacts of National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC)'s hydropower projects on the lives and livelihoods of local communities in Sikkim. As part of the project, I spoke extensively to local people in the catchment areas of Teesta-V, a run-of-the-river (ROR) hydropower project just like the Tapovan Vishnugad Power Project in Uttarakhand. ROR projects are seen as a "green" alternative to high-dam hydropower projects such as the Tehri Hydropower Project. This is because an ROR dam diverts the river flow in a controlled environment to generate electricity and sends the water back to the river, whereas a high-dam project stores river water in a reservoir.

After a few meetings with local people in Sikkim, I learned four things. One, ROR projects are not green. This is because river water is diverted for power

generation, and this destroys the riverine ecology. The blasting and tunneling that happens while building a dam dry up mountain springs, which provide water for drinking and agriculture.

Second, due processes for clearance of the project were also not followed. People were under pressure to give their nod for the project, but it was not an informed choice since they did not have adequate information about its impact on the environment and their lives.

Third, they told me about the fragility of the Himalayas and how earthquakes and other climatic events impact the dam and the people. Such shoddy project clearances have also happened in other parts of the country, including in Uttarakhand. And finally, the company in Sikkim, NTPC, spent its corporate social responsibility funds to build schools, health facilities, and road infrastructure for the locals. But as one of the women told me: "These are our

basic rights, and why should their availability be tied up with any project?"

I saw parallels of what I learned in Sikkim in Uttarakhand on Sunday.

There is no doubt that the glacial avalanche that destroyed everything in its wake was climate-induced. Over the years, numerous reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) - including the latest one, Special Report on Oceans and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate - point out the climate risks in high-mountain regions. I strongly feel that projects such as hydropower must be weighed against its benefits. IPCC assessed that the climate crisis has altered the frequency and magnitude of the natural hazards in high mountain regions of the world. We reported, with medium confidence, that globally, in some regions, snow avalanches involving wet snow have increased while the rain on snow floods



have also increased at lower elevation in spring.

We recognise hydropower is a low-emission energy source, but by design, these projects are not environmentally benign.

With the growth of the Indian economy in the last few decades, electricity demand has increased. While coal makes the bulk of India's energy generation, current policies to promote renewable resources are also growing. India's renewable power potential is enormous and investing in this must take precedence over coal. This shift may not happen instantly, but coal can be retired earlier-than-previously thought,

provided there is strong political will. Similarly, as we think of coal, we must think about hydropower. Is development with a greener face possible? There are no straight answers. We need to take each sector and start conversations on its environmental impact. Nature-based solutions, which mean the use of nature to tackle socio-environmental challenges, can also fuel green growth, if proper strategies are in place. They can also be linked to the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative. For example, the solar industry is dependent on China for photovoltaic cells.

How social media has changed the way we see ourselves

There is a connection between social media and body image issues. While, on the one hand, social media has opened up many avenues for networking, it has brought with it, the desperate need for validation from the online community

As social media becomes all-pervasive, it has had a significant impact on society. Almost everybody is on social media today. As more people join Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and other networking sites, there is far greater sharing of information, content, thoughts and ideas than ever before. Social media helps build online communities, connect audiences, and generate revenue.

However, the downside to these activities is the desire to stay in the spotlight. This can consequently lead to low self-esteem and create a negative perception of one's "body image". Body image is how people think about their appearance and how they perceive themselves. A negative body image harms individuals who are affected by the impractical, often absurd, manner in which they view themselves. The assumption that a person must always look good

on social media has become a disorder in itself.

There is a strong connection between social media and body image issues. While, on the one hand, social media has opened up many avenues for networking, it has brought with it, the pressure to look good, get thousands of likes and positive comments on various platforms. This can affect the mental health of many young people. Validation from the online community has become something of an addiction.

Everyone likes to be complimented on their looks. But when this happens on social media, its effect is often amplified. People often seek approval and appreciation from strangers who they meet online. But if, despite their best efforts, the comments they receive are negative, it can lead to sadness and depression.

A majority of those who have body image issues are people who

compare their pictures with those posted by others. If they perceive that they fall short, they feel dejected. Low self-esteem has become something of a norm among social media users and can be detrimental to their mental well-being.

According to the Mental Health Foundation, low self-esteem affects people of all ages, not just the young. They get affected by things such as weight issues, which then can be a catalyst that forces them into depression and alcohol or substance abuse. Similar findings were revealed in a poll of 4,505 adults by YouGov in the United Kingdom. The study revealed that 57% of people aged 18 to 24 years admitted to having anxiety over their body image, compared with 30% in the age group of 45 to 54 years, and 20% for those over the age of 55.

Global statistics show that at least 91% of women are not happy with how they look and end up following trendy diets to



achieve an "ideal body". These statistics apply across race, marital status, gender and age. Almost half of the population that uses social media has admitted to having had low self-esteem. Negative body image and low self-esteem can lead to anxiety, nervousness, depression, jealousy, eating disorders, alcohol abuse, and living in a make-believe world where social media perfection has a disproportionate influence on people.

However, with some effort, society can overcome body image issues. There should be a culture of inclusivity and the

promotion of a positive body image. Parents should be more careful and look for signs of negative body image among children and seek timely help. Parents can help their children by promoting a positive body image, making their children understand the implications of unnecessary social media use. They can seek help from trained counsellors and psychiatrists. Social media is both a blessing and a curse. It is up to us how we use it.

Sasha Raikhy Sain is a consultant psychiatrist and psychotherapist, and director and founder, Possitive Vibes

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.



On India, a fracture in the diaspora

The Indian-American community is increasingly divided on political, religious, and generational lines. India will find that the more polarisation grows at home, the more its diaspora will become polarised, and one of the country's strongest foreign policy assets will be increasingly less so.

People of Indian origin constitute one of the largest diasporas in the world, residing in at least 200 countries. The stock of Indian migrants has almost tripled over the past three decades, from 6.6 million in 1990 to 17.9 million in 2020. The benefits of leveraging the diaspora for India's economic and foreign policy goals have been recognised for decades, but even more so since Prime Minister (PM) Atal Behari Vajpayee initiated the first Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas in 2001. But no leader has courted his country's diaspora as assiduously as PM Narendra Modi.

Diasporas, however, have a Janus-face. The acts of migration and living abroad affect identities - ethnic, religious, and those of national origin. One of the largest Indian diasporas - and certainly the wealthiest and most influential - resides in the United States (US). Yet, we know little about how Indian-Americans view India. How do they remain connected to their

ancestral homeland? And how do they regard political changes underway in India?

The Indian American Attitudes Survey (IAAS), a nationally-representative survey of Indian-Americans we conducted in September 2020, found that this population is, by and large, quite connected to its homeland through family and social networks, culture, and politics. However, the nature and intensity of this connection varies substantially. Indian-Americans born outside of the US are much more likely to report a strong connection to India compared to those born in the US (see figure).

Further, IAAS finds that Indian-Americans support more liberal positions in the US and more conservative ones in India on an array of contentious policy questions. This could be a case of "when in Rome do as the Romans do," or the reality that a group's attitudes differ according to whether it perceives itself to be part

of the majority or a minority community.

IAAS demonstrates that there are also inter-generational and partisan differences on political and social changes underway in India. Indian-Americans are divided on India's trajectory. While 36% report that India is currently on the right track, 39% believe it is on the wrong track - with those born in the US less optimistic. IAAS respondents are also markedly more pessimistic than the Indian population at large. According to a July 2020 Ipsos survey, 60% of Indians reported that India was on the right track.

Modi enjoys substantial support among Indian-Americans. But views on Modi suggest a modest partisan tint. Republicans give Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) the highest approval, although Democrats also rate them favourably - well above the Congress and Rahul Gandhi. However, the religious divide is striking. Almost seven in 10



Hindus approve of Modi's performance, while just one in five Muslims do. Indian-American Christians are almost evenly divided. However, Modi's popularity among the Indian-American community is considerably weaker in the US than in India. While he enjoyed a 19% net favourability in the IAAS survey, a Morning Consult poll conducted in India concurrently with our survey put this number at 55%. It is evident that the divisions that animate Indian society also manifest within the diaspora. In particular, Hindu Indian-Americans hold very different views on domestic

politics and policy in India compared to their non-Hindu counterparts, on average. Moreover, the second generation - those born in the US - are more liberal than their immigrant parents. These divisions foreshadow a more fractured, less homogeneous Indian-American community. The political polarisation infecting both India and the US appears to be seeping into the diaspora. Furthermore, polarisation among Indian-Americans has troubling implications not only for the community's role within US politics, but also for its role as the lynchpin of India's "soft power."

Airfare hike: Domestic air travel raises up to 30 percent in India

By Susmita Ghosh

Domestic air travel just became costlier in India with the new directive of the Civil Aviation Ministry. For the domestic flights, the fare will increase up to 30 percent, which can be a reason of headache to the frequent fliers. The government is also controlling the cap fare till March 31, 2021 in addition to their earlier decision for 80 percent of their domestic capacity to be deployed.

The Central Government imposed a lockdown resulting in the suspension of all scheduled commercial passenger flights on March 25 in the country to contain the spread of the coronavirus. Domestic flights resumed their operations from May 25, 2020. At this time, the central government had imposed a fixed cap for airline ticket price during the pinnacle of the covid-19 pandemic.

Indian airlines have been demanding for a long time for

their restriction in setting fares to be lifted. During an investor call, Ronojoy Dutta, CEO, IndiGo, stated, "Fares are lower than they should be at this point and again it is because we are not getting enough of our booking period,". He also added that adding that with rising cost and low occupancy it was hard for the airline to make money.

The government of India finally announced an increase in domestic airline fare on Thursday. According to them, the fares for air travel would be increased due to hike in fuel prices and the opening of the aviation market post-pandemic. The fuel price has crossed the US\$60 per barrel mark and it consists of 70 percent of the airline's cost. The increased lower and upper fare cap has been placed between 10-30 percent.

For two months, the government had temporarily suspended all the flight operations to contain

Covid-19. The hike in price could be beneficial for the domestic airline sector which suffered a huge loss for all four quarters of the pandemic. Most of the airlines have asked the government to eliminate the fare cap system and asked to let free-market economics decide the fair price. The hike in price resulted in almost 3 percent spike in shares of airlines and their shareholders like IndiGo and SpiceJet.

Earlier in the pandemic, the government had introduced 7 fare bands (A-G) for airline tickets which were based on the duration of the flight. According to the fare bands, maximum or minimum charges were levied. The government has also issued a new and updated fare band with the increase in fare for domestic travel from minimum Rs 2000 and maximum Rs 6000 to Rs 2200 and Rs 7800 respectively. In the highest fare band, the minimum and

maximum fares have been moved from Rs 6,500 and Rs 18,600 to Rs 7,200 and Rs 24,200.

The civil aviation minister, Hardeep Singh Puri informed at the Rajya Sabha that the price bands on domestic flights would be discontinued as soon as flight services reach levels that were before the pandemic started.

India's domestic air passage traffic is increasing monthly. It saw a 3.5 percent sequential growth in January with more than 7.6 million passengers travelling in a domestic route. The figure is still 41 percent less than that of the previous year. The extraordinary situation called for extraordinary measures. "The floor and the ceiling price on airfares were designed to ensure that airlines, in a situation of limited availability, did not charge an exorbitant price," Puri said.



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Why Indian celebrities bend to State power

The fear of retribution by State and non-State actors, even as commercial stakes are high, tilts the balance

Long before Akshay Kumar, there was Kishore Kumar. In 1975, soon after the Emergency was declared, Indira Gandhi's government was keen to get Bollywood to push her 20-point programme and asked the singer-actor to perform at a Youth Congress rally. Kumar refused. In a patently vindictive action, the then information and broadcasting minister, VC Shukla "ordered" a ban on the singer across All India Radio and Doordarshan. Kumar was not alone in the film industry in standing up to the Emergency. Others such as Dev Anand, Manoj Kumar and Shatrughan Sinha also refused to toe the line. Long before the present stars of Indian cricket, there was Bishan Singh Bedi. The legendary left arm spinner tangled with the cricket board authorities on several occasions, once even being banned for a test in 1974 for protesting against the meagre allowances given to the players on tour. Now in his 70s, Bedi has been a rebel without a pause - a perennial anti-establishment figure. So where are the Kumar and Bedi equivalents in today's

world? Why are today's film and cricketing superstars so unwilling to stand up to any form of executive power and instead resort to obsequious sycophancy, the latest example being the flood of near-identical tweets on farm laws? Those who have never said a word on hundreds of farmer suicides are suddenly expressing their concern over the kisan protests. But by being so obviously part of a central government-organised social media counterblast, in response to a single tweet on farm protests by artiste Rihanna, our iconic stars have reduced themselves to copy-paste cheerleaders, seemingly lacking a mind of their own. In a regime paranoid about image management, the hugely popular stars are pawns in a perception war, remote-controlled by an all-powerful Big State, any defiance of which could lead to unforeseen consequences.

It isn't as if this is entirely a post-2014 phenomenon. Controlling or at least co-opting popular culture icons has been a favourite pastime of every political party

in power. Only now, it is much more brazen in intent and execution.

When the State bestows patronage on its ideological fellow-travellers and ruthlessly targets its critics, the temptation to follow the leader is that much greater.

Fear of retribution is a key factor in pushing our celebrities to toe the official line. From opening up income tax files to lodging enforcement directorate inquiries, State agencies are routinely used to expose the soft underbelly of the rich and famous. The Rhea Chakraborty case last year is a classic example of how untrammelled State power can terrorise the film industry - the danger of a knock on the door from the Narcotics Control Bureau is omnipresent. Moreover, it isn't just the ruling political elites which are guilty of threat and intimidation. We now have self-styled vigilante groups, State-sponsored social media armies and even some citizens who act as big bullies, unleashing a deadly campaign of cyber abuse and violence. The common strand that unites these



forces is their strident espousal of a majoritarian nationalism that effectively criminalises even the slightest expression of dissent as anti-national. In Hollywood, stars such as a Meryl Streep who speak truth to power are celebrated; in India, they are censured.

Recall when, a few years ago, actors Shahrukh Khan and Aamir Khan were accused of speaking out on the rising culture of intolerance in society. The street protests against the stars were engineered by an array of groups aligned to the Hindutva ideology, all aiming to question the "patriotism" of the Khans, their surname making them particularly vulnerable in a climate of rising religious bigotry.

By threatening to boycott their films and coercing sponsors to withdraw their ads, the protesters were also consciously targeting the financial viability of these high-value brands. The stakes involved in commercial cinema are just too astronomical for most people to take a risk. This might at least partly explain why a top producer-director like Karan Johar had to personally apologise to a political figure like Raj Thackeray for the "hurt sentiments" of the Marathi mannos ahead of the release of one of his films. Ironically, while most of our A-list celebrities have chosen the path of least resistance, it is those on the fringes of the fame industry who are braver and bolder.

How tech can transform law enforcement



This will significantly increase the efficiency of our LEAs and, at the same time, drastically reduce the time taken to provide justice. It can be a win-win for all the key stakeholders

(News Agencies)- There is an urgent need for law enforcement agencies (LEAs) to adopt technology in their operations as it can act as a force multiplier. This is especially true in India where the police to population ratio is less than 150 per 100,000, whereas the United Nations recommends 222 police officials per 100,000 residents. But there are ways in which LEAs can use technology to increase their efficiency and

effectiveness. One, digitise citizen-facing services. Most citizens in India dread the idea of having to go to a police station. Technology can help make this interaction more pleasant. By providing digital access to the police, citizens can avail services from the comfort of their home. The Punjab Police has a citizen-facing portal, Saanjh, which provides online services for downloading first information reports and searching for stolen

vehicles and lost mobiles, among other services. These digital portals also provide an easy and transparent mechanism to the citizens to register their complaints, provide feedback and track their complaint status. Technology can also be used to provide senior police officials dashboard views for their areas of jurisdiction, identify trends, patterns, outliers and take corrective action.

In addition to digital portals, social media can be used by LEAs to reach out directly to citizens - providing information on traffic jams, how to protect against cybercrime, dispelling rumours, countering fake news. The social media interaction can be both "push" - alerts are sent

to citizens - or "pull" - citizens access the social media page/handle in order to get the desired information.

Two, use it for crime detection. Technology can effectively help get a digital footprint of the criminal. Mobile forensics can be used to retrieve critical information such as contacts, photos, SMS, video, email, web browsing history, location information and social networking messages. Call Detail Records (CDR) contain information about calls made and received, cell tower location, International Mobile Equipment Identity - a unique identifier for each mobile phone, and International Mobile Subscriber Identity - a unique identifier for each SIM. Due to the high usage

of mobile phones, it is difficult to analyse these records manually. CDR analysis tools can be used to identify call patterns, most frequently called numbers, geo-location, and help in tracking missing persons, lost mobiles, movement, and establish relationships between criminal associates.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be used to match fingerprints, facial images, analyse CCTV footage and recognise vehicle number plates. In order to detect false number plates, AI can also be used to recognise the make and model of the car and match it with the vehicle registered with that number plate.

India's small farmer finds a champion



PM Narendra Modi's speech, marked by bipartisanship, spelt out a great vision for India and Indian agriculture

has neither the ability to organise, nor the time to devote himself to political pursuits. Thankfully, India's small farmer has got a powerful spokesperson in the form of the PM.

That India's agriculture is riddled with many challenges is not hidden from anyone. Land holdings are shrinking, agri-technology is becoming obsolete, and farmers face exploitation at the hands of middlemen. To free the small farmer from these shackles, the government has combined an innovative approach with zero tolerance towards malpractices. PM Modi referred to modernising the long-standing mandis, while also complimenting efforts by various states towards improving agriculture systems. The unequivocal message - minimum support price (MSP) was there, is there and will remain - should answer all those who have spread canards about MSP. After all, it is this government that has

increased MSP to 1.5 times the cost of cultivation. Other initiatives, be it neem-coated urea or the modified crop insurance scheme, have touched the lives of small farmers the most. At the bedrock of good governance is listening and accommodating divergent views. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government has always shown utmost empathy and sensitivity towards the issues of the poor and the marginalised. This is why it initiated an unprecedented 11 rounds of talks with the farmers. At a time when egos and oneupmanship are rampant, it takes a big heart to offer to put the laws on hold for 18 months until all the issues are addressed. PM Modi is a leader who understands the pain of the farmers, and every step taken under his leadership will, undoubtedly, be in line with their best interests. To elaborate, as the PM underlined, there is a

need to widen the ambit of what we see as "improvements" in agriculture. At the base of it, if infrastructure, including roads, rail and air connectivity improves, farmers will be able to gain access to distant and diverse markets. The government's focus on allied sectors such as dairy and fisheries is aimed at generating additional revenue for the farmers, and giving them opportunities to showcase their innovations. Similarly, the PM's vision for water in every household too has its gains for the farmers.

Today, millions of small farmers need our attention. They are talented and hardworking. They do not need doles to keep them poor.

They need support to enable them to rise and contribute to the welfare of India. No less a leader than the PM speaking about them is noteworthy.

Words carry the power to shape the future. Not many statesmen can speak in a manner as powerful as Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi. His response to the debate on motion of thanks on the President's address pressed all the right buttons with people at this critical hour. Replete with hard facts, and with a sprinkle of humour and wit, his speech addressed apprehensions related to crucial issues such as the farm laws. His message to the nation was clear - this is India's moment under the sun and we must seize every opportunity for growth that lies ahead of us. It is time to re-

energise our inherent capabilities and rebuild our nation. It would be a colossal mistake to lose sight of the big vision for India, and so, our differences should not come in the way of this vision.

The most important aspect of the PM's speech was the elaborate explanation of the government's aim to empower small and marginal farmers through the three farm laws. In all discussions with regard to agriculture in India, this section is often forgotten. It is a well-known fact that, after all these years, the Green Revolution's gains have not trickled down to this section. India's small farmer

Use the Ladakh crisis as an opportunity

Civilians need to focus, laser-like, perhaps by creating a Defence Reforms Unit nested within the National Security Council, to push the military to adopt necessarily painful organisational reforms.

Crises, especially ones that do not end too badly, can be a good thing. India's democracy is full of such examples. For instance, the trauma of the Emergency discredited the appeal of authoritarianism among most Indians and the 1991 balance of payments crisis led to first-generation economic reforms. This also applies to our military experience. The 1962 defeat led to massive militarisation and helped achieve a more credible outcome in the 1965 war and a famous victory in the 1971 war. Similarly, the 1999 Kargil war resulted in significant, long overdue national security reforms. How might historians look back upon the current India-China border crisis and what can we take away from it?

But two caveats. First, this crisis was not of India's making as

revealed by the military's scramble in responding to Chinese troop deployments in May 2020. Distracted by the pandemic, the government took a while and eventually came up with an appropriate tit-for-tat manoeuvre in end-August. Second, the Indian military has just embarked on perhaps its most significant institutional reform, triggered by the prime minister's (PM)'s decision to create a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS). However, apart from speculative media stories, there has been no official document released by the first CDS, General Bipin Rawat. Commenting on unconfirmed reports, then, just becomes an exercise in punditry.

Yet, to the credit of the Indian Army, the senior leadership appears to be raising deeper questions. For instance, one of the

offensive strike corps, historically tasked to operate on the western border, is now being given a responsibility towards the north. Such "rebalancing," as Army Chief General MM Naravane, put it, was long overdue but raises more questions. Was a crisis necessary to bring about such a change? If the answer is yes, then there is an even more chilling prospect - what other skeletons lie buried, undiscovered, till the next crisis?

There also seems to greater awareness of the need to reform professional military education - the most-effective method to engineer an intellectual shift. Reportedly, this initiative has also come from the Army Chief and there are hectic consultations within the organisation. Laudable though these initiatives are, there are more systemic issues -



germane to the military's internal organisation - requiring urgent attention. For instance, one of biggest sources of concern is the pension bill. As defence authors Laxman Singh Behera and Vinay Kaushal point out, "Rise in the pension expenditure has a significant crowding out effect on stores and modernisation, two major components that determine nation's war-fighting ability." The current approach to this problem seems to be two-fold - a farcical three-year "Tour of Duty" to attract the young and an effort to prevent pensionable soldiers from leaving. Both represent a short-term "presentism" approach.

It is better to ask larger questions - why were the terms of the short service commission changed in 2006 and was that the best decision? Prior to 2006, under the terms of the short service scheme, officers served for five years and then opted to remain or leave immediately without pension.

This helped tap talent and avoid pension costs. However, from 2006, the length of service was increased from five to 10 years. Logically, officers would be reluctant to leave without pension after serving for 10 years and, instead, opt for 10 more years.

The global scrutiny of Indian democracy



International responses to the farm protests are a result of a growing perception that India is turning back on its democratic roots. The most effective way to counter this is through action

The farm protests - in opposition to the government's measures and the new laws to liberalise agricultural markets - have continued to intensify. After the shocking violence and vandalism on Republic Day, farm groups went into a huddle and it appeared that the protests would lose momentum. But when the Uttar Pradesh Police sought to disperse protesters from Ghazipur, at Delhi's borders, Bharatiya Kisan Union leader, Rakesh Tikait's resistance and emotive appeal led to a renewal of the agitation. The images of thousands of protesters, continuing to oppose the State for months, in a largely non-violent manner, lend themselves

to a captivating narrative and evoke solidarity. Even those who believe that the farmers are wrong in their demands or have been maximalist during negotiations cannot but help admire the tenacity and determination of this mass movement.

But when this image is coupled with images of what can be seen as a degree of State coercion - either through heavy police deployment or barricades or orders of internet shutdowns or first information reports against journalists or arrests of ground-based reporters - then the narrative of ordinary citizens fighting for their livelihood against an insensitive State gets

enhanced traction. This is the broad explanation for the range of international reactions to the farm protests. But this response cannot be understood in isolation.

Ever since Narendra Modi's impressive electoral victory in 2014, and even more so since his resounding triumph in the 2019 elections, there has been a story that has gained increased attention in the West. This is the story of India's perceived democratic backsliding. The overwhelming tone and nature of the international media's coverage of contentious domestic political issues reinforce a narrative that India is turning back on its democratic, secular, pluralist roots and its open and free society is no longer as open and as free. The under-representation and exclusion of minorities from the power structure of the ruling party; instances of hate speech by members of organisations broadly associated with the ideological worldview of the ruling

dispensation; and a set of laws and policies - from the effective abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir and the subsequent detention of leaders and crackdown on connectivity to the process to update the National Register of Citizens in Assam, which left out 1.9 million residents of the state, from the enactment of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the Shaheen Bagh protests to the Delhi riots - have all fed into this perception that India is sliding back from its constitutional roots. The recent international response to the farm protests has to be seen in this wider context, for in itself, the agitation may not have elicited a response except from Sikh members of the diaspora.

The government believes this narrative is unfair. After all, it is through the democratic route that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has come to power in two consecutive elections. It also

believes that this international criticism is a result of a campaign by domestic political rivals and activists who have been unable to mount an effective domestic opposition to the regime and thus seek support from elsewhere. Political managers in the BJP are convinced that, in this case, international criticism has little to do with the farm laws or the nature of agricultural markets or the direction of Indian economic reforms - but guided solely by an attempt to undermine Modi internationally and box the Indian State into a corner. This narrative, many in the government believe, is also being encouraged by India's geopolitical adversaries directly or indirectly.

The problem, however, for the government is that irrespective of what it sees as the flaws in the liberal international narrative on India, this narrative is becoming more entrenched.

6 Lessons From A Himalayan Tragedy - by Ramachandra Guha

On Sunday, a few hours after the news about the flash floods in Chamoli District hit our screens, I phoned a man who should be a household name but sadly is not. A leader of the Chipko movement, a thinker of originality and insight, a social reformer of courage and vision, he may be both our country's greatest environmentalist as well as the greatest living resident of Uttarakhand. Back in 1983, he had written a long essay in Hindi warning against the construction of hydel projects in the Himalaya. He repeated these warnings in the 1990s, and again in the 2000s, this time in essays published in English as well as in Hindi. Had the politicians of Uttarakhand, and of India, listened to him, this tragedy in the upper Alakananda valley may never have occurred at all. Now in his late 80s, Chandi Prasad Bhatt (to give our hero his name) has lived all his life in the region where the devastation

took place. He knows every village, and has walked along every river and stream in this part of Garhwal. I first met him in the summer of 1981 in the little town of Gopeshwar, just down the road - or down the river - from where this latest flood occurred. I have kept in touch with him ever since, seeking his counsel on environmental and social subjects. It was inevitable that, on hearing of what had happened in his locality, I would reach out to him for more information.

After I got off the phone with Bhatt-ji in Gopeshwar, I called the Nainital-based scholar Shekhar Pathak. Shekhar is, among other things, the editor of the journal Pahar, and the author of a magnificent recent history of the Chipko movement. A key section of this book deals with a Chipko protest in the village of Reni, when, with the menfolk all away, a group of peasant women led by Gaura Devi stopped a group of loggers

from felling a patch of forest. That protest occurred in the year 1974; now, 47 years later, the little hamlet of Reni was once more in the news, albeit for less uplifting reasons. No one knows more about the landscape and history of Uttarakhand than Shekhar Pathak, and to get a clearer sense of what had happened, I had to talk to him too.

Inspired by years of learning from Bhatt and Pathak, and drawing from my own research as well, this column suggests that there are six key lessons that the recent tragedy in Uttarakhand holds for us all:

First, that Uttarakhand is particularly prone to such dramatic and devastating events should have come as no surprise to anyone familiar with the recent history of the region. The Kedarnath floods of 2013 are still fresh in the memory of every Indian who watched them unfold on their TV screens. The horrific floods in the Bhagirathi in 1978 and in the



Alakananda in 1970 happened before the age of satellite television; but every Uttarakhandi knows about them too. The region has also been prone to serious earthquakes, as in Uttarkashi in 1991 and in Chamoli in 1999. Second, such disasters are as much man-made as they are acts of nature. An unusually heavy burst of rain, or the unpredictable behaviour of a glacier, or even an earthquake, would have far less damaging effects if the natural forests had been kept intact, if the roads had

been built with more care, if no dams had been designed or built, if the siting of homes and hotels had kept in mind the distinctive ecology of the Himalaya. Because carelessly-constructed roads and dams lead to large amounts of debris being dumped, hill rivers become more violent and turbulent. Because permissions to build hotels and buildings are given regardless of local needs and constraints, hillsides become weaker and more likely to collapse when threatened by storms and floods.

Mumbai ACB arrests traffic constable for accepting bribe



Mumbai Police's Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) on Wednesday nabbed a traffic police constable for allegedly accepting a bribe of Rs 300 from an auto-rickshaw driver in Thane.

(News Agencies)- Mumbai Police's Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) on Wednesday nabbed a traffic police constable for allegedly accepting a bribe of Rs 300 from an auto-rickshaw driver in Thane.

Constable Gokul Jhadkhande (52) had demanded Rs 400 from an auto driver to release auto which was towed away.

"On Tuesday we received a complaint from the owner of the auto-rickshaw. In his complaint, he said that the auto was towed and kept at the office of traffic branch. Constable

Jhadkhande is demanding Rs 400 to release the auto-rickshaw. The auto-rickshaw driver said that his financial condition is very bad and bribe is not acceptable whatever be the amount," a police official said.

The amount was brought down to Rs 300 and Jhadkhande was caught while accepting the money in a trap laid by the ACB, following the complaint.

Jhadkhande was subsequently arrested and booked under relevant provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act.

Bombay HC denies bail to two accused in cryptocurrency fraud case worth Rs 113 crore

Lakhanpal, who is absconding, started the cryptocurrency venture, Money Trade Coin (MTC), along with his aides.

(News Agencies)-The Bombay High Court on Monday rejected the bail application of two persons in connection with a fake cryptocurrency case in which over 15,810 investors were duped of Rs 113.10 crore through various schemes.

The accused, Sachin Shelar and Taha Kazi, who were arrested in 2018, told the court that they were only employees of the firms floated by prime accused Amit Lakhanpal, managing director of Flintstone Group of Companies. Lakhanpal, who is absconding, started the cryptocurrency venture, Money Trade Coin (MTC), along with his aides.

Opposing the bail, Thane police said they were directors of firms run by Lakhanpal. Rejecting the



bail application, a single-judge bench of Justice Sandeep K Shinde said, "Evidence collected by police suggests that both of them were active at all stages of

the fraud, right from floating schemes, developing websites, monitoring the rate of cryptocurrency, activating and blocking investor accounts and

collection of cash from different persons across the country and its appropriation."

"It is unlikely that they are not beneficiaries of the amount si-

phoned off from 82 bank accounts of companies," the court said.

The fraud came to light after an investor, Pravin Agarwal, lodged a complaint with police in 2018. He came in touch with the group when he attended a seminar organised by Lakhanpal on August 4, 2017, at Taj Mansingh, New Delhi, on cryptocurrency.

In the seminar, Agarwal alleged that Lakhanpal introduced himself as an official of the Finance Ministry and encouraged the attendees to invest in Money Trade Coin (MTC), promising high returns. Impressed by attractive investment scheme, Agarwal visited the office of Flintstone group in Thane and invested Rs 10 lakh. However, he never got his money back.

ED searches premises of Pune businessman Avinash Bhosle

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) conducted searches at residential premises and offices of Pune-based businessman Avinash Bhosle.

(News Agencies)-The Enforcement Directorate (ED) conducted searches at residential premises and offices of Pune-based businessman Avinash Bhosle.

The search, according to sources, were being conducted in related to a money laundering case registered by the agency.

Officials from Zone 2 of Enforcement Directorate conducted searches at the premises of Avinash Bhosle's residence and office in Pune and also at some places in Mumbai. Bhosle, who is said to have connections with various top leaders of several political parties, is father-in-law of Maharashtra minister and Congress leader Vishwajeet Kadam. Sources said that the money laundering case

being investigated by the agency was in connection with a land deal and development that had happened in Pune. Earlier, Bhosle and few others were being questioned by ED officials in connection with a FEMA (Foreign Exchange Management Act) registered with the Zone 2 of the agency. Bhosle runs the ABIL group which has developed some of the most prime commercial and residential properties in Pune and also in Mumbai.

ED officials had questioned Bhosle in connection with the FEMA case last year. Some more people had been summoned in the same case last month by the agency. Sources said that the search by ED was still going on till late night on Wednesday and could continue further.



Advertising executives in police custody over illegal hacking of trees in Mumbai



According to the police, the investigations till now suggest that the trees were cut to clear the view for hoardings

(News Agencies)-After a series of tweets by Minister Aditya Thackeray, Mumbai police swung into action arresting senior executives of outdoor advertising agencies responsible for illegal hacking of trees in South Mumbai.

Mumbai Police arrested two senior executives including the CEO of top outdoor advertising agencies for the illegal hacking of trees in South Mumbai last week. The police have now arrested six persons in the case and registered two FIRs.

The Gamdevi police on Tuesday

arrested Atul Ashar, CEO of Orion Advertisers for the illegal hacking of the Banyan tree at Girgaon Chowpatty. He was granted bail by the court on Wednesday. Another arrest in the case is of Rumi Filly Marawala, General Manager of Selvel Publicity, booked for the hacking of a tree at Malabar Hill near Jindal Mansion. Marawala was arrested on Wednesday by Malabar Hill police and has been remanded to police custody.

According to the police, they have collected evidence to prove connection between the arrested

accused and advertisement companies. "The trees were cut to clear the view for the hoardings that belonged to these firms on their instruction. The persons who were cutting the trees were doing it on the instance of these advertising companies. We have verified their Call Data Records (CDR). In fact the companies also made payments to the hackers by bank transfers and cheques. There is clear evidence to show that the trees were cut at the instance of the advertising companies," said Rajeev Sawant, Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP), Gamdevi Division. Earlier in the case, Gamdevi police arrested four persons who hacked the trees including a massive Banyan Tree at Girgaon Chowpatty. They were identified with the help of CCTV footage and arrested for

illegally hacking trees in South Mumbai. Compliant filed by BMC said that the accused posed as workers and hacked trees to clear the view for advertising hoardings. According to the police, the investigations till now suggest that the trees were cut to clear the view for hoardings at Tambe Chowk where the Banyan tree was located and at Malabar Hill for the same reason. "They have been booked under various sections of the Indian Penal Code and the Maharashtra Preservation of Trees Act, 1971. The four arrested last week, Sameer Quereshi, Shafiq Darji, Hiralal Darshan, and Mohammed Chinu are in judicial custody in the Gamdevi case and we will seek their police custody in the Malabar Hill case on Thursday," Sawant said. Tourism Minister Aaditya Thackeray is following

up on the development in the case, he tweeted on Wednesday. "With regards to the illegal hacking of the Banyan tree at Marine Drive, the accused, identified from CCTV footage have been arrested by the Mumbai Police. Further investigations are on and we will come down strongly on these culprits. The kingpins behind this act won't be spared. I commend the Mumbai Police and BMC for the swift action. But this is also a strong message that the guilty won't be spared for such acts." Last week, after local residents complained, the BMC filed a written complaint with the MRA Marg police, stating that the tree was hacked illegally to clear the view for commercial hoarding. The BMC had asked the police to book the advertising companies who hacked the tree.

ED arrests CMD of BRD group for duping investors by promising 18% return

William Verghese is being probed by the ED on charges that he persuaded people to invest money in various companies of the BRD Group by promising them 18 per cent returns per annum.

(News Agencies)- The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has arrested the Chief Managing Director of Kerala-based BRD Group, CC William Verghese from Trissur district. William Verghese was produced before a special court in Ernakulam which sent him to ED's custody for seven days.

Verghese is being investigated by the financial probe agency on charges that he persuaded people to invest money in various companies of the BRD Group by promising them 18 per cent returns per annum. These companies include BRD Finance Limited, BRD Securities Limited and BRD Motors Limited.

It was alleged by the complainants Verghese initially collected money as investments and later issued share certificates. The BRD Group did not pay dividends as promised and issued bonus shares with an intention of cheating them, alleged complainants. The Kerala Police has registered more than 140 FIRs against the BRD Group of com-

panies since 2018 on the basis of complaints from investors. During its investigation into the matter, the Enforcement Directorate collected documentary evidence while also recording the statements of various persons. The ED also searched premises of BRD Securities Ltd, BRD Finance Ltd and BRD Motors in Kerala's Kunnankulam and Kokkalai. The residence of BRD Group CMD William Verghese in Edappally, Ernakulam was also searched on January 29 of this year. Officials claim to have re-

covered several incriminating documents and records which were later seized. "It has been found that William Verghese formed various entities and collected money from various persons within India and also outside India. A number of properties were purchased by William Verghese and others in their respective names out of funds thus collected which represents the Proceeds of Crime (PoC)," said the ED. Officials of the financial probe agency claimed that



the PoC was generated by William Verghese. He is the "mastermind" in the whole process of

planning and execution with the help of other accused, they added.

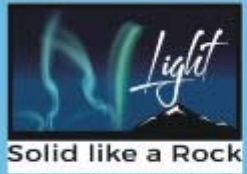
Mumbai court rejects pre-arrest bail to woman who sent fake police notice to bank

(News Agencies)- A Mumbai sessions court has rejected pre-arrest bail to a woman who allegedly sent fake police notice to a bank to procure statement of her estranged husband's account. The couple has been involved in a matrimonial dispute since 2012. While the family court had granted maintenance to their son and daughter, the woman did not get any such protection. The woman challenged the order of a

family court in the Bombay High Court. Her advocate filed an affidavit in the high court in February 2020 in which statements of bank accounts of her husband, his parents and their company with a private bank were annexed. The husband enquired about this from his bank and learnt that bank statements had been obtained by an assistant police inspector (API) Vilas Sutar attached to the Agripada police

station. The husband filed an RTI at the police station to find out about the case and learnt that the notice under Section 91 of Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) to the bank was never sent by the police station. The husband then registered a case at Azad Maidan police station against the woman, two of her lawyers and the policeman. In the case, the Bombay High Court asked police not to take any coercive steps

against the two advocates - Rizwan Merchant and Gayatri Gokhale. Vilas Sutar managed to get pre-arrest bail in the case, however, the court rejected the same for the woman while stating that prima-facie appears that the notice was prepared by co-accused API Sutar, the material shows that the purpose behind preparing forged and fabricated notice was to procure the bank statements for the benefit of the woman alone.



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Bangladesh sentences eight to death for publisher's murder

Eight hardliners sentenced to death for 2015 murder of secular publisher Faysal Arefin Dipon.

(News Agencies)- A court in Dhaka has sentenced eight people of a banned armed group to death in connection with the murder of a publisher in the capital six years ago.

Faysal Arefin Dipon, the publisher of Bangladesh's Jagriti Prokashoni, was hacked to death on October 31, 2015 in his own office in the city's Shahbagh area.

Among the "secular" books Dipon published was one by Avijit Roy, an American citizen of Bangladeshi origin who was murdered in a similar manner in February that year.

Both the murders were carried out by members of Ansar al-Islam - a hardline group that was banned by the Bangladesh government in May 2015.

Officials say Ansar al-Islam is a local affiliate of al-Qaeda group. Bangladesh witnessed a wave of violence between 2013 and 2016 targeting secular activists, bloggers and atheist writers. In 2015 alone, five bloggers and one

publisher were killed. In recent years, the government has set up two major anti-terrorism police units to crack down on Islamist groups.

More than 100 suspected Islamists have been killed in anti-terror raids across the country and hundreds arrested.

'Enemy of society and state'

On Wednesday, Judge Md Majibur Rahman of Dhaka's special anti-terrorism tribunal

gave the verdict in the presence of six of the eight accused in a packed courtroom.

Tight security was imposed in the court area ahead of the verdict.

Those sentenced to death are sacked army officer Major Ziaul Haque, Moinul Hasan Shamim, Md Abdus Sabur, Khairul Islam, Md Abu Siddique Sohel, Md Mozammel Hossain Saimon, Md Sheikh Abdullah, and Akram Hossain alias Hasib.

Among these convicted, Major Haque and Hossain alias Hasib are absconding "Those who killed a person for publishing books are the enemy of society and state," Judge Rahman said while reading out the verdict.

"If the criminals involved in this heinous act survive, other members of Ansar al-Islam will be motivated to commit such crimes," he said, adding that only a death penalty will "ensure

justice and it will be an exemplary punishment".

Defence lawyer Md Khairul Islam told Al Jazeera the verdict was given without any statement from a primary witness.

"It was given based on confessional statements which we believe had been taken forcefully," he said, adding that he will appeal against the verdict in a higher court.

UN calls for Bangladesh army probe after Al Jazeera investigation

(News Agencies)- The United Nations is calling for a full investigation into evidence of corruption and illegality involving the Bangladesh army, which was exposed during an investigation released by Al Jazeera on Monday. The corruption involves Bangladesh's Chief of Army Staff, General Aziz Ahmed, who is due to meet senior UN officials in New York next

week. In All the Prime Minister's Men, Al Jazeera's Investigative Unit revealed that Bangladesh's military purchased sophisticated and highly intrusive mobile phone surveillance equipment from Israel, which Bangladesh military commanders claimed was "for one of the Army Contingents due to be deployed in the UN Peacekeeping Mission". A spokesperson for the

UN said that this was not the case. "Such equipment has not been deployed with Bangladeshi contingents in United Nations peacekeeping operations," the UN spokesperson told Al Jazeera.

"We are aware of the reporting by Al Jazeera Investigations concerning allegations of corruption against senior officials in Bangladesh and the press release issued by the

Ministry of Defence of Bangladesh. The allegation of corruption is a serious matter that should be investigated by the relevant authorities."

Bangladesh is the largest overall contributor of uniformed personnel to UN Peacekeeping missions, with more than 6,800 presently deployed in peacekeeping operations around the world. IMSI-catchers

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Pullback raises hope but India set to keep close eye on China

(News Agencies)- The limited withdrawal of frontline troops by the Indian and Chinese armies from one of the key frictions points on the contested Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh on Wednesday has turned the spotlight on how the broader disengagement plan will unfold in other flashpoints where rival soldiers are deployed eyeball-to-eyeball and where previous attempts to reduce military tensions have failed. The mutual pulling back of tanks and infantry combat vehicles from heights on the southern bank of Pangong Tso a fortnight after military commanders of the two armies agreed on January 24 to push for early disengagement has raised hopes of a solution to the 10-month military standoff. This is the first significant movement in negotiations to ease tensions in at least eight months -- disengagement in Galwan valley took place in early July 2020 but it did not progress

in other areas. According to officials and experts monitoring the border row, India will keep a wary eye on the developments taking place in the area as the process unfolds.



PATROLLING RIGHTS IN DEPSANG AND FINGER AREA
The Chinese People's Liberation Army's (PLA) aggressive forward deployments in the eastern Ladakh theatre have hindered the Indian Army's patrolling patterns in several areas including Depsang, Finger Area on the northern bank of Pangong Tso, Gogra and Kongka La. Regaining access to several areas that are now difficult to reach due to actions by the Chinese army along LAC is

critical, experts said. "On the face of it, the disengagement is a positive step. I think we will have to wait for details of the process, whether it includes all military presence or only heavy equipment and aspects such as future patrolling pattern in vacated areas. It is hoped that this is a part of a more comprehensive agreement covering all areas in Ladakh," said former Northern Army commander Lieutenant General DS Hooda (retired). PLA's deployments in forward areas in Depsang have hindered access of Indian soldiers to routes including the ones leading to Patrolling Points (PP) 10, 11, 11-A, 12 and 13. Also, before PLA grabbed positions on Finger 4, the Indian Army would patrol right up to Finger 8, which New Delhi considers within Indian territory.

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Pakistan commutes death sentence for 2 mentally ill convicts

(News Agencies)-In a landmark ruling, Pakistan's top court on Wednesday commuted the death sentences of two mentally ill prisoners who have spent decades on death row, the first such ruling in this conservative Muslim-majority nation.

The decision by the Supreme Court was quickly hailed by Justice Project Pakistan, a rights group that has fought an extensive, years-long legal battle for the two inmates.

One of the two prisoners whose sentence was commuted, Kanizan Bibi, has spent 30 years on death row. She was 16 when she was charged with murdering her employer's wife and five children. The police said she was having an affair with her employer, who was also arrested and later hanged. She was diagnosed with schizophrenia in 2000.

The second prisoner on death row whose sentence was commuted, Imad Ali, 55, was convicted of murdering a religious scholar in 2001. He was diagnosed with schizophrenia in 2008. In 2016,

Pakistan's Supreme Court halted the execution of Ali, just days before he was to be hanged.

"Because of certain misconceptions, the implications of mental illness are overlooked and the vulnerability or disability that it causes is not given due attention," Judge Manzoor Ahmad Malik said in his opening remarks Wednesday before a five-member panel of the court. Pakistan in 2008 ratified an international convention that prohibit the execution of mentally ill prisoners. Since then, only one mentally ill prisoner was executed, Muneer Hussain. He was hanged in April 2015 despite having had a history of mental illnesses, according to the rights group. Last year, with the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic and the steep rise in COVID-19 cases in Pakistan's crowded jails, the Supreme Court of Pakistan agreed to release some mentally ill and disabled prisoners to ease conditions, but only those whose sentences were less than three years.

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After Rihanna and Greta, Trevor Noah's 'The Daily Show' brings farm stir back in international spotlight

(News Agencies)- The farmers' protest that has been going on at Delhi borders for over two months has once again managed to grab international media's focus after making it to the popular American satirical news programme 'The Daily Show' hosted by comedian Trevor Noah.

The ongoing farmers' movement caught international media's attention and stirred a major political controversy in India as well after renowned global figures Rihanna and Greta Thunberg tweeted in support of the protesting farmers.

The farmers' protest has now featured in the latest edition of The Daily Show.

An 8-minute-long clip on the farmers' protest in India was covered in The Daily Show's 'If you don't know, now you know' segment. The clip, as the segment name clearly indicates, is an explainer of the farmers' protest against Centre's three agricultural laws for the international audiences. "We're talking about India because, in a year of global protests, they're [India] in the midst of the biggest one anywhere," comedian and host Trevor Noah says as the segment



begins. "The government tried to change the decades-old agriculture laws and that's when the manure hit the fan," Noah further says.

The segment also highlights the farmers' fear that they will lose MSP with the push for privatisation, however, it does not feature any government statement on the farm issue.

"That sounds like a rough situation for the farmers. And, if the last year has told us anything, it is that we cannot take farmers for granted. Nowhere in the world. We need farmers," Trevor Noah says after the segment addresses farmers' fears over the farm laws. The blocked borders,

jammed highways, the Red Fort incident of January 26, the violence etc, find mention in the segment

"Farmers are the same people who wait 5 months to grow an eggplant. An eggplant! I am not even patient enough to find it in the emoji," Trevor Noah says praising farmers' "determination" after the segment features an interview of a protesting farmer who says they will wait for four years and even more till their demands are met.

New Zealand, Australia on tsunami alert after 7.7 magnitude quake in Pacific

(News Agencies)- New Zealand authorities early on Thursday urged residents along its northern coast to avoid beaches and shore areas after a strong earthquake struck southeast of the loyalty Islands in the Pacific.

The New Zealand National Emergency Management

shore," the agency said in a statement.

Meanwhile, Australia's Bureau of Meteorology said there was a tsunami threat to offshore Australian islands and territories.

The European Mediterranean Seismological Centre (EMSC)

said the 7.7 magnitude quake's epicentre was 417 km (258 miles) east of Tadine, New Caledonia, and was at a depth of 10 km (6.2 miles).

The quake, which was upgraded from an earlier magnitude



Agency said people should get out of the water, off beaches and away from harbours, rivers and estuaries in areas from Ahipara to Bay of islands, Great Barrier Island and from Matata to Tolaga Bay.

"We expect New Zealand coastal areas to experience strong and unusual currents and unpredictable surges at the

of 7.2, followed at least three other tremors in the region with magnitudes ranging from 5.7 to 6.1 in a span of just over an hour.

The US Tsunami Warning System said a tsunami watch was in effect for American Samoa and that there was potential for tsunamis in other regions including Vanuatu, Fiji and New Zealand.

NYC: STOP THE SPREAD OF CORONAVIRUS!

New Yorkers working together can slow the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19) in New York City.



PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS

- Wash your hands with soap and water often.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or sleeve when sneezing or coughing.
- Do not touch your face with unwashed hands.
- Do not shake hands. Instead wave or elbow bump.
- Monitor your health more closely than usual for cold or flu symptoms.



STAY HOME IF SICK

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



PROTECT THE MOST VULNERABLE

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



REDUCE OVERCROWDING

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- Stagger work hours, starting earlier or later.
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- If the train is too packed, wait for the next one.

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Saudi women's rights activist Loujain al-Hathloul released from prison



(News Agencies)-The prominent Saudi dissident and women's rights activist Loujain al-Hathloul has been released from prison after 1,001 days in custody. Following a concerted campaign by her relatives and

global rights groups, Hathloul was granted probation by a judge in Riyadh and released to her family on Wednesday afternoon. Her sister Lina published a photo of a smiling Loujain on Twitter early evening

Riyadh time - the first image of the most celebrated political prisoner in the Kingdom since she was detained almost three years ago. "Loujain is at home !!!!!", the accompanying message said.

Another sister, Alia, said in a separate post that Hathloul was at their parents' home in Saudi Arabia, adding "this is the best day of my life". It is understood that the terms of Hathloul's probation prevent her from discussing her ordeal in prison. She is banned from leaving Saudi Arabia, and has a suspended sentence looming if she breaks the terms of her release.

"Loujain's years-long imprisonment has ended, but

she is not free," said Adam Coogee, the deputy director for the Middle East at Human Rights Watch. "Banned from travel and coerced into silence by a suspended sentence hanging over her, Loujain's ordeal remains a flagrant miscarriage of justice."

Hathloul, 31, had been a leading campaigner for the right for women to drive in Saudi Arabia before a change in the law in late 2017. Calls for her release by her family had been repeatedly championed by human rights groups and foreign governments. However, as late as December last year she was sentenced to five years and eight months behind bars and

accused of pushing a foreign agenda and using the internet to harm public order.

The sentence dashed hopes of an imminent release and intensified criticism of the heir to the Saudi throne, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who has been the driving force behind widespread social changes in the Kingdom as well as a ruthless crackdown on dissent. Hathloul launched hunger strikes to protest against her imprisonment and joined other female activists in telling Saudi judges that she was tortured and sexually assaulted by masked men during interrogations.

Larry Flynt, publisher of Hustler magazine, dies aged 78

(News Agencies)- Larry Flynt Jr, the publisher of Hustler magazine who used his pornography empire and flair for the outrageous to push the limits of free speech, has died at the age of 78, the Washington Post reported on Wednesday.

The newspaper said Flynt's brother Jimmy had confirmed his death but did not cite a specific cause. Flynt suffered from a variety of health problems since a 1978 assassination attempt that left him paraplegic.

Flynt loved to aggravate his critics with stunts such as wearing a diaper made from an American flag to court and was involved in a number of legal battles.

In the most famous, the US supreme court ruled in favor of Flynt in a libel battle with the evangelist Jerry Falwell. Falwell

sued for \$50m over a fake ad published in Hustler, which depicted Falwell saying his first sexual encounter had been with his mother, but the supreme court ultimately ruled the ad was a parody and protected by free speech. In his heyday, Flynt lived a life that could have made Caligula blush. He wrote in his autobiography that his first sexual experience was with a chicken and told of having sex every four or five hours during a workday. After he was paralyzed, Flynt had penile implant surgery so he could continue to have sex.

Flynt created a business with an estimated turnover of \$150m at one point. As magazine circulation slipped, he stayed ahead of trends by investing in adult-oriented television channels, a casino, film

distribution and merchandise. He said he never objected to being labeled a smut peddler as long as he was considered a first amendment crusader, too.

"Just because I publish pornography does not mean that I am not concerned about the social ills that all of us are," he once told an interviewer.

Flynt was often in legal trouble, fighting obscenity charges or lawsuits, and he often turned courtroom appearances into spectacles. His obscene outbursts once prompted his own lawyer to ask a judge to have Flynt bound and gagged. Born in 1942, Flynt grew up in poverty in Kentucky and Indiana and dropped out of school after the eighth grade. After stints in the armed forces and at a General Motors plant, he and his brother



opened the Hustler Club in Dayton, Ohio, in 1968. By 1973 it had grown to a string of strip clubs across the state and Flynt put out a newsletter to promote them. That newsletter evolved into Hustler magazine, his flagship publication, which came to be infamous for featuring explicit photos that made its competitor

Playboy seem mild. Virtually nothing was off limits on Hustler's pages and Flynt made a point of publishing photos of women's genitalia. At its peak, Hustler reportedly had a circulation of 3m. Larry Flynt Publications also put out other porn magazines, as well as movies and mainstream magazines.

More than 11 million people could lose pandemic unemployment benefits if Congress doesn't act soon

(News Agencies)- An estimated 11.4 million workers will lose their unemployment benefits between mid-March and mid-April unless Congress passes its next coronavirus relief package in coming weeks, a new study has found. Out-of-work Americans will start running out of Pandemic Unemployment Assistance and Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation benefits next month. Some 4 million people will see their benefits expire in mid-March, while the payments of

another 7.3 million folks will lapse over the following four weeks, according to a report from The Century Foundation, released Wednesday.

Democratic lawmakers began unveiling their next relief legislation this week, advancing President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion proposal. The bill calls for extending the unemployment programs -- as well as providing a \$400 federal weekly boost to payments -- through August 29. The President's plan called for continuing benefits through the

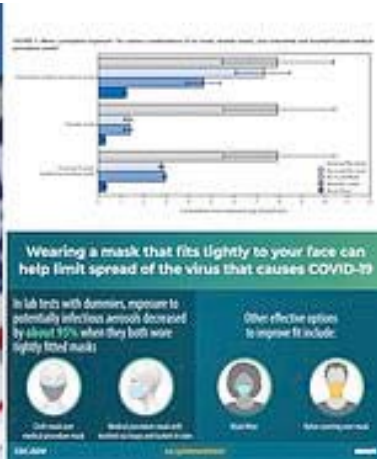
end of September. The House Ways and Means Committee is considering the legislation on Wednesday.

Programs created by the CARES act - The two temporary federal programs were created in Congress' \$2 trillion relief package last March and were extended by 11 weeks in the \$900 billion relief deal passed in December. The former provides benefits to freelancers, gig workers, independent contractors and certain people affected by the pandemic, while the latter

lengthens the duration of payments for those in the traditional state unemployment system. The December package also provides an additional \$300 a week in federal payments through mid-March. But because Congress and former President Donald Trump waited until the end of the year to act, more than \$17 billion in jobless benefits for January were delayed as states reprogrammed the provisions into their computer systems. "There's no reason for Congress to wait until the last minute to

extend these critical benefits, and risk a lapse in aid," wrote Andrew Stettner, senior fellow at the foundation, noting that lawmakers should act two to four weeks ahead of the mid-March deadline to give state unemployment agencies time to process the new rules. The looming expiration of benefits comes as the nation's jobs recovery remains rocky. Only 49,000 jobs were added in January, and the US is still down nearly 10 million jobs since before the pandemic.

Two masks ARE better than one: CDC study shows a cloth covering over a surgical one blocks 92.5% of infectious particles - but officials are NOT recommending doubling up



efficacy. 'These experimental data reinforce CDC's prior guidance that everyone 2 years of age or older should wear a mask when in public and around others in the home not living with you,' said Dr Rochelle Walensky, CDC director.

'We continue to recommend that masks should have two or more layers, completely cover your nose and mouth, and fit snugly against your nose and the sides of your face.'

And President Biden's press secretary Jen Psaki said Tuesday that the White House is not advising it - despite Biden's own habit of wearing two masks - but is considering 'a range of options' to get face coverings to Americans.

Her comments came after White House chief of staff Ron Klain said the Biden administration was considering an initiative to send masks to every American

household - an plan first suggested by the Trump administration, but abandoned. The White House now has 'a range of options under consideration on to how to ensure that people who need masks the most, people who need this type of protection the most, receive it, but no decision has been no final decision has been made,' Psaki said.

She added that the CDC's new report was not a formal recommendation, but additional findings that reiterate existing mask guidance.

'It doesn't actually issue definitive guidance on one mask versus two mask. Obviously if that's something they were to issue as official guidance, we listened to our health and medical experts,' Psaki said.

The CDC researchers found that wearing one mask - surgical or cloth - blocked around 40

percent of the particles coming toward the head that was breathing in.

When a cloth mask was worn on top of a surgical mask, about 80 percent were blocked from reaching the unmasked receiver. When both the exhaling and inhaling heads were double-masked, more than 95 percent of the particles were blocked, said the CDC's Dr John Brooks. Still, for now, health authorities acknowledge they have their hands full just trying to get more people to wear one mask and wear it correctly.

'The first challenge is to get as many as people as possible masking. And then for those that do mask, to help them get the best benefit out of that mask,' Brooks said.

Brooks said agency officials heard about people donning two masks and wanted to evaluate whether it was beneficial.

(News Agencies)- US government researchers found that two masks are better than one in slowing coronavirus spread, but health officials stopped short of recommending that everyone double up.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Wednesday reported the results of a lab experiment that spaced two artificial heads six feet from each other and checked to see how many coronavirus-sized particles

spewed by one were inhaled by the other.

They found that wearing two masks, like one cloth mask over a disposable surgical mask, can block up to 92.5 percent of infectious particles from escaping into the air.

But the CDC stopped short of recommending that Americans start doubling up their masks, and noted that other methods, like tying up the strings of a surgical mask can improve fit and

Man in far-right militant group joined Capitol mob after appearing with Trump ally Roger Stone

(News Agencies)-An Oath Keeper who appeared to be providing security for political operative Roger Stone on January 6 later joined an angry mob outside the Capitol, according to video and images reviewed by CNN and four sources who confirmed his identity.

Hours after being seen with Stone outside a Washington hotel, Roberto Minuta was photographed on steps at the eastern side of the Capitol wearing goggles and other equipment. Video shows Minuta pointing and yelling at police next to other individuals wearing logos associated with the Oath



Keepers, an anti-government, far-right militant group.

Two videos show a man wearing goggles and clothing identical to that of Minuta inside the Capitol during the riots.

Someone who answered the phone at Minuta's tattoo shop

declined to comment to CNN and hung up. Minuta's wife told ABC News that Minuta had not entered the Capitol, but she confirmed he was "another patriot" outside the building "standing up for freedom." Minuta has not been charged

with a crime. Before the Capitol incident, Minuta flanked Stone outside a hotel, as shown in a video first reported by ABC News. He and other men appeared to be serving as bodyguards as Stone greeted his supporters and took pictures with them.

Minuta had also walked alongside former national security adviser Michael Flynn at a rally in Washington on December 12 and was interviewed by Alex Jones for his InfoWars program in a video posted on January 19, 2020, before a gun-rights rally in Virginia. Minuta has previously received support from the leader

of the Oath Keepers, Stewart Rhodes. Last May, when Minuta decided to reopen the tattoo parlor he runs in Newburgh, New York, in defiance of the governor's Covid-19-related order to close nonessential businesses, Rhodes called on all Oath Keepers members within driving distance to attend a rally at Minuta's shop.

"Anytime a patriot stands up in defense of liberty, we need to be standing right there with him, shoulder-to-shoulder," Rhodes said in a statement about the planned rally posted on the Oath Keepers website.

Stanford Children's Hospital pediatrician, 33, is arrested in 'pedophile sting after showing up to meet an underage girl he'd sent porn to' and being met by cops instead

(News Agencies)- A pediatrician at Stanford Children's Hospital has been arrested after trying to arrange a date with police officers who were posing as an underage girl, and sending them explicit photos.

Dylan O'Connor, 33, was arrested after arranging to meet up with the girl for sex in Redwood City, California, police said. He had also sent her explicit

photographs, they said. It's unclear if they were of him or someone else, but the cops said they were 'pornographic'.

He was taken into custody on charges of sending harmful material to a juvenile and traveling to meet a minor for lewd purposes, which are both felonies. Redwood City Police started investigating him after receiving a tip from the San Jose

Police Department about O'Connor. The officers posed online as the girl and told him she was underage, but he still arranged to meet them for sex, they said. On Friday, O'Connor drove to an address where he'd arranged to meet the girl but was instead greeted by police officers and arrested immediately.

His bio has been removed from Stanford Children Hospital's



website. In a statement, a spokesman said he'd been barred from his job.

'Upon learning of Dr. O'Connor's arrest, Stanford immediately placed him on unpaid

administrative leave and relieved him of all duties.

'These are serious criminal charges, which we understand are still under investigation by law enforcement, so we are unable to comment further at this time,' a spokesman said.

The police officers also raided his home. They are now looking for other potential victims, they said. It's unclear if O'Connor is married. Public records list his address as a three-bedroom home in Redwood City worth around \$2 million.

100-year-old former Nazi concentration camp guard charged with Holocaust atrocities

(News Agencies)- German prosecutors have charged a 100-year-old former SS concentration camp guard with aiding and abetting the murder of 3,518 people.

The man is charged with "knowingly and willfully" aiding and abetting the murder of prisoners at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in Oranienburg, north of Berlin, from January 1942 to February 1945, according to the prosecutor's office in Neuruppin, Brandenburg. The man's name has not been released, in accordance with Germany's privacy laws.

The charges include involvement in the shooting of Soviet prisoners of war in 1942, and aiding and abetting the murder of prisoners through the use of

the poison gas Zyklon B, as well as other shootings and the killing of prisoners by creating and maintaining hostile conditions in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp.

Sachsenhausen was established in 1936. Of the roughly 200,000 prisoners who passed through it, around 100,000 are thought to have died there. During World War II, the camp's inmate population fluctuated between about 11,000 and 48,000 people. The prosecution considers the man fit to stand trial despite his advanced age, Cyril Klement, the Neuruppin court's senior prosecutor, told CNN.

Klement told CNN that the Neuruppin Regional Court consulted with a forensic psychiatrist and found the man

able to attend the trial, though only for a few hours a day, with breaks.

The court is now considering whether to go ahead with the trial. The defendant first has the opportunity to respond to the indictment.

German prosecutors are investigating several other cases connected to the concentration camps of Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, Mauthausen and Stutthof, according to the Central Office for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes.

Just last week, a former secretary from the Stutthof concentration camp was charged with complicity in the murders of 10,000 people. Prosecutors in Itzehoe did not name the woman but said in a statement that they



charged her with "aiding and abetting murder in more than 10,000 cases," as well as complicity in attempted murder. Last year, former concentration camp guard Bruno D. was given a two-year suspended sentence by the Hamburg Regional Court. He was proven to have worked as an SS guard at Stutthof and,

in the court's view, aided and abetted the murder of 5,232 people there.

An estimated 6 million Jewish people were killed in Nazi concentration camps during World War II. Also killed were hundreds of thousands of Roma people and people with physical or learning disabilities.

Death sentence of Saudi man jailed as a teen for anti-government protests is commuted

(News Agencies)- A man who was arrested and sentenced to death for taking part in anti-government protests as a teen in Saudi Arabia has had his sentence commuted, his father told CNN Sunday.

Ali al-Nimr's sentence was reduced to 10 years in jail by the Specialized Criminal Court on Sunday, according to human rights group Reprieve.

His father, Mohammed al-Nimr, who attended the hearing in Riyadh, said his son, now 26, should be released in eight or nine months after having already spent more than nine years "of his youth and part of his

childhood" in prison. The nephew of the executed firebrand cleric Nimr al-Nimr, Ali al-Nimr was arrested in 2012 at the age of 17 for taking part in protests calling for social and political reforms in Saudi Arabia's restive Qatif province. He was given a death sentence.

A court later convicted him of charges including belonging to a terror cell, attacking police with Molotov cocktails, incitement and stoking sectarianism, according to state media.

In 2015, CNN reported his final appeal had been rejected and he faced beheading, along with the additional, rarer punishment of

"crucifixion," which would see his body placed on public display as a warning to others.

His sentence was commuted after Saudi Arabia announced last April that as part of a royal decree it would abolish the death penalty for people who committed crimes as minors.

Anyone who received a death sentence after being convicted of crimes they committed as a minor would receive a prison sentence of no longer than 10 years in a juvenile detention facility, according to a statement from the state-backed Human Rights Commission (HRC) at the time. "My family and I are happy.



I hope all those arrested in my country and elsewhere (will) be released," his father told CNN after Sunday's ruling. However, he explained he wished his son had been acquitted by the judges "because he is actually

innocent." "His health is good, but he has been in prison for more than nine years. He spent more than seven years with the threat of execution hanging over his head every day, every hour and every minute.

New Zealand parliament drops tie requirement after Mori lawmaker ejected for refusing to wear one



(News Agencies)-New Zealand's parliament has dropped its requirement that male members wear neckties,

after a M?ori leader was ejected earlier this week for refusing to wear one in the chamber. Rawiri Waititi, 40, argued that forcing

him to a Western dress code was a breach of his rights and an attempt to suppress indigenous culture. Instead, on Tuesday he arrived wearing a taonga, a Mori greenstone pendant.

Speaker Trevor Mallard twice prevented Waititi from asking questions in the debating chamber on Tuesday, insisting that lawmakers could only ask a question if they were wearing a tie. When Waititi continued with his question after being stopped a second time, Mallard ordered

him to leave. "It's not about ties, it's about cultural identity, mate," Waititi said as he exited the chamber.

The incident kicked off a debate about colonialism in New Zealand, and sparked outrage from around the world with #no2tie soon trending on Twitter. By Wednesday, Mallard had announced that the parliament was scrapping the tie requirement. "A meeting of the committee held tonight discussed this and heard a submission from Te Paati M?ori.

The committee did not reach a consensus but the majority of the committee was in favour of removing a requirement for ties to be part of 'appropriate business attire' for males," he wrote on Twitter.

"As Speaker, I am guided by the committee's discussion and decision, and therefore ties will no longer be considered required as part of 'appropriate business attire'. I acknowledge those who felt this was an important issue worthy of further consideration."



Natural catastrophe or man-made disaster?

Not all natural catastrophes are the work of fate – some are man-made. However, the distinction is not always straightforward, particularly in the case of floods, landslides or wildfires.

Natural catastrophes can cause immense economic and human losses. Floods, storms, earthquakes, droughts, forest fires and volcanic eruptions are among the most devastating types of natural catastrophe. But some disasters are man-made. These include explosions, major fires, aviation, shipping and railway accidents, and the release of toxic substances into the environment. However, the distinction between natural and man-made catastrophes is not always as clear cut as you might think. Some events are wrongly assumed to be natural catastrophes, as the following examples show.

Landslide at the Vajont Dam
On 9 October 1963 in the Italian Alps, 270 million cubic metres of rock and earth collapsed from the side of Monte Toc into the reservoir below, triggering a 150 metre tsunami which overtopped the dam. 25 million cubic metres of water rushed through the narrow canyon towards the village of Longarone at the bottom. This village and four others were almost completely destroyed and nearly 2,000 people were killed. The 262 m high concrete dam withstood the wave and still stands today

virtually unscathed. Construction of the dam had been completed in 1960. During the filling process in 1962, the adjacent hillside began to move. Filling was immediately halted and the water level lowered. This seemed to work and the mountainside stopped moving. In April 1963, the filling of the basin was resumed – until the side of the mountain suddenly collapsed. Normally, a landslide into a lake and the resultant tsunami are entirely natural processes. However, the Vajont disaster was clearly a result of the filling of the basin destabilizing the mountainside. Without the dam, the mountain would not have started to slide and even if it had, there would have been no flood wave.

Dam breach in Tesero
Two mine-tailing basins were located near Tesero in the Trento region of Italy. The 34 m high dam of the upper basin collapsed on 19 July 1985. A torrent of debris and mud poured into the lower basin, causing its dam to fail as well. A 200,000 cubic metre mudflow rushed through the Stava valley at high speed, burying 268 people. Some databases list the event as a flood disaster. Yet the disaster was not due to extreme precipitation. The dam

had been constructed to very low safety standards and was known to constitute a high risk. The collapse is believed to have been caused by a poorly installed drainage pipe.

In 2015, devastating forest fires raged across parts of Indonesia. Weather conditions there and in large parts of the world were heavily influenced by the climate phenomenon known as El Niño. Conditions were especially dry in the western Pacific region. In Indonesia, fires ravaged forests and bushland over tens of thousands of square kilometres. A dense mantle of haze covered large parts of Southeast Asia, in some cases for months on end. The consequences were dire: people had serious health problems, airports and schools had to be closed and public life suffered in general. Economic losses amounted to billions. Property losses alone are likely to exceed a billion US dollars. Yet it would be too simple to attribute this catastrophe exclusively to the El Niño phenomenon. The fires were

started deliberately – to clear the forest. Due to the extremely dry conditions, however, the actual area burned was many times larger than originally intended. The catastrophe was therefore caused by a combination of man and nature. **Landslide in Shenzhen** On 20 December 2015, a massive landslide in southern China destroyed 14 factory buildings and more than a dozen office and residential buildings. Sludge and debris some six metres deep buried parts of the Hengtai industrial

area on the edge of the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone. Around 70 people were killed. According to the authorities, an artificial dump of excavated soil and rubble had been brought down by heavy rains. The debris had evidently been piled up too high and too steeply and over the years had grown to a height of over 100 metres without the authorities taking any action. Even if heavy rains ultimately triggered the disaster, it was clearly a man-made incident.



2 powerful undersea earthquakes hit north of New Zealand and near western Indonesia

A powerful undersea earthquake has struck north of New Zealand, prompting a tsunami watch in the region. The U.S. Geological Agency said the magnitude 7.7 quake hit Wednesday evening. It was centered at a depth of 6 miles southeast of the Loyalty Islands, it said. It was not expected to cause significant damage or fatalities on land. The U.S. Tsunami Warning Center issued tsunami watches for New Zealand, Fiji, Vanuatu and other Pacific islands. The region is prone to earthquakes because it sits along the Pacific "Ring of Fire," a horseshoe-shaped series of seismic fault lines around the ocean. Meanwhile, a strong undersea earthquake shook western Indonesia

on Wednesday, but no injuries were immediately reported. The U.S. Geological Survey said the magnitude 6.2 quake struck at a depth of 6 miles and was centered 135 miles south-southwest of Bengkulu city in Bengkulu province on the southwestern side of Sumatra island. No tsunami warning was issued by the Indonesian Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics Agency and no casualties were immediately reported. Indonesia, a vast archipelago of 271 million people, is frequently struck by earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and tsunamis because of its location on the "Ring of Fire," an arc of volcanoes and fault lines in the Pacific Basin.

Threat of damage from large South Pacific earthquake eases



7.7 magnitude quake struck just after midnight on Thursday about 415km east of Vao in New Caledonia at a depth of 10km.

A powerful 7.7 magnitude undersea earthquake struck the South Pacific on Thursday, triggering tsunami warnings in the region that were later cancelled, with no immediate reports of damage.

The European Mediterranean Seismological Centre (EMSC) said the quake's epicentre was 417 km (258

miles) east of Tadine, a town in the French territory of New Caledonia, and at a depth of 10 km (6.2 miles).

France's ministry for overseas territories said in a social media post on Thursday there were no immediate reports of damage or casualties in New Caledonia. The earthquake also sparked a tsunami warning for New Zealand, New Caledonia, Vanuatu and other nations in the region. The US Tsunami Warning System later said the tsunami threat

had passed for the region, although warned there may be minor sea fluctuations. According to the USGS, it was the strongest of a total of five earthquakes that occurred within an hour to the southeast of the island group.

Following the quake, the New Zealand National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) urged people in coastal areas to move away from waterfronts.

"Fortunately there is no need to evacuate at this time," NEMA told Al Jazeera via

email, adding that they were also not "aware of any casualties at this time".

A wave of 0.3 metres struck Fiji, according to the Twitter feed of the island nation's seismology department. It provided no further details.

John Ristau, a seismologist from New Zealand-based GNS Science, told NewsHub's The AM Show that most likely the damage from the quake would be "minimal". But he also warned that the quake could trigger more tremors.

Earthquake measuring 6.3 strikes Tajikistan, strong tremors felt in J&K, Delhi-NCR, Punjab

Earthquake tremors were felt across Delhi and other parts of North India on Friday evening. The epicentre of the earthquake was in Tajikistan.

An earthquake measuring 6.3 on the Richter Scale struck Tajikistan on late Friday night. Strong tremors were felt across north India in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, the Delhi-NCR and Uttarakhand.

As per the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the epicentre of the earthquake was in Tajikistan.

The IMD said the earthquake measured 6.3 on the Richter Scale. It occurred at 10.31 pm (IST) and its coordinates were 38.00 N and 73.58 E. The depth of this earthquake was 74 km. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal tweeted, "Earthquake tremors felt in Delhi. Praying for everyone's safety." Former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah in a tweet said the tremours forced him to move out of his house as the "ground was shaking".

"Not since the earthquake of 2005 have the tremors in Srinagar been bad enough to force me out of the house. I grabbed a blanket and ran. I didn't remember to take my phone and so was unable to tweet 'earthquake' while the damn ground was shaking," he tweeted. However, so far no major damage or loss of life has been reported anywhere.

Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh said no damage has been reported in the state so far and the police and local administration are keeping a watch.

"No reports of any damage so far in Amritsar or other parts of Punjab following the earthquake. Top officials of Punjab Police and local administration are keeping a close watch on the situation. Praying for everyone's safety," Amarinder Singh

tweeted. In Himachal Pradesh, strong earthquake tremors were felt in Una, Chamba, Dalhousie, Kullu, Shimla and other areas. The tremors were also felt



in Haryana, parts of Rajasthan and as far as Mathura in Uttar Pradesh.

Besides these, tremors were also felt in several cities in Pakistan like Islamabad, Lahore, parts of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Earlier this week, the central government informed Parliament that as many as 965

earthquakes measuring 3 and more on the Richter Scale were recorded in the Delhi-NCR alone in 2020. Last year, the Dehradun-based Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, one of India's leading research institutes, said the frequent earthquakes reported in the Delhi-NCR of late are due to the release of strain energy which has been accumulated as a result of northward movement of the Indian tectonic plate and its collision with the Eurasian plate through the fault or weak zones.

It added that historical earthquake catalogue shows that there were strong earthquakes of 6.5 magnitude at Delhi in 1720; 6.8 at Mathura in 1803; 5.5 near Mathura in 1842; 6.7 near Bulandshahr in 1956; 6 near Faridabad in 1960 and 5.8 near Moradabad in 1966 in the Delhi-NCR.

The Top 20 Biggest Man-Made Disasters



Disaster — noun — a sudden accident or a natural catastrophe that causes great damage or loss of life. It's what we call tsunamis, earthquakes, typhoons, eruptions and climate changes. However, those are nothing more than a reaction to our actions. We blame the Earth for the death millions. We also think of ourselves as the alpha beings on this land, as governors and protectors. And yet, every now and then, our own incompetence and stupidity surfaces and shows us we're nothing more than a danger. Not convinced? Hold your answer for after you finish the following list. Since it's virtually impossible to estimate total damages or compare, no classification can be made. Thus, the number before each heading is nothing more but structural enhancement.

1. The Bhopal Gas Leak

In 1984, a pesticide plant in Bhopal, India, released 30 metric tons of methyl isocyanate into the atmosphere. The Union Carbide India Limited chemical plant was in extremely poor condition and had broken dozens of safety regulations years before the accident. However, the errors accumulated in time and on the night of December the third, a safety release system activated and emptied a storage tank in the air, in order to prevent a huge chemical explosion. The release spread highly toxic chemicals over Bhopal and the neighbouring areas. Official death count by the Indian government is 3,787 bodies, however, unofficial records state 8,000 deaths or more tied to the disaster.

2. The Jilin Chemical Explosion

In November the thirteenth, 2005, a petrochemical plant in Jilin, China was the site of series of explosions. Poor handling of the operating systems led to blasts which shattered windows up to 200 metres away. Six people died, dozens were injured and thousands were forced to evacuate the region.

The event released 100 tons of pollutants, mainly benzene and nitrobenzene, into the environment. Surprisingly enough, the accident went seemingly victimless as viewed in scale.

However, Songhua River and Amur River were covered in 80 km of toxic sludge. The benzene level rose to 108 times the safety levels. Exposure to it lowers the amount of blood cells in the body and can cause leukaemia and other immune system impairments.

Later the Jilin and Heilongjian Province water supplies were shut off, due to the contamination. Tens of millions of people were stranded without the vital supply. The initial death count might have been small, but surely, a lot more people died in result of the explosions.

3. The Tennessee Coal Ash Spill

The Kingston Fossil Fuel Power Plant like any other of its kind produced fly coal ash as a by product of the coal combustion. The methods of storing required the ash to be mixed with water and the mixture stored in dredge cells. However, due to poor management, the mixture was stored in dangerously high amounts on the slope of a hill. After a powerful rain storm, in 2008, the slurry gave weight and stormed down the hill in a massive landslide of mud and ash. In the southern states, people love to play in mud slides, however, one would guess this one was a bit over the top. Three hundred acres of land were buried under the filth and a lot of properties in Kingston were destroyed. An estimate of 675 million dollars of damage was caused to the residents and national land with another 975 million needed to clean up the slurry. Six months after, only three percent is removed.

4. The Sidoarjo mud volcano

Typically mud volcanoes are results from seismic activity. However, man couldn't stand the fact somebody else, be it mother nature, do something he could not. So, we caused one of our own. PT Lapindo Brantas was an Indonesian drilling company. Although being warned multiple times, the company pushed forward with an excavation site in a know unstable area not far away from the ring of fire. Apparently, the drilling reactivated previously inactive faults. This was complimented by a 6.3 magnitude earthquake to the south-west and several big aftershocks. A few days later, the drill hole erupted mud 200

metres above itself in result. It continues to this day, with the expectancy to continue for the next 25 to 30 years. At its peak the mud volcano spewed 180, 000 cubic metres of mud into the ocean.

Despite mud is not directly toxic, it's not edible or drinkable either. The amounts released continue to contaminated the surrounding waters and affects thousands of near by inhabitants and wildlife.

5. The North Pacific Garbage Patch

A gyre is a marine phenomenon, caused by the relationship of neighbouring currents. Essentially, it's a vortex of trapped water which spins around a centre point. It has no access to the neighbouring currents, so transfer of particles is not possible.

In 1988, scientists predicted the garbage thrown off in the ocean will ultimately converge in one of these gyres and create a huge patch of waste floating in circles forever. Well, it happened. Estimates vary between 700 thousand and 15 millions square kilometres of garbage. Roughly 0.4 to 8.1 percent of the entire surface of the Pacific Ocean is covered in a mixture of toxic sludge, plastic, petrol and other thrown away waste. No wonder sharks don't like us. Hell, I'd bite off the leg of anyone who comes into my home and empties their garbage can inside.

6. The Gulf War Spill

As a direct result of human idiocy, 720 thousand cubic metres were spilled into the Persian Gulf during the war. Apparently, Iraq found it a brilliant military strategy to drown the waters in petrol, just to make it hard for US forces to land.

This brilliant defence manoeuvre changed the surrounding wildlife for good. The amounts was just too much to clean up and well, Iraq didn't really try hard to fix what they broke. The oil is now settled in the very sediment layers of the water bed. All marine wildlife suffered a great deal of damage, as some local species even disappeared. The environment still recovers after 21 years and still has a long way to go. Mother nature is one tough cookie.

7. The Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill

Considered the worst oil spill in history, on April, the twentieth, 2010, the Deepwater Horizon oil

rig exploded and sank in the sea. This left the drill hole completely open and petrol began to blow out directly into the waters, much like a gun wound in the chest. It ultimately discharged 780,000 cubic metres of oil in the Gulf of Mexico, while claimed seven lives. The US managed to cap it 87 days later, as it was even considered to use nuclear blasts to seal the well. I guess a huge oil leak was not enough pressure material, as naturally they wanted to make the evening news cast.

The spill threatened 8,332 marine species, some of which, already endangered and under federal protection. In the following years and on-going, scientists continue to pile up reports of the catastrophic effects. From mutated fish to closed beaches from washed petrol ashore, more and more damage just keeps surfacing. The oil is now soaked up in the environment and food and water resources. It's described as the biggest health crisis in the US.

8. The Exxon Valdez Oil Spill

If you haven't already guessed, humanity has evolved out of the ability to learn from its mistakes. The Exxon Valdez oil tanker was on a course for Long Beach, California in 1989, before it struck the shore around midnight local time. The reason was a tired and insufficient crew which led to one of the world's biggest contamination disasters for all times. An estimate of 119 thousand cubic metres of crude oil were spilled over several days, before the US government could react to the situation. In the end, 2,100 kilometres of coastline and 28 thousand square kilometres of ocean were coated in thick layer of oil.

No wonder the US is always hungry for more, they just keep spilling it in the ocean.

9. The Guiyu E-Waste Dump In China

The Americans, although completely deserving, are not the only ones to blame for the current state of the Earth.

The Guiyu dump in China is the biggest e-waste landfill in the world. A total of 52 square kilometres of land is buried in

iPhones, Galaxy S4s and other famous electronic devices. Even though of e-waste can't possibly compare in size with world garbage, it contains the intimidating amount of 70% of all heavy metals in the landfills. In time, they leak out of the appliances and guess what, end up in the land, air and water. Pretty much all of the surrounding area and especially the rice supplies are exposed to lead poisoning. Guiyu's children have a 54 percent higher lead levels in their blood than those of the nearby town Chendian.

On top of that, the methods of disposal and reprocessing are highly outdated. Some include literally burning the piles of electronics to retrieve precious metals, which furthermore pollutes the area. Soil samples from a Guiyu workshop show 371 times more lead and 115 times more copper in comparison to samples taken 30 kilometres away.

The environmental impact from electronic waste is one of the largest growing problems in the world as of now. Consider that next time you drop your batteries in the general trash can.

10. The Baia Mare Water Cyanide Contamination

The gold mining company Aurul is a venture by the Australian company Esmeralda Exploration and the Romanian government. One of the processes, used to extract the precious metal from the ore is gold cyanidation. What's left after the process finishes is cyanide-contaminated water.

The company claimed they can take care of their junk and shipped it to a dam near Bonitza Mare. However, whether to poor management, incapability or lack of monitoring, the dam wall ruptured on January the thirtieth, 2000. A total of 100 thousand cubic metres is toxic water, in which resided 100 tons of cyanide spilled over the near by farmlands and made its way into the Somes river. From there, it travelled across many European rivers and ultimately ended up in Danube river.

The spill killed 80% of all life in the Serbian section of the Tisza. Sixty

two species or fish, twenty of which are under protection, were threatened, as large quantities died by the poisoned water. In Hungary the water supply of two and a half million people were destroyed.

The cyanide contamination is the second biggest pollution in Europe after the Chernobyl event.

11. Chernobyl

Many of you, the readers, know of the Chernobyl melt-down. As we proved we have not learned with the Fukushima crisis, there is a desperate need to remind the world as often as possible what danger nuclear power hides if not monitored.

Chernobyl used to be a nuclear power plant near Pripyat, Ukraine. In 1986, an explosion, caused by poor management, cracked open one of the plant's nuclear reactors and leaked large quantities of radio active particles into the atmosphere. The winds spread the radioactive cloud all over USSR and Europe. It was classified as level 7 on the International Nuclear Event Scale. The only other accident to receive the maximum rank is the Fukushima event. Way to go, catching up Japan!

Even though the reactor was sealed as quickly as humanly possible, the entire area around the plant, including the near by town Pripyat was highly contaminated. The residents were evacuated immediately, however, long term effects of the exposure still appear to this day. In the accident itself died 31 people, but each year hundreds of birth malformation and radiation-related illnesses add to the death toll. The town is now nothing more than a dead, ghostly monument to remind us of our mistakes.

12. London's Great Smog

The winter of '52 was a cold one for Londoners. At the time, people heated their homes with mainly coal powered heaters. Naturally, the consumption increased to battle the chills. It wouldn't have been a problem if there wasn't an anticyclone right on top of the city which collected the burned pollutants and smoke, and formed a thick layer of smog over the entire city. It lasted for four days and due to nature of the city nobody paid attention. However, the smog was highly toxic and hit the lungs of pretty much every inhabitant. Later in the year, when medical reports were analysed, it was found that four thousand people have died prematurely and a hundred thousand more developed dreadful respiratory illnesses. I guess ignorance is not always blessed.

13. The Minamata Disease

The Minamata disease was discovered in the mid twentieth century in Minamata Bay, Japan, hence the name. It's a neurological degradation, caused by organic mercury poisoning. Not a big discovery really, we've known of the toxic effects of mercury for a long time. However, the situation that demanded the extended research is far more interesting and horrific. The residents near Minamata Bay and especially the fishermen and their families exhibited a bizarre neurological impairment.

At first it was suspected a contagion was loose in the area. Naturally, the diseased were isolated and their homes purified. This led to wide discrimination of those who showed signs of the illness. When medical specialists and universities showed interest

in the events, it was discovered the sick had a mortality rate of 36.7 percent — a truly dreadful figure. This attracted international attention and large scale researches began.

Ultimately, it was found the waters in Minamata Bay, it's fish and everybody in contact had a period of 34 years of exposure to lead, mercury, manganese, arsenic, thallium and copper — all highly toxic heavy metals. Turns out, the near by chemical factory, owned by the Chisso corporation, was dumping its contaminated waste water directly into the bay.

The corporation officially certified 2,265 victims most of which already dead in March, 2001. Another 10 thousand have received financial recompense. However, the total death toll is probably much higher. Good thing they have certificates now to show for their suffering.

14. The Libby Montana Asbestos Contamination

Libby, Montana is a small town that only prospered thanks to the W.R Grace plant which operated the vermiculite mines. However, at the time (starting 1919), people knew little about the effects of asbestos on the respiratory system. The toxic material was one of the by-products of the mines and plant operations. As a result, it was constantly pumped out of the industrial chimneys and continued to cover the town until 1990, when the mine was closed. Even though, by that time, asbestos had pretty much soaked into the very existence of the residence. Along the particles transmitted by the smoke, excess materials were used as fill for driveways, gardens and playgrounds. Even the school track was made from tailings provided by the plant.

The pollution accounts for 200 deaths and thousands of illnesses throughout the inhabitants. Now, the entire area is announced as contaminated and warning signs are put all over to avert people from further health danger.

15. The Love Canal Toxic Landfill

The Love Canal is a neighbourhood in Niagara Falls, New York. At the time of landscaping the area, the land belonged to Hooker Chemical, which used it to bury their toxic waste. However, an economic boom called for drastic expansion of the area. Niagara Falls had to quickly acquire more land to build a school. At start, Hooker Chemical refused to sell, due to health precautions. Ultimately, however, they were persuaded and the neighbourhood was built right on top of the buried toxic trash. Because there is no more effective way to learn chemistry, than right on top of a chemical landfill. The pollution, of course, affected the residents almost immediately. Birth defects, anomalies and strange illnesses began to emerge. However, no sooner than 1978 was the issue made public by US reporters. And yet, even that didn't attract the attention of the respected authority.

In 1995, district judge John Curtin finally ruled in favour of the residents and matters were settled. The school was brought down and clean up began.

16. The Centralia Fire

Centralia is a borough, now almost completely abandoned, in Columbia County, Pennsylvania. Its story goes way

back in the times of native Americans, however, it will always be remembered for the event in 1962. Every year the administrative Council hired men to clean up the local landfill. In 1962, five firemen were took the job. A common method is to set the dump on fire, let it burn for some time and later extinguish.

Now, fighting fires is what firemen are usually good at, right? Well, not in this case they're not. Centralia had a coal mine, which was abandoned for some years. Abandoned is typically good to set fire in, a mine and furthermore coal, however, is not. The firemen stuck the piles of trash in the mine and set it a blaze. Here is where stories start to heavily differentiate, but the most popular one is they never completely extinguished the fire. So, it spread throughout the mine, fuelled by the leftover coal inside. Eventually, it spread underground, below Centralia and Byrnesville.

At the start, as always, the issue was ignored. It was only after a sinkhole collapsed and sucked a child underground, that state officials turned their eyes onto the problem. Right now the two towns are almost completely abandoned, with very few residents, who just refuse to leave their homes, regardless of the dangers.

17. The Door To Hell

The Door To Hell is a natural gas field in Derweze, Turkmenistan, which to this day forth still continues to burn, after it was set on fire in 1971. Soviet scientists began to drill and excavate the resource in the same year. However, during their work the ground under the drilling rig gave weight and collapsed. A giant crater formed and started to blow out methane, a highly potent greenhouse gas, right into the atmosphere. Out of fear of further pollution, the workers did the next best thing — lit it on fire. When the gas is burned, almost all environmental hazards are removed.

Whether that was the reason, or a secret passion to surpass the Centralia event, I leave to you. The scientists had the expectancy the fire would burn for a few days and then die. However, four decades later, it still does, fed by the underground deposits. Which you know, considering the fuel crisis warnings, could have been useful.

18. The Death Of Aral Sea

The Aral Sea can be considered as a sacrificial lamb to the former Soviet Union's agricultural plans. In 1960, it was the world's fourth in size. However, in the same year, USSR officials decided to divert the route of the two rivers which fed into the lake. Massive irrigation channels went under construction. The plan was to eventually feed the rivers back into the lake, but also make them pass through the desert, where crops were to be planted. The union wanted to become the biggest exporter of cotton. And the biggest they were in 1988. However, that first place cost them the fate of the lake. The channels were very poorly built which is to be expected of the time. The cold war demanded speed and quantity, rather than quality. The diversion channels were so inefficient, in some places up to 75 percent of water was lost to the land, rather than fed in the lake.

In result, the lake began to evaporate. In 2004, its surface area was only 25 percent of the original size.

Uzbekistan cares for the land as much as it did for the water. The agricultural plan was made to achieve results and nothing more. Naturally, the land was exhausted and large quantities of pesticides and fertilizers were used to keep up the production. The run off from the fields washed all the toxic chemicals into the already shrank sea. Those, combined with the salinity, which resulted from the evaporation, continue to heavily pollute the surrounding area and inhabitants to this day. Sand storms pick up the poisonous particles and shower the area with toxic dust. The residents of the area live a highly polluted life. Birth defects, death of newborns and pregnant women, illnesses and lack of water are just the start of an endless list of suffering. All for mother Russia, I guess.

19. The Palomares Incident

In 1966, an American B-52 bomber, loaded with four hydrogen bombs, crashed into a KC-135 tanked, while they refuelled mid-air over Spain. Miscommunication was the main cause. The nuclear weaponry was released in the crash. Out of the four, three bombs landed in the area near Palomares — a fishing village in Spain. Two of them had discharged their non-nuclear explosives. A two square kilometre zone was contaminated with plutonium...and democracy. The third and fourth ones were recovered from the land and sea, respectively, generally intact. Although, somehow, human losses were averted, it was only due to pure luck that we hadn't seen a new Nagasaki. Had this happened, the world could have been gone by the time you read these lines.

20. Castle Bravo

This was the code name given to the biggest nuclear bomb ever discharged by American hand. The blast had a force of 15 megaton of freedom, a thousand times stronger than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima.

Apparently, the designers of the bomb made a little miscalculation and it ended up three times more powerful than expected. It's the largest nuclear explosion in the US. Only Russia has ever discharged more powerful bombs. But, of course, no Russian will ever settle to have his...confidence smaller than the American.

It happened on the first of March 1954 in the Bikini Atoll, Marshall Islands. The explosion spread fallout over 20 thousand people who inhabited the near by islands. The residents of Rongelap and Utrik Atolls were never even alerted about the test and spend three full days of fallout exposure, before the American government evacuated them. Three years later, they were returned to their homes, only to be told their land is contaminated and they can't stay. A Japanese boat came in direct contact with the radiation and grew ill. One of them died and caused an international uproar. The world still remembers the previous contact between Japan and US nuclear weaponry. This was the country's second close call to a new and possibly nuclear, world war. One would start to wonder whether Americans are not really trying to stir something up.

Deadly Himalayan Flood Shows Perils of Mountain Warming



Scientists think a huge chunk of ice or rock fell and caused a devastating surge of water down a river in India. Scientists are still investigating the cause of a catastrophic flood that killed dozens and left around 150 people missing in northern India on Sunday. So far, experts believe a huge mass of ice or rock fell from a nearby mountain glacier and caused a surge of water in the Rishi Ganga river. The flood barreled down the

mountainside, wiping out bridges, destroying two hydroelectric dam projects and prompting evacuations of villages in India's Uttarakhand state in the Himalayas. What triggered the avalanche remains unclear. Rising temperatures are causing mountain glaciers to melt and destabilize throughout the Himalayas, but it's still too early for scientists to say whether climate change had a hand in Sunday's disaster. It's a

warning bell nonetheless. What happened in Uttarakhand serves as a reminder of the perils of climate change in mountainous areas all over the world. Large glaciers around the globe "have been shrinking dramatically over the last century—thinning vertically hundreds of hundreds of meters over that time," said Dan Shugar, a geoscientist and glacier expert at the University of Calgary. That can increase the risk of landslides and avalanches. When glaciers are healthy and growing, the ice tends to erode the sides of the mountains, making valleys steeper. When the ice melts away, there's nothing left to hold those walls up. "And so we tend to see a lot of giant, what we call 'rock avalanches,'" Shugar said. "And it seems like we're seeing more of them." Several studies in the last few years have suggested a connection between rising temperatures

and more frequent rock avalanches in some mountain regions. Thawing permafrost can heighten those risks, Shugar added.

Permafrost is a type of frozen soil common in polar regions and in high-mountain areas, where it's cold year-round. As temperatures rise, melting permafrost makes the soil softer and less stable, increasing the risk of landslides. Avalanches and landslides aren't the only cause for concern. Shrinking mountain glaciers can also trigger another type of disaster known as a glacial lake outburst flood. As glaciers melt and shrink, they often leave large pools of water in their wake. Sometimes, these glacial lakes overflow or burst, surging down the mountainside with devastating force. These outburst floods are a growing cause for concern in many mountain regions around the

world. Research published in Nature Climate Change last year suggests that glacial lakes are rapidly growing—both in number and size—as the world warms and glaciers shrink. Scientists have spent several days trying to unpack what happened in Uttarakhand over the weekend. In the immediate aftermath of the floods, some experts suspected that a glacial lake outburst flood was to blame. But satellite data and aerial images have weakened that theory. Looking at satellite images collected by Earth-imaging company Planet Labs Inc., Shugar said he noticed "there was a very obvious landslide scar, on basically a ridgeline adjacent to the Rishi Ganga river, so the material would have collapsed into that valley." "At that point, I was pretty sure that a landslide was the root cause, or playing a major role in what had transpired," he added.

Miniature Satellites Reveal Cause of Deadly Uttarakhand Flood That Devastated Hydroelectric Dams

The disaster draws attention to the controversial hydropower projects in the Himalayas

On Sunday morning a wall of thick, concrete-gray water rushed down India's Dhauliganga river valley, sweeping dams, houses and people along with it. The official death toll has reached 38, but nearly 200 people remain missing. Flood debris filled a 12-by-15-foot tunnel at a hydroelectric dam project, where more than 30 construction workers remain trapped despite six days of rescue efforts by nearly 600 responders.

The deluge also wiped out five bridges, some of which ran 40 feet above typical river levels. This cut off access to 13 villages; the national government has been bringing in aid via helicopter and zip line as workers hasten to rebuild these vital connections.

The disaster laid bare a tension between the desire for economic development and the natural hazards of an already dynamic mountain range undergoing changes in the warming climate.

Much of the initial news coverage of the disaster reported it as a glacial lake outburst flood, which happens when a glacial lake breaches a natural dam of ice or debris and rapidly empties its contents. This kind of flooding is more common in the warmth of the summer—but it at first seemed like a reasonable explanation because Himalayan glacial lakes are growing in size and number as the climate changes,

says Saurabh Vijay, a glaciologist from the Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee.

This idea was quickly proved wrong, though, by an army of more than 130 miniature "cube" satellites, launched over the past six years by San

Francisco-based private company Planet Labs. "They provide a snapshot of everywhere on Earth, every day," says Dan Shugar, a geomorphologist at the University of Calgary. Roughly six hours after the flood, Shugar pulled up the latest Planet Labs satellite images and discovered a trail of dust and a dark scar on the pearl-white peaks above the flood zone—clear signs of a



landslide. Shugar consulted with other researchers on Twitter and soon homed in on the landslide's origin. He saw that an enormous hanging glacier, roughly 15 football fields long and five across, had broken from the steep face of a

mountain and plummeted downward, bringing some of the rock face down with it. Shugar says this ice and rock avalanche crashed into the Ronti Gad, a smaller tributary that feeds into the Rishiganga and then Dhauliganga rivers.

The landslide would have displaced some water, and a growing number of scientists agree with this analysis now. Still, the flood's magnitude was

far greater than would be expected in such a case. So, the question remains: where did all this water come from? Experts studying the disaster have proposed a few possibilities.

In one scenario, landslide debris may have briefly halted the flow of the Rishiganga river, says Umesh Haritashya, an environmental geologist at the University of Dayton. This could have created a temporary lake that eventually broke through its debris dam and poured down the valley. "Put a stopper in the bottom of a bathtub, and the bathtub fills up pretty quick," Shugar says, "It doesn't have to take long to create a small lake." But he also explains that the friction of an avalanche creates a lot of heat, which could have melted much of the ice tumbling down the mountainside. "It's entirely plausible that all of that ice melted, just about instantaneously." The cascade may have also impacted ice and frozen sediments in the valley and melted those, too. Some still believe the event could be related to a glacial lake outburst flood, suggesting that a lake hidden beneath or within a glacier may have ruptured. No surface lakes were visible, and a team of scientists from the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology has trekked to the landslide site in hopes of finding on-the-ground clues to solve the mystery.

New world order emerging post-Covid, India can be a leader: PM Modi

a range of issues, including the farmers' protest near Delhi. He urged the protesting farmers to avoid being misled on farm laws while assuring that the minimum support price or MSP will stay. The MSP has emerged as one of the key issues with the farmers claiming it will be abolished putting them at the

mercy of big corporate houses. They have been demanding a law as guarantee on MSP.

Among other things PM Modi talked about during his Rajya Sabha address was India's battle against the coronavirus disease (Covid-19), the Republic Day violence and international attention to farmers' protest.

applauded the people's contribution in the fight against Covid-19, crediting them with overcoming the various hardships and following safety protocols. The Prime Minister also congratulated state governments, saying Covid-19 gave an opportunity to enshrine the values of cooperating

federalism. PM Modi then turned his focus on the protests against the farm laws in which he said that there are some 'aandolan jeevis' (professional agitators), who, he said, are seen at every agitation. "We have to identify them," he said.

"Some people are trying to create unrest in India. We

should not forget what happened with Punjab. In 1984, Punjab suffered the most. What happened in J&K, northeast hurt India. Sikhs are being misled. The country is proud of the Sikhs," PM Modi said referring to the recent international support to farmers' protest.

Bumble founder becomes a billionaire at 31 Woman exec who quit Tinder after accusing male co-founders of sexually harassing her floats her female-friendly dating app for \$13bn

The married mother-of-one was one of five co-founders of Tinder, but quit the start-up company in 2014 and sued fellow partners Sean Rad and her ex-lover Justin Mateen for sexual harassment.

She claimed that Mateen became 'verbally controlling and abusive' after their on-off romance ended, and that she was called a 'slut' and a 'liar'. The case was settled by Tinder.

The fall-out from that legal battle drove workaholic Herd - who says she wakes up every two hours in the night to check her emails - to create Bumble with the tag line 'by women, for women'.

The app only allows female members to make the first approach to prospective dates, and promotes itself as a place where women are safe and empowered, and where harassment is rigorously policed. In 2019, Blackstone paid about \$3 billion to acquire a majority stake in MagicLab, which owned the Bumble and Badoo apps at the time, from founder Andrey Andreev. Wolfe Herd was named Bumble's chief executive officer after the deal.

Wolfe Herd is now married to Texas oil heir Michael Herd, has a one-year-old son called Bobby Lee Herd II and enjoys an luxury jet set lifestyle which she shares with her 143,000 followers on Instagram.

Pre-coronavirus highlights included her luxurious 30th birthday party in Capri, Italy, where she was pictured wearing a custom Giambattista Valli dress estimated to be worth \$10,000.

She married her husband in opulent fashion in Italy's Positano back in 2017 and her bevy of A-list friends have become involved in Bumble, including Priyanka Chopra and Serena Williams.

Wolfe Herd's firm celebrated a stellar first-day trading performance on Wall Street, yesterday with shares soaring nearly 80 per cent on their stock market debut.

Shares started trading at \$76 on the Nasdaq - considerably higher than the \$43 which the company had sold shares to public investors the night before - and the company now has a market cap of \$14 billion.

Humble operates two major apps, Bumble and Badoo, which touts over 40 million monthly active users worldwide.

Bumble plans to use the \$2.2 billion proceeds from the IPO to pay off debt, fund international growth, and pursue acquisitions. Wolfe Herd took to Instagram to mark the occasion, writing: 'Anyone going through a setback, low point, or rough patch.

'To anyone who feels disempowered in their relationships - or who's had the courage to make the first move into healthier ones. Today is for you. This is the outcome of starting over again when it feels like the end.

'It's a testament to new beginnings, new paradigms, and new norms. Today has shown that barriers can be broken when we believe in a better way.

'@Bumble is the outcome of a fiercely dedicated team who've worked tremendously hard to show that women can, should, and will make the first move. When relationships are better for women, they're better for everyone.'

Wolfe Herd was born in Salt Lake City - and lived in Paris as a child when her parents took a sabbatical in Paris.

She studied international relations at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, did foreign exchange program for one year

at the Sorbonne in Paris and was a member of the Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority.

Wolfe Herd initially joined the company Hatch Labs before moving to the development team for Tinder.

She was reportedly behind the name of the app, taking inspiration from the flame logo. She has also been credited with fueling its popularity on college campuses. She left Tinder in December 2014 over sexual discrimination and harassment in the workplace. She reportedly received more than \$1 million plus stock as part of a settlement.

The same month, the former Tinder executive moved to Austin, Texas and founded Bumble.

Her app was heralded as a game changer in the usually predatory world of online dating as it lets women pick the men rather than vice versa.

By December 2015, the app had reached over 15 million conversations and 80 million

matches.

The app has the tag line 'by women, for women', touting it as a place where women are safe and empowered, and where harassment is rigorously policed. Wolfe Herd was named one of Business Insider's 30 Most Important Women Under 30 in Tech in 2014.

In 2016, she was named as one of Elle's Women in Tech.

In March 2019, Wolfe Herd testified before the Texas House Criminal Jurisprudence committee about the prevalence of unsolicited explicit photos sent to female users on dating apps. The IPO puts Wolfe Herd into a very rare club of female billionaires. While women make up about half of the global population, self-made women account for fewer than 5 per cent of the world's 500 biggest fortunes.

She met her husband while skiing in 2013 and had a three-day wedding on Italy's Amalfi Coast in 2017.

In December 2019, the couple announced the birth of their first child.

Wolfe Herd announced new parental benefits for Bumble employees in 2019, including bonuses, paid leave, and flexible start times.

A self-confessed workaholic, she has claimed to wake up every two hours during the night to check her inbox. 'I'm trying to stop that,' she said in 2017. 'I get no downtime.'

In 2018, the 28-year-old Bumble dating app CEO revealed she travels with a team of bodyguards after neo-Nazis posted her - and other employees' - contact details online.

In an interview with British newspaper The Times, CEO Whitney Wolfe Herd explained how the FBI had to step in after a neo-Nazi organization posted the contact details for herself and multiple other staff members to encourage their followers to harass them.

"Right To Protest Cannot Be Anytime, Everywhere": Supreme Court

Twelve activists had filed a review petition on the last year ruling of the Supreme Court terming the anti-citizenship law protests held at Shaheen Bagh to be illegal.

"The right to protest cannot be anytime and everywhere. There may be some spontaneous protests but in case of prolonged dissent or protest, there cannot be continued occupation of public place affecting rights of others," the three-judge bench of Justices SK Kaul, Aniruddha Bose and Krishna Murari said while dismissing the review petition. Though the review petition was decided on February 9, the order came late last night.

The three-judge bench reiterated that public places cannot be occupied for protests and that public protests must be "in designated areas alone". "Dissent and democracy go hand in hand," the top court had observed in its October 2020 verdict, stressing that "protests like these

are not acceptable". Delhi's Shaheen Bagh had emerged as the epicentre of anti-CAA protests in 2019 where the protesters - mostly women and children - sat for more than three months.

The Shaheen Bagh protests had received worldwide attention and the Time Magazine honoured 82-year-old Bilkis dadi, the face of the movement, as one of the 100 "most influential people of 2020".

Critics have said the contentious citizenship law - which the government says enables citizenship for non-Muslims from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan if they escaped religious persecution and entered India before 2015 - is "anti-Muslim". A massive wave of protests had swept the nation against the CAA before the novel coronavirus pandemic forced a majority of population indoors and the government announced one of the world's strictest lockdowns in March last year.

An Internal Matter Or An International Embarrassment?

(News Agencies)- I recently had a chance to read a fascinating story about one of the world's greatest sports personalities, Sir Donald Bradman. The story speaks not of "The Don's" sporting ability which was on display for close to 20 years between 1928 and 1948 but, instead his tenure as a sporting administrator- a role he occupied for close to 40 years. The story revolves around Bradman's handling of the issue of whether Australia should ban the all-white South African Test cricket team from touring

Australia for the proposed 1971-72 test series. While initially, Bradman was of the view that sports and politics should be kept separate and that the test series should go ahead as scheduled, he displayed a characteristic that one rarely sees in the world today: a desire to better understand issues instead of taking an easy stand.

As part of this exploratory endeavor, Bradman actually traveled to South Africa to meet its Prime Minister, John Vorster, an admirer of Hitler. As the story goes, when Bradman asked

Vorster about why the black community in South Africa was denied the chance to represent



their country, Vorster informed Bradman that they were "intellectually inferior" and could

not cope with cricket's intricacies. In response, Bradman said, "Have you heard of Garry Sobers?". Sobers is widely regarded as cricket's greatest all-rounder. The trip made an indelible mark on Bradman who on his return to Australia announced the tour's cancellation in a press conference stating that "We [Australia] will not play them [South Africa] until they

choose a team on a non-racist basis." Years later in 1986 when a delegation from the Commonwealth countries, including the Australian Prime Minister, visited Nelson Mandela in prison, Mandela's first question was - "is Don Bradman still alive?". This past week or so we have also seen certain sporting personalities and celebrities voice their view on a topic that has (much to the embarrassment of India) now attracted international attention and opinion.

Nitish Kumar Leaves Gupteshwar Pandey In Cold, Picks Another Top Cop As Minister



(News Agencies)-Bihar Chief minister Nitish Kumar appears to have put Gupteshwar Pandey in a perennial-wait mode. Even as the ex-DGP has been waiting patiently for his induction in the NDA government, another former top cop has quietly taken oath as a cabinet minister in the state. Sunil Kumar, a 1987-batch IPS officer has been made the

minister for excise and prohibition, barely a few months after his retirement.

Sunil, who held key positions, including SSP, Patna during his career, joined the ruling Janata Dal-United shortly after his retirement in August last year. He was subsequently fielded from Bhore (reserved) constituency from where he won by a narrow

margin. On February 9, he was among the 17 ministers, including eight from JD-U, to be sworn in at Raj Bhawan during the much-awaited expansion of the Nitish ministry.

But no such luck for Pandey, who had joined JD-U with much fanfare after taking voluntary retirement from the service late last year, a few months before he was to superannuate. He was apparently hoping to get the party ticket from the Buxar constituency which, unfortunately for him, went to BJP quota under the seat-sharing agreement within NDA. He could not get the ticket from any other Vidhan Sabha constituency either.

His premature retirement had also sparked speculations that he might contest the by-election from Valmiki Nagar Lok Sabha seat, which had fallen vacant due

to the death of the sitting JD-U MP, Baidyanath Prasad Mahto. But that was not to be. Apparently disappointed, he later emphasised that he had joined politics to serve society. Nonetheless, it was widely believed since then that he would be accommodated in the Nitish ministry sooner or later. But he did not get a berth in the latest cabinet expansion. Worse still, he has not yet been made an MLC either. There is still a glimmer of hope, though. There are at present 12 vacancies in the state legislative council for nominated members, which are to be filled soon. His supporters are hopeful that he would be nominated to the Council soon. Also, they say, there are still five vacancies in the Nitish government. Pandey had shot into the national limelight during the high-pitch investigation into

the actor Sushant Singh Rajput death case, which had pitted the Bihar police against their Maharashtra counterpart last year. He had also courted controversies over his remark to question the "aukaat (status)" of Sushant's girlfriend, actress Rhea Chakravorty, who was at the centre of a prolonged media trial in the case at the time. A flamboyant officer in his time, Pandey was often hailed by his supporters as the "Robin Hood of Bihar". Ahead of the state elections last year, his biography and a video featuring him as an inveterate do-gooder had also been released, apparently to boost his chances in the polls. But nothing seemed to impress Nitish, who chose to give the JD-U ticket to Sunil, who had preferred to keep a low profile all along, unlike his erstwhile colleague.

Paranoia grips Pak army

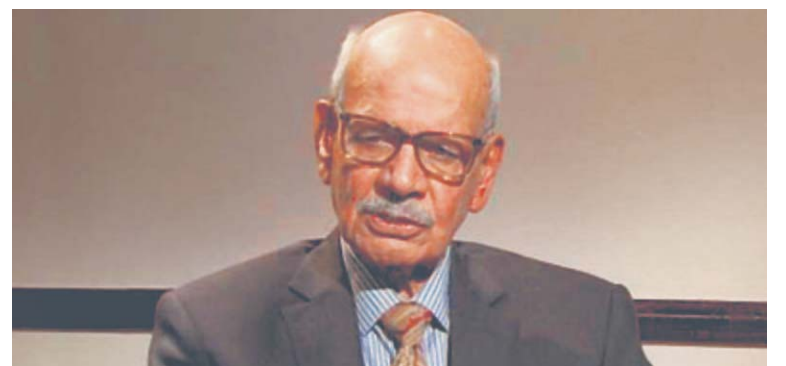
Edgy about retired officers meeting Indian 'hostile elements'

(News Agencies)-Lt GEN Asad Durrani (retd), a former Director General of Pakistan's ISI, continues to be hounded by the army he served with distinction, though not without controversy. The saga of charges against him and counter charges by him against the army leadership, past and present, is riveting. More importantly, for the Indian strategic community, including participants in track-two processes, this matter confirms that senior generals of the Pakistan army expect that former members of their fraternity would be guided by prescribed scripts,

especially in their interaction with Indians.

Serving generals may 'respect' a retired brother but will never tolerate his cooperating with an Indian in an unsupervised joint intellectual venture. That is the ultimate sin and that is what Asad Durrani did when he collaborated with Amarjit Singh Dulat, who was head of the R&AW for a couple of years in the late 1990s. They put together an unusual, though not earth-shaking, book (The Spy Chronicles) on the basis of a series of conversations which covered a range of subjects, including India-Pakistan ties. That

embarrassed the Pakistan army as it provided its critics, especially Nawaz Sharif, to claim that the force had double standards to assess the patriotism of its former colleagues and others. For this reason, among others, action was initiated against Durrani and penalties and disabilities were imposed on him. He was also put on the exit control list which prevents Pakistanis from leaving the country. That impediment continues and Durrani has approached the courts against the inclusion of his name. Some 10 days ago, the government filed



para-wise comments to Durrani's petition. According to Pakistani media reports, it opposed the relief sought by Durrani on the ground that he had been 'interacting with hostile elements', including R&AW, since 2008. In a paper which Durrani had widely circulated some months ago, and which had found its way to the media, he had noted that earlier government counsel had told the court that he was 'affiliated with

RAW since 2008'. Now 'interacting' and 'affiliated' have vastly different connotations. It would therefore appear that the army has chosen now to water down the charge to 'interacting'. Apart from R&AW, other hostile elements have not been named. While it has been mentioned that Durrani was interacting with R&AW, it is highly unlikely that he was doing so with the agency as an institution.

The man behind Fortnite is making the riskiest bet of his career. The payoff could be huge

Over the course of his career Tim Sweeney has been unafraid to take on tech industry giants.

The CEO and founder of Epic Games has had a knack for picking the right battles while also shoring up his company's independence. Fortnite, the company's blockbuster battle royale game, recently topped more than 15 million concurrent players and has spawned a universe of fandom. Epic challenged established platforms by launching its own digital video game storefront. And the multi-billion dollar company developed the Unreal Engine, a proprietary software for making its own video games that it licenses out to other developers and animators. Now Sweeney, 50, is embarking on the biggest battle in his company's 30-year history: Epic is suing Apple and Google in a legal challenge that could remake the future of the digital economy.

"Epic's frustration with Apple especially, and Google to some extent, had been building up for at least three years. Ever since Fortnite grew to have a large audience, we felt stifled by several things," Sweeney told CNN Business during a December interview.

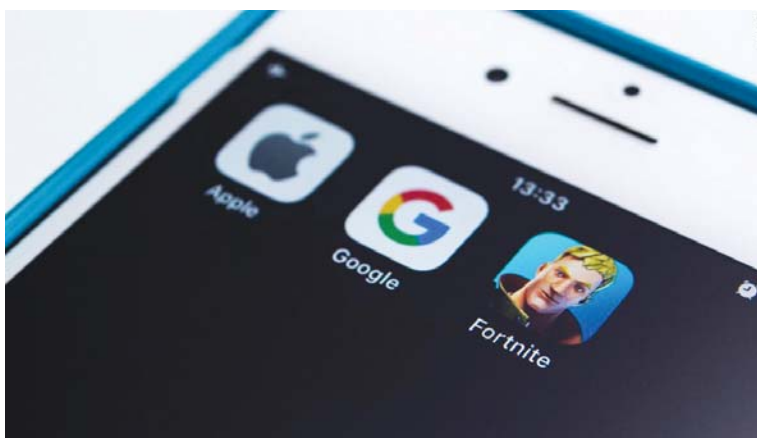
Launched in 2017, Fortnite quickly became a phenomenon. When it first debuted, Epic charged \$40 to download the game - a typical price. But the company quickly pivoted to a riskier business model, betting that offering Fortnite as a free-to-play game with in-app purchases of digital items like outfits would generate more overall revenue.

The bet paid off. Though Epic has raked in billions off Fortnite's in-game purchases - about \$1.3 billion in 2020 and \$1.8 billion in 2019, according to Nielsen's gaming division SuperData - the company balked at paying a chunk of that revenue to app store owners like Apple and Google. If a player downloaded Fortnite from Apple's App Store, for example, Apple would receive a 30% cut of all in-app purchases.

Sweeney believed that requirement violated antitrust laws because it forced developers to use Apple and

Google's payment systems. So Epic spent months developing its battle plan to fight Apple, which it codenamed "Project Liberty," he said.

The company prepped a 60-page lawsuit and created a video that parodied Apple's classic "1984" commercial, for good measure. On August 13, Project Liberty was sprung into action - a plan that sought to force the tech giants into response.



In a blog post, Epic encouraged Fortnite users to pay the company directly for in-app purchases. Both Google and Apple promptly removed Fortnite from their stores, alleging the company violated their terms of service. Epic then filed lawsuits against each of the companies, in which Epic argued the courts should intervene and order Apple and Google to allow developers to sell in-app purchases without the 30% revenue cut.

"Epic's problem is entirely self-inflicted and is in their power to resolve," Apple said in a statement. "Epic has been one of the most successful developers on the App Store, growing into a multibillion dollar business that reaches millions of iOS customers around the world.

We very much want to keep the company as part of the Apple Developer Program and their apps on the Store."

Google responded that it had "consistent policies that are fair to developers" and that Fortnite had violated those rules. "However, we welcome the opportunity to continue our discussions with Epic and bring Fortnite back to Google Play," it added. For Sweeney, who spoke to CNN Business via video call from his home, the battle against Apple and Google is about more than just a 30% cut of its

revenue. "I grew up in a time in which anybody could make software. This is my first computer, an Apple II," said Sweeney, gesturing towards the iconic blocky, grey machine on the desk behind him. "You turn it on and it comes up with a programming language prompt," he continued. "So I felt all along that open platforms are the key to free markets and the future of computing." Early dreams - In

1991, a young, 20-something Sweeney founded Epic, then known as Potomac Computer Systems, as a way to sell copies of a video game he made himself. He ran the company out of his parents' house in Maryland. While Epic produced its own shooter games like Fire Fight and Unreal, it also began licensing its



game development technology to other game makers in the late 1990s. This became the Unreal Engine, a ubiquitous game software which is now an essential part of Epic's business. Between 2012 and 2017, Epic survived mostly on revenue generated from the Unreal Engine's licensing fees, said Sweeney. Today, the Unreal Engine is also used in animation, such as creating scenes for Disney's "The Mandalorian." Sweeney said he always envisioned Epic as a multi-

faceted business. He wanted Epic to both make and sell games - and create and license the tools used to make them.

One part of that equation was, of course, Fortnite.

From the outset, Epic has always had always had outsized ambitions for Fortnite. The game has dozens of crossovers each year, from Marvel's Avengers to Star Wars. It hosts massive virtual concerts and gives gamers endless shiny features, with the aim that there's something new each time a player logs on. But the breakneck speed of development allegedly had a real cost for its workers, some of whom told gaming publication Polygon in 2019 that they regularly worked 70-hour weeks. Since then, Epic has made changes including hiring more people, soliciting more employee feedback, offering unlimited paid time off and mandating company-wide vacations, according to the company.

Epic's decision in 2018 to expand into selling third-party games created yet another business opportunity, and yet another fight against the establishment. By launching its own games store, and cutting out the middleman,

Epic was attempting to break into an already thriving market for PC games that was, at the time, dominated by Steam, a popular games store.

"We had to move mountains in order to have any chance of gaining traction at all," said Sweeney. Epic's store attracted attention for splashy stunts like giving away Grand Theft Auto V, which is the best-selling game in the US in the last decade, according to NPD Group.

While the Epic Games Store has gained momentum, attracting



over 160 million PC users and generating over \$700 million in purchases last year according to the company, critics object to its exclusive deals that keep certain games out of other stores. Sweeney has defended his position, saying the store exclusives are a reasonable strategy that helps Epic compete against Steam.

In 2019, Epic acquired social media app Houseparty and later announced it would add voice chat to Fortnite through the app. The company was valued at \$17.3 billion as of 2020, making Sweeney a billionaire.

Uniquely positioned While investors of Epic include Tencent, which has a 39% stake, and Sony, which purchased a 1.4% stake in 2020 for \$250 million, Sweeney remains the CEO and controlling shareholder. Competitor Roblox has announced its plans for a direct listing and Unity - a rival to Unreal - went public in 2020. But Epic Games has little interest in an IPO.

"We're still a highly independent company who's not beholden to public markets in which we have to show ever-increasing profits," said Sweeney. "And anything like a fight like this [with Apple and Google], which loses us money for a year or more, would never be tolerated. So we have the financial independence to do that." Epic's business model gives it a flexibility that other tech companies don't necessarily have. "Unlike Facebook, iOS doesn't drive the majority of Epic's revenues. Unlike Spotify or Netflix, Epic is highly profitable," said Matthew Ball, a former Amazon Studios executive and strategist who has penned over 20,000 words on Fortnite and Epic.

Amazon's mushrooming power has met an unlikely foe: Bessemer, Alabama

Though Amazon is a sprawling international conglomerate, with more than a million employees and significant operations in areas ranging from technology to retail to food, it is possible to understand its essence by grasping a few key facts. Its boss is one of the richest men in the world. It exercises unparalleled influence over the consumer economy. And it has a long and well-documented history of abusing virtually every category of human it employs, from office workers to warehouse workers to customer service agents. Most recently, the company agreed to pay a \$62m fine for stealing tips from its delivery drivers, an awful crime that nevertheless constituted a fairly average week in the annals of Amazon workplace horror stories. Likewise, the labor movement in America has a rich history stretching back more than a century, but you can understand its key purpose like so: it exists to make working people as powerful in our economy as companies are. Without strong unions, the imbalance of power between employers and employees is so hopeless that it can produce a society where a tiny handful of super-rich people get ever richer, even while wages stagnate for everyone else and



labor rights are constantly eroded, making the "American Dream" of upward mobility a cruel joke. In other words - what we have now. Which brings us to the unlikely town of Bessemer, Alabama, where voting has just begun on the first real union election at an Amazon warehouse in the US. To be an Amazon warehouse worker today is to find yourself in the odd position of simultaneously having kind of a crappy job while also being perhaps the single most important kind of worker in America. That is to say, these workers represent the embodiment of where all of our corporate and economic trends are headed - low-wage jobs dictated by algorithms, in which people act as living automatons,

completely at the mercy of the arcane needs of a trillion-dollar company. As small businesses across the country fail, more and more people every day wake up to find that these kinds of warehouse jobs are all that they can get. If our economy keeps evolving as it has been, any one of us could be forced to become an Amazon warehouse worker soon enough.

Seen in this light, the question is not whether these workers need a union - of course they do. It is their only hope. Nor is the question whether the labor movement needs to prove that it can successfully unionize Amazon warehouses. Of course it does. Not only do the people working there desperately need the power that comes with

collective bargaining, but it is impossible to fulfill organized labor's mandate of exercising true power for working people in today's economy if you can't crack the most meaningful job category at the most powerful company. The relevant question, rather, is whether we still live in a country where unions are able to do what we know they absolutely need to do, or whether the entire, uneasy social arrangement between capital and labor has fallen apart. That is a heavy burden to place on the shoulders of 5,800 people in an Alabama warehouse. But this union election is a confluence of just about every single procedural obstacle that has been put in place over the course of decades to make union organizing harder.

Alabama is a "right to work" state, meaning people represented by unions aren't required to pay dues; the warehouse workforce is a toxic mix of regular employees and "contractors", a job category that exists wholly to allow corporations to circumvent labor laws; and Amazon itself is sparing no expense pulling out every tired trick in the anti-union playbook, from bombarding workers with propaganda at work to building a wretched website full of distorted claims to reportedly recalibrating traffic lights outside the facility to make it harder for cars to stop and chat with union organizers. As with all corporate anti-union campaigns, theirs is a mix of barely legal inaccuracies and thinly veiled threats - a form of economic terrorism in which rich and powerful companies strongly imply that exercising your legal right to a union will cause your livelihood to disappear. Whenever you see Jeff Bezos (net worth: \$195bn) make a philanthropic donation or build another space rocket or buy another mansion, remember that his fortune comes directly from the legalized oppression of hundreds of thousands of people like those in his warehouse in Bessemer, Alabama.

Billionaire capitalists are designing humanity's future. Don't let them

Last year a group of cryptocurrency investors purchased a decommissioned cruise liner, the Pacific Dawn, and renamed it the MS Satoshi, after the alleged creator of Bitcoin. The investors were members of the "seasteading" community, an experimental movement that wants to create autonomous, floating city-states in international waters. The Silicon Valley billionaire Peter Thiel, a self-described anarcho-capitalist, is a major supporter of the movement - which, like space colonization, seems to attract the enthusiasm of a certain kind of fantastically rich and rightwing tech baron.

The MS Satoshi project was a failure. In a major blow to the seasteading movement, the ship was sold for parts in December, after the ship's owners were unable to get insurance for their voyage into international waters. (They hold out hope, however, of creating a luxury development of science-fiction-esque pod apartments off the coast of New Jersey.) The saga highlights one of the most troubling aspects of what could be called



the futurism movement: a majority of the compelling and visible ideas about tomorrow are being conceived and developed by a tiny minority of ultra-wealthy individuals and private-sector companies.

It's not hard to see the seductive appeal of these visions of the future. Beautiful digital renderings invite us into glowing and highly conceptual worlds, such as Elon Musk and SpaceX's plan to build a glass-domed colony on Mars, or Jeff Bezos's plan for floating space colonies. On Earth, Richard Branson's Virgin Hyperloop One has worked with top

architects around the world to produce spectacular, inspiring images of a world connected by zero-emission, 670mph vacuum-propelled pods. Uber, imagining self-flying taxis shuttling riders from roof to roof,

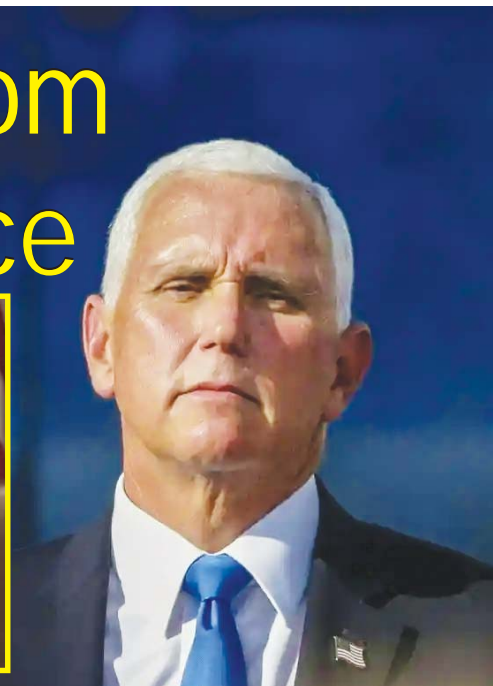
unveiled 16 proposals for "skyports" designed by prominent corporate architecture firms. Underground, Musk's Boring Company promises shorter commute times, while in our homes we are enchanted by the potential of Nest and Alexa. Like any good ideology, this privatized futurism affects everything from global infrastructures to kitchen appliances. These kinds of projects use often fantastic imagery to inspire the public's imagination and to build consensus around these visions. But unlike many of the forward-thinking proposals of the past - produced by a

"public" of academics, artists and government agencies - today's "future" is almost completely invented by private companies owned by tech billionaires. Why do they care about our imagination? What is at stake when we buy in? What does it mean when the future is privatized?

This kind of speculation is ultimately about dictating policy and ownership. If companies control the image of the future, then they control the future itself, and can control the infrastructure. Ultimately, they will define how society functions. Platforms like Amazon Web Services, Facebook and Robinhood have become massive infrastructures that control large parts of our economy and the public sphere. This is not a wholly new phenomenon. At the 1939 World's Fair, General Motors presented Futurama, an "artistic conception" that outlined their vision for the world of 1960. As Norman Bel Geddes, GM's designer, wrote about the plans: "There is a Federal obligation to develop the country's resources of land, water, power, and natural wealth."

As vice-president, he abased himself and his office. In reward, Donald Trump sent a mob to kill him. Now, as another impeachment trial looms, he is cast out from Republican ranks

The martyrdom of Mike Pence



After Donald Trump had exhausted all of his claims of voter fraud and could contrive no more conspiracy theories that the 2020 presidential election was stolen from him, and after his revolving menagerie of legal mouth-pieces had all of their motions tossed out of every venue up to the supreme court, and after his reliable enabler, Attorney General William Barr, informed him his accusations were false and he had reached the end of the line, and resigned, Trump came as a last resort to rest his slipping hold on power on his most unwavering defender and ceaseless flatterer, who had never let him down: his vice-president, Mike Pence. Nobody was more responsible for fostering the cult of Trump. The evangelical Pence had been Trump's rescuer, starting with his forgiveness for the miscreant in the crisis during the 2016 campaign over Trump's Access Hollywood "grab them by the pussy" tape and then over the disclosure of the "Individual One" hush money payoff to a porn star about a one-night stand to shut her up before election day - AKA "the latest baseless allegations". Pence was the indispensable retainer who delivered the evangelical base, transforming it through the alchemy of his faith into Trump's rock of ages. After every malignant episode, from Charlottesville ("I stand with the president") to coronavirus ("The president took another historic step"), the pious Pence could be counted on to bless Trump for his purity of heart and to shepherd the flock of true believers. "Trump's got the populist nationalists," Stephen Bannon, Trump's pardoned former senior adviser, remarked. "But Pence is the base. Without Pence, you don't win."

Withstanding the howling winds

of narcissism, the unshakably self-abasing Pence upheld the cross over Trump. On the evening of 3 May 2017, Trump welcomed his evangelical advisory board for dinner in the Blue Room of the White House.

"I've been with [Trump] alone in the room when the decisions are made," Pence testified to the assembled pastors. "He and I have prayed together. This is somebody who shares our views, shares our values, shares our beliefs."

Nobody more than Pence had modeled adulation of Trump to become the standard for sycophantic imitation. At the first

cluding in his last breathless, fawning words: "And we are making America great again." On 6 June 2018, at a meeting of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Trump suddenly and inexplicably put his water bottle on the floor. Without missing a beat, Pence, seated beside him, put his bottle on the floor too.

Finally, after 61 failed lawsuits challenging the presidential election, Trump's lawyers Rudy Giuliani and Jenna Ellis told him there was a magic solution. Pence, presiding over the counting of the ballots of the electoral college before a joint session of Congress on 6 January, could

tell you ... He's a great guy. Of course, if he doesn't come through I won't like him quite as much ... He's a wonderful man, a smart man and a man I like a lot."

On the day before the electoral college votes were to be certified, 5 January, Trump tweeted, "The Vice-President has the power to reject fraudulently chosen electors." Hours later, Trump cornered Pence in the Oval Office. He had brought along a rightwing law professor, John Eastman, from Chapman University, who argued that Pence had the power to overturn the electoral college. Eastman had written an op-ed asserting that Kamala Harris was ineligible to run for vice-president because she was not a proper US citizen - a new birtherism. Trump told Pence Eastman was "very highly qualified". For once, Pence stood his ground. His reverence turned into recalcitrance. He rebuffed Trump. There was a line he would not cross.

That night, after the New York

Times report regarding comments Vice-President Pence supposedly made to me today is fake news. He never said that. The Vice-President and I are in total agreement that the Vice-President has the power to act."

Before dawn on 6 January, after it was clear the Republicans had lost both seats in Georgia and with them control of the Senate, Trump frantically engaged in a tweet storm.

"States want to correct their votes, which they now know were based on irregularities and fraud, plus corrupt process never received legislative approval. All Mike Pence has to do is send them back to the States, AND WE WIN. Do it Mike, this is a time for extreme courage!"

Then Trump called Pence at the vice-presidential residence, the Naval Observatory, to deliver an ultimatum. "You can either go down in history as a patriot, or you can go down in history as a pussy," Trump said. But Pence spurned him again. He hung up and got into his motorcade. As he drove to the Capitol, Trump mounted the platform at his "Stop the Steal" rally outside the White House, to address thousands of followers. Trump knew Pence intended to perform his constitutionally prescribed duty to preside over the process that would seal Joe Biden's election. Pence had repeatedly told Trump that was what he would do. Trump had tried every means to dislodge him from his position, but Pence proved immovable. Trump's call that morning, threatening him as a "pussy", was the last desperate gambit. Trump knew the string was played out.

But when he addressed the crowd he had assembled, Trump pretended he did not know what



meeting of members of Trump's cabinet, on 12 June 2017, the president called on each to offer praise.

"I'm going to start with our vice-president. Where is our vice-president?" Trump asked. "We'll start with Mike and then we'll just go around, your name, your position."

"This is just the greatest privilege of my life," Pence said, setting the tone for the others.

By August, Pence had mentioned Trump's "broad shoulders" 17 times, to proclaim his manly strength. At the cabinet meeting of 20 December 2017, Pence praised Trump 14 times in just under three minutes, a commendation every 12.5 seconds, con-

cluding in his last breathless, fawning words: "And we are making America great again." On 6 June 2018, at a meeting of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Trump suddenly and inexplicably put his water bottle on the floor. Without missing a beat, Pence, seated beside him, put his bottle on the floor too. Finally, after 61 failed lawsuits challenging the presidential election, Trump's lawyers Rudy Giuliani and Jenna Ellis told him there was a magic solution. Pence, presiding over the counting of the ballots of the electoral college before a joint session of Congress on 6 January, could



Times reported that Pence felt "he would need to balance the president's misguided beliefs about government with his own years of preaching deference to the constitution", Trump issued a statement: "The New York

Pence was going to do. Stung by Pence's emphatic refusal, he knew he was retailing a false narrative. He feigned that Pence had not yet made up his mind - and that the entire decision now depended upon him.

Israel wants India by its side against ICC ruling, Delhi silent

The Indian Express has learnt that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whom he described recently as a "great friend", asking India to speak out against the decision, and to send a clear message to the ICC "to stop this assault on justice and common sense".

Israel is pushing "good friend" India to take a stand against a ruling last week by the International Criminal Court claiming jurisdiction over Palestinian territories, but Delhi, still navigating its way through the big shifts in West Asia, is reluctant to be drawn in, official sources said.

The Indian Express has learnt that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whom he described recently as a "great friend", asking India to speak out against the decision, and to send a clear message to the ICC "to stop this assault on justice and common sense". Delhi has not responded to Netanyahu's February 7 communication, which came two days after the ICC ruling. Instead, the sources said, it has been conveyed through diplomatic channels that since India is not a member of the Rome Statute, the founding treaty of the ICC, it would not want to comment or take a position on any of the court's decisions or rulings. Israel, which is also not a mem-



ber of the Rome Statute, has condemned the ICC ruling as "outrageous" and said the decision had exposed the court as "a political body". Israel said the ICC "has no authority to make such a decision" since Israel does not recognise the court's jurisdiction and the Palestinian Authority is not a sovereign state. Netanyahu called the ruling "antisemitism". The ICC's majority 2-1 decision on February 5 was made on the basis of Palestine's 2015 accession to the Rome Statute after

its acceptance as a "non-member observer state" of the UN General Assembly in 2012. The court made it clear that the ruling was not a determination of Palestinian statehood. The ruling came 14 months after ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda said there was "reasonable evidence" that war crimes were being committed in Palestinian territories of West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. She named both the Israeli Defence Forces and Hamas as pos-

sible perpetrators. Israel, which sees India as a "like-minded" nation, expected a positive response from Delhi, especially as the ruling could be a precedent-setter and may come back to bite on Kashmir or other troubled spots, sources said, pointing out that "shutting our eyes to the court does not mean the court does not exist". India, which had participated actively in the Preparatory Committee for the Establishment of the ICC, had however abstained from the motion to

adopt the Rome Statute, for several reasons, including jurisdictional issues, fearing that the ICC might exercise its jurisdiction in areas such as Kashmir and the North-East, which it considers "internal issues" that are hands off for international actors. The spokesperson for the Ministry of External Affairs offered no comment to questions from The Indian Express on Netanyahu's appeal to Prime Minister Modi, and the reasons for India not saying anything on the issue. A diplomatic source said it was "not a break or make issue" in bilateral ties, nonetheless a positive response from Delhi would have been "important". Earlier, Modi had called Netanyahu on February 1, three days after a blast outside the Israeli embassy in Delhi, assuring him of all cooperation in the investigation into the low-intensity explosion, which Israel said it was treating as a terrorist incident. On January 26, Netanyahu had tweeted greetings to "great friend" Modi on India's 72nd Republic Day.

India must not allow UK to stall or delay Vijay Mallya's extradition

If the government's approach needs some clarifications, the Opposition's apathy in this matter is inexplicable. It has not raised the issue of Britain's virtual refusal to extradite Vijay Mallya.

The government's approach in the Vijay Mallya matter seems strange. The extradition proceedings against him in Britain are over. His appeal against the extradition order has failed. Instead of sending him to India to face the law, the British government has informed New Delhi that he cannot be sent because "judicial" action of a confidential nature regarding him is underway. The British authorities have further stated that no time frame can be indicated about these judicial proceedings. The upshot is that this high-profile fugitive from Indian law is safely residing in Britain and cocking a snook - seemingly with the assistance of his host country - at India.

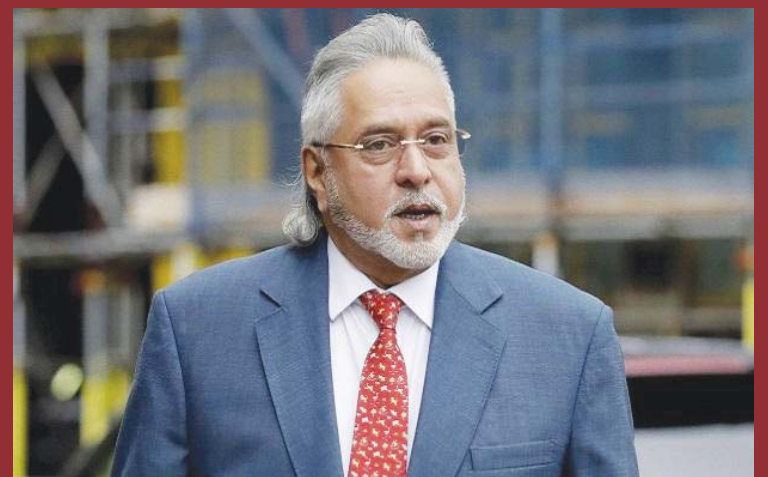
According to media reports, the Supreme Court has been told that Indian ministers as well as senior officials have taken up the

matter with Britain, but to no avail. Why is the government accepting this highly questionable British approach? Surely, it is hardly tenable that a government can refuse to state what the judicial proceedings are all about. It is one matter to be unable to disclose the substance of proceedings on national security or privacy or some other consideration and quite another to claim that nothing can be shared about it. Would that not defeat the entire purpose of an extradition agreement?

Several questions arise. Perhaps the first is if the government has taken legal advice in Britain if its government's position is sustainable under the country's law? Another is to seek from the British authorities if they have invoked identical or similar methods to hold up the extradition of fugitives belonging

to European countries or the US? If so, when and in how many cases? It is likely that they may claim confidentiality even here. In any event, India should express its displeasure at the way the British are handling this matter. And certainly, the means to do so could not have been an invitation to prime minister Boris Johnson to be the chief guest at the Republic Day.

Of course, the government can always say that India-Britain relations cannot be held hostage to one case for both countries have too many abiding interests which need to be nurtured for mutual benefit. This is true, but so is this government's laudable commitment to curbing corruption. That involves not allowing foreign governments to get away by dragging their feet at preventing accused persons from returning to India to face the law. The



government has done well to secure the extradition of many accused persons from countries in the Arab peninsular and one in Europe. This showed a serious approach on its part in matters relating to terrorism. An identical approach is needed in matters relating to economic offences. Any laxity here would only reinforce the view that India has different policies for different countries. This view could be further reinforced in the case of Britain for great indulgence was shown to it when India went along with the decision that Prince Charles should

become head of the Commonwealth as and when the leadership position for the group opens up.

If the government's approach needs some clarifications, the Opposition's apathy in this matter is inexplicable. It has not raised the issue of Britain's virtual refusal to extradite Mallya. Indeed, this is one issue on which the Indian political class can send out a clear and unanimous signal to Britain that it will not countenance a manipulative delay in sending back Mallya.

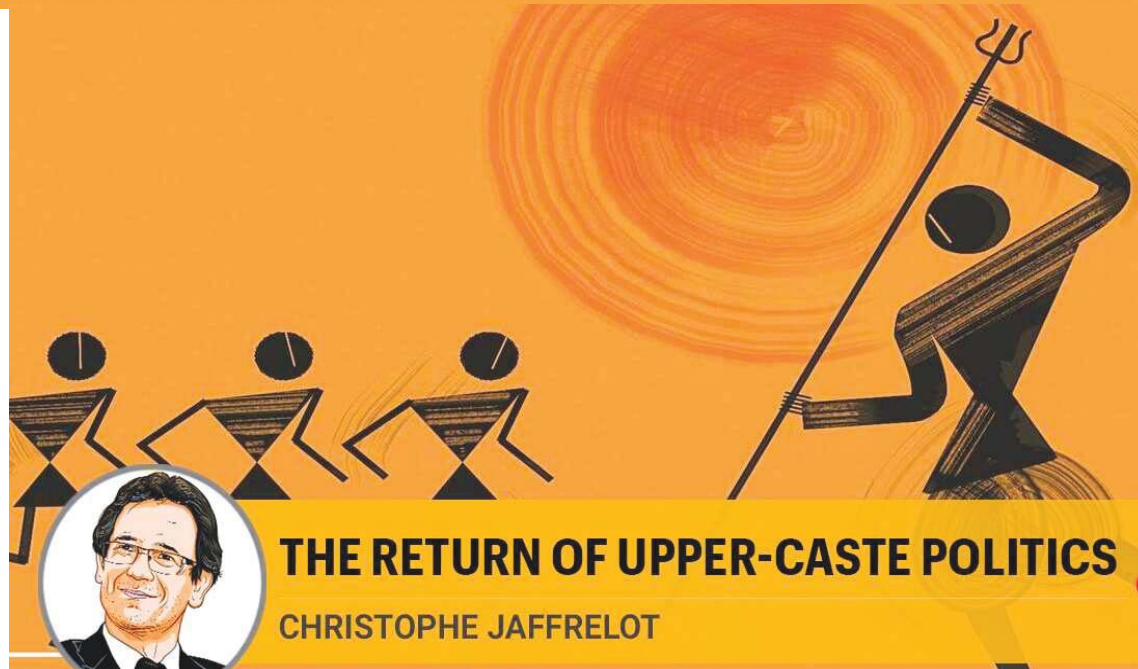
Rise of Hindutva has enabled a counter-revolution against Mandal's gains

The BJP's rise to power may, therefore, result in the promotion of some upper-caste orthopraxy and ethos via state vigilantism.

Hindu nationalism is generally defined as an ethno-religious movement. But it may have as much to do with social factors as with identity markers, as its last phase of expansion has been primarily a reaction to Mandal. Soon after the then prime minister, V P Singh, announced the implementation of the Mandal Commission report, *Organiser* wrote of "an urgent need to build up moral and spiritual forces to counter any fallout from an expected Shudra revolution". And when Mandal II happened, the same newspaper argued that the "Congress-led-UPA government at the Centre is bent upon destroying the last bastion of merit...". After the BJP was defeated in 2004, and again in 2009, it became urgent to hone a strategy that would enable it to come to power and prevent the deepening of policies that went against its Hindu nationalist ideology and the interests of its base.

The brand of national-populism that Narendra Modi had initiated in Gujarat was the perfect alternative. It could transcend caste barriers in the name of an existential defence of Hindus against threatening Others (by resorting to polarisation techniques) and attract OBCs and even Dalits, not only because of the polarisation but also because of the plebeianisation of the BJP, which used to be identified with the upper castes until then. Modi himself came from a backward caste, had developed the *chaiwala* narrative and pretended that he had been victimised by the English-speaking establishment of Delhi - a feeling many OBCs shared. After all, many of them had started to emancipate themselves after Mandal, but they had not succeeded in joining the middle class. Modi could exploit their frustration - all the more so as he promised to apply the "Gujarat model" for creating jobs.

While the BJP already had the support of the urban, upper-caste middle class, Modi brought to the party the OBC plus vote. The percentage of OBCs who



supported the party jumped from 22 per cent in 2009 to 34 per cent in 2014 and 44 per cent in 2019. These figures explain the rise to power of Modi's BJP, and, correlatively - but paradoxically - the comeback of upper-caste politicians. In the Hindi belt, 45 per cent of the BJP MPs were upper caste in 2014 and 2019. This over-representation of the upper castes was reflected in the BJP's ticket distribution. If one

removes SC and ST candidates from the picture, 62 per cent of all general category MP candidates of the BJP in the Hindi belt were upper castes as against 37 per cent for all other parties' combined. In the government that Modi formed in 2019, 47 per cent of the 55 ministers were from the upper castes, 13 per cent from the dominant castes (including Jats, Patels and Reddys), 20 per cent

were OBCs, 11 per cent were SCs and 7 per cent from the STs (plus one Muslim and one Sikh). Parallely, the Modi government has transformed the reservation system. First, the erosion of the public sector has resulted in a steady decrease in the number of jobs reserved for SCs. At the same time, the number of civil service candidates shortlisted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) dropped by

almost 40 per cent between 2014 and 2018, from 1,236 to 759. Second, the creation of a lateral entry in the Indian administration has diluted the quota system. Third, the introduction of a 10 per cent quota in 2019 for the economically weaker sections (EWS) has altered the standard definition of backwardness and de facto reserved such a quota to upper castes who were not that weak. (By setting an income limit of Rs 8,00,000 per annum to qualify under EWS, the government has made over 95 per cent of the upper castes eligible for this quota).

Besides, BJP leaders have started to eulogise the moral superiority of the upper caste in public. For instance, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, BJP leader from Rajasthan Om Birla, declared: "Brahmin community always works towards guiding all other communities... hence, Brahmins are held in high regard in society by the virtue of their birth."

Plant trees, sure. But to save the climate, we should also cut them down

Democrats have set their sights on passing major climate legislation, but with a razor-thin majority in Congress, they need to look for common ground with Republicans. One of the most promising ideas is to plant a vast number of trees - and also to cut them down.

President Joe Biden has announced an ambitious goal of net-zero emissions by 2050. That would mean switching to renewable energy, expanding public transit, retrofitting buildings, and a host of other policies to slash greenhouse gas emissions. But even in the best-case scenario, it won't be possible to eliminate all emissions. The idea of "net-zero emissions" is that any remaining emissions can be fully offset by so-called "negative emissions" -- methods of sucking carbon out of the atmosphere.

Planting trees is the most straightforward way to do that. Trees absorb CO₂ for



photosynthesis and store it as cellulose and lignin, the main components of wood.

Planting trees may also be the most popular climate policy. Even former President Donald Trump loved the idea. He championed an international initiative to plant 1 trillion trees, which would be enough to soak up at least a decade of global emissions. When Republican Rep. Bruce Westerman, a professional

forester, introduced the "Trillion Trees Act" last year, he was joined by a bipartisan group of co-sponsors that included House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy.

According to the World Resources Institute, the US alone could add 60 billion new trees to deforested lands, agricultural or urban areas, and sparse eastern forests that aren't prone to wildfires.

Forests in the western US, on the other hand, are prone to wildfires,

and that calls for putting down the shovel and reaching for the axe.

Wildfires turn trees from asset to liability. Last year's record blazes in California belched twice as much CO₂ as the entire state's power plants. It's one of the terrible feedback loops of climate change, where wildfires beget more wildfires.

To break the cycle, it's often necessary to sacrifice individual trees for the good of the whole forest. If large trees are packed densely together, flames can spread easily between them, so "selective thinning" can reduce the risk of large fires. The same goes for small trees, which can act as "ladder fuel" by transmitting fires from the forest floor up to the treetops. Dead trees that are still standing, dried out like matchsticks, pose another fire hazard that can be neutralized with chainsaws.

Tesla buys USD 1.5bln in Bitcoin, will accept as payment soon



Electric automaker Tesla said Monday that it has invested around USD 1.5 billion in Bitcoin and it plans to begin accepting the digital currency as payment for its high-end vehicles soon.

Silver Spring, Feb 9 (AP) — Holders of Bitcoin may be able to cash in some of their investment in the digital currency for a brand new electric car. Electric automaker Tesla said Monday that it has invested around USD 1.5 billion in Bitcoin and it plans to begin accepting the digital currency as payment for its high-end vehicles soon. The price of Bitcoin soared 15.4 per cent to around USD 44,500 Monday in reaction to Tesla's announcement, according to

CoinBase.

The California-based electric car maker headed by Elon Musk revealed the new strategy in a filing with the US Securities and Exchange Commission, saying its investment in digital currency and other "alternative reserve assets" may grow. Bitcoin has drawn enthusiasts for its scarcity and security, but the volatile digital currency still is not widely used to pay for goods and services. It's mostly been a store of value, like gold, with some limited merchants

like Overstock accepting bitcoin for payment.

It's also used by those distrustful of the banking system or criminals seeking to launder money. Whether other major companies will follow Tesla's lead in investing in Bitcoin or accepting it for transactions is unclear. A vehicle is a large purchase, which could make Bitcoin a better fit to pay for it, but the wild price swings in Bitcoin could be a significant risk to any merchant who decided to accept it. "It was wise of Tesla to announce that it will deem its investment in Bitcoin as an "alternative asset." That is certainly appropriate, because Bitcoin might be coming into greater acceptance as currency, but it is not cash," said Anthony Michael Sabino,

a professor of law, at St. John's University.

Tesla said last month that it had cash and cash equivalents of USD 19.4 billion after selling new shares to take advantage of a rising stock price. Dan Ives of Wedbush Securities said the move gives Tesla "more flexibility to further diversify and maximize returns on its cash." Tesla is in a unique position to accept digital currencies for payment, since the automaker does not rely on a network of independently owned dealerships to sell its vehicles unlike traditional car companies such as General Motors and Ford. "It certainly seems that beyond embracing it as a store of value for his own trust or his own assets, it does appear that (Musk is) embracing it as a transactional tool as well," said

Michael Venuto, co-portfolio manager of the Amplify Transformational Data Sharing fund, an exchange-traded fund that tries to invest in digital currency technologies. Venuto's fund holds a small amount of Bitcoin but mostly invests in companies that build around such technologies. Even with Tesla's support, it could take some time before those who've made money investing in Bitcoin to use it to buy a car. Jessica Caldwell, executive director of insights at Edmunds.com, doesn't expect it to become commonplace because most people take loans to buy their vehicles or lease them and don't pay in cash, said Plus, most people at present would not be comfortable taking a risk with cryptocurrency on such an expensive purchase, she said.

Is India going to ban Bitcoin? Here is story so far

The Indian government is closer than ever to impose a blanket ban on crypto-currency trading, mining and investments in the country. This will include the much talked about Bitcoin along as well as other popular crypto-currencies. A bill for the same has already been proposed and on Tuesday, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in the Rajya Sabha that a high-level Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) has been constituted under the Chairmanship of Secretary (Economic Affairs) to study the issues related to virtual currencies and propose actions through which all private cryptocurrencies, except any

virtual currencies issued by state, will be prohibited in India.

The government has also proposed to launch Reserve Bank of India (RBI) backed Central Bank-backed Digital Currency (CBDC). This leaves the industry and investors uncertain about the future of virtual currencies in India. However, this isn't the first time when government has tried to act against crypto-currency. Here is a complete look at everything that has happened so far.

What is crypto-currency and how is it different from CBDC?

Crypto-currency is the generic name given to virtual currency. It is used as a digital asset designed to work as a medium of exchange. They work using

blockchain which is a decentralized technology spread across many computers that manages and records transactions. There are 6700 different types of crypto-currency traded publicly, according to CoinMarketCap.com, a market research website. Some of the popular ones include Bitcoin, Dogecoin, Ethereum, XRP etc. None of these crypto-currencies are issued by the central bank of a nation. That's what differentiates them from CBDCs. The latter is a digital currency which holds the same value as fiat currencies issued by a country's central bank. People's Bank of China was the



first major central bank to announce it would experiment with a CBDC.

India's struggle with crypto-currency - -- The Indian government has been trying to find ways to protect the investors and find a viable solution. In

December 2013, the RBI had cautioned the users about the risks of virtual currencies for the very first time. It had said that their value is a matter of speculation and not underpinned by an asset or good. Since then, things have changed dramatically.

Future of imaging business lies in underwater cameras: Report

First things first, what is actually happening in the world of cameras? First the steady shift from DSLRs to mirrorless cameras. Then the mirrorless cameras notch up 8K video recording capabilities such as Canon EOS R5 and Sony Alpha 1. Second, camera makers coming up with vlog-specific cameras like Sony ZV-1 for content creators. Third, companies putting in efforts to manufacture drones due to its popularity. We earlier reported,

Sony revealed the Airpeak drone at CES 2021.

So, what is next? FIOR Markets is a self-described futuristic market intelligence company. According to its latest report, there will be a massive boom in underwater cameras. It is expected that the underwater camera market will reach a value of \$15.3 billion by 2027.

It is not hard to imagine that the future of imaging business lies in underwater cameras. Many video content creators are always

experimenting to bring something new on the table. Right now, the most convenient method to shoot underwater footage is via an action camera. Also, there is a reason why Geneinno, an underwater robotics company, launched its second underwater drone known as Geneinno T1 Pro. Going back to the report, FIOR Markets predicts that the global underwater camera market will grow from \$4.8 billion (in 2019) to \$15.3 billion (in 2027). "The

factors driving the market are the growing demand for underwater cameras for personal use, the implementation of underwater cameras in media & entertainment applications, the emergence of camera rental services, the high demand for underwater sports, and the rising trend of underwater photography on social media feeds," FIOR writes.

The one factor that refrain users from buying dedicated underwater cameras is the high

could probably work around cost effective methods to make underwater cameras popular for both commercial and personal uses.

The underwater camera market study further reveals that "The mirrorless underwater camera segment holds the largest market share due to the portability of the camera; the absence of mirrors makes them lighter in weight and are cheaper than other cameras." FIOR says that the notable

Monster Hunter movie review:**Milla Jovovich, Tony Jaa's video game adaptation is the death of cinema**

Monster Hunter movie review: Paul WS Anderson's new film, starring Milla Jovovich and Tony Jaa, feels depressingly hollow, even by the standards of corny, unpretentious action movies.

Monster Hunter

Director - Paul WS Anderson

Cast - Milla Jovovich, Tony Jaa, Clifford TI Harris, Ron Perlman
Paul WS Anderson cannot even be trusted with recycling old material, which is ironic, because he only makes garbage. Many films are ripped off in his latest sensory assault - the bluntly titled Monster Hunter - each with less grace than the last.

Faced with the reality that he doesn't have the Resident Evil series to malign any longer, Anderson set his sights on another Capcom franchise. Had it not been for Covid-19 and a cruel twist of fate - a joke in Monster Hunter offended Chinese audiences, aka the only people who had the power to save it - you could have been sure that they'd release one of these every year

for the next decade.

You've got to hand it to Anderson, though. He aims big. Monster Hunter opens with a desert chase that appears to have been cobbled together from discarded Mad Max: Fury Road storyboards, and dares to include an Apocalypse Now homage. Francis Ford Coppola nearly died making that movie; you might go belly up watching this one. As elite soldier Natalie Artemis, Milla Jovovich redefines what it means to be a 'long-suffering wife' as she suits up, once again, only to be lobbed around in a film directed by her husband. Anderson shoots Jovovich, a groundbreaking action star in her own right, as if she is a machine of war. I've seen Michael Bay film (doomed) phone booths with more passion than how Anderson designs action sequences around his lawfully

wedded wife.

Not once, for instance, can you be sure that she is even in the middle of the action herself - such is the ineptitude with which Monster Hunter is cut. That the editing in this film is the handiwork of a man named Doobie White is the icing on the cake. He has to his credit some of the most godawful action movies in recent memory - the Neveldine/Taylor atrocity Gamer, in which Michael C Hall affected a slave owner accent; and Polar, in which Johnny Knoxville gets assassinated during third base.

No happy endings are there to be found in Monster Hunter either. Not only does Anderson do his wife dirty, he also wastes Tony Jaa, who, in essence, is the titular hunter of the monsters. Instead of allowing Jaa to express himself as he knows best - imag-



ine him leap-frogging over the backs of the horned Diablos, like he did with elephants in Ong Bak - Anderson subdues Jaa's skills by quick-cutting around him. In darkness. There's a cursory, video game-inspired, mission-oriented plot - Natalie and The Hunter must go on a quest to a Sky Tower, battling a collection

of monsters along the way. There are training montages scored to synth rock music, and a quick cameo by Ron Perlman, playing Kurtz-lite.

All of it, however, feels depressingly hollow, even by the standards of corny, unpretentious action movies. Kill it before it lays eggs.

Lahore Confidential review:**Subterfuge meets romance in ZEE5's spy thriller**

ZEE5's newest release Lahore Confidential is a thrilling love story of two spies from different countries, who are torn between their love for each other and a strong sense of patriotism.



Cast: Karishma Tanna, Richa

Chadha and Arunoday Singh

Director: Kunal Kohli

Producer: Jar Pictures

Writer: Vibha Singh

DOP: Karthik Ganesh

Creator: S Hussain Zaidi

Action Director: Sunil Rodrigues

Casting by: Mukesh Chhabra

Rating: 3 (out of 5)

There is something innately exciting about spy thrillers, especially those touching upon Indo-Pak espionage, that make you want to figure out what's going on behind the surface even as you get immersed in thrills that the main plot has to

offer.

ZEE5's latest release Lahore Confidential will take you into the world of spies; RAW agents on secret missions and cross border espionage as you get absorbed in this saga of love, deceit and subterfuge.

Set in modern-day Lahore, the film opens with a birthday party gone awry with gunshots and a killing. The attack is shown through the lens of a little boy, who sees his father being killed on his Ammi's birthday.

Lahore Confidential is a contemporary love story of two spies, who are torn between their love for each other and a strong

sense of patriotism.

Ananya (played by Richa Chadha) is a smart and subversive city girl with a passion for Urdu literature and a dream to write a book on poetry one day. She is packed off to Pakistan as a media attaché in the Indian High Commission in Lahore, but is completely oblivious to the fact that she is part of an important intelligence mission for her country.

There, she is introduced to Rauf Ahmed Kazmi aka James Spencer (played by Arunoday Singh). Rauf and Ananya bond over shayari, and Urdu literature but this is not a normal love story. Soon, we realize that Rauf is none other than that little boy in the opening scene, who sees his father die before his eyes. "Mujhe kisi kaum se nafrat nahi hai. Mujhe nafrat hai is khooni khel se," he says, as

he goes about killing those who kill others.

Rauf and Ananya's intimate love story only create additions to the multiple layers of deception. It is a world that forces you to live multiple identities, and your personal desires can, somewhere, clash with your duty towards saving your nation and its honour. Ananya is caught up in the machinations of her agency and her strong adoration for Rauf.

The narrative shows female spies in a completely new light, as we meet Ananya and Yukti (played by Karishma Tanna), who are modern Indian women living life on their own terms in a foreign country. They hold strong even as they see their colleagues being kidnapped and trapped in extremist plots on both sides.

The subtle sub-plot that runs with Ananya's mother is the

quintessential story of every young Indian woman. You may have a successful career, but your life is defined by your marriage, which has to happen at the 'right' age.

At just a little over an hour, the turn of events is swift, leaving us with little time to pause, or feel a dull moment. The actors - Richa Chadha and Arunoday Singh - play their part with elan and their on-screen chemistry is absolutely sizzling. Tanna, too, is convincing as a firebrand agent, who lives life quite on her own terms and won't mind 'getting a quick fuck, for a cover'.

The cinematography is great and the city of Lahore is recreated before us in a picturesque way with all its glory and shair-o-shayari. The Punjabi folk music adds more flavour to the old school romance, as we are left with melodies to hum!

Kriti Sanon is Tiger Shroff's leading lady in Ganapath

KRITI SANON TO STAR IN TIGER SHROFF'S GANAPATH



Tiger Shroff has finally unveiled the name of his leading lady in the much-anticipated film Ganapath. On Wednesday, he took to social media to announce that he will be reuniting with Kriti Sanon for the upcoming film Ganapath. He also shared a motion poster where Kriti looks fierce while riding a bike.

KRITI SANON TO STAR IN TIGER SHROFF'S GANAPATH

The motion poster shows Kriti in an intense avatar. She can be seen riding a bike in a black crop top and pants and sporting kohl-smudged eyes. Sharing the post, Tiger Shroff wrote that he is excited to work with a talented actress like Kriti. His

post read, "Khatam hua intezaar @kritisanon Super excited to work with this bundle of talent again #Ganapath #VikasBahl #VashuBhagnani @jackkybhagnani @deepshikhadeshmukh #GoodCo @pooja_ent #PoojaEntertainment (sic)."

Kriti Sanon also shared her excitement to be working with Tiger and wrote, "Tigyyyy! tooooo excited (sic)." Take a look:

MEET KRITI SANON AKA JASSI FROM GANAPATH

Kriti also introduced her character in Ganapath on Instagram. She wrote, "Meet JASSI !! Super Duper Excited for this one!! Teaming up once again with my very special @tigerjackieshroff Can't wait for the shoot to begin! Lets KILL it (sic)."

TIGER SHARES A GLIMPSE OF HIS LEADING LADY

On February 9, Tiger Shroff promised his fans that he will reveal the name of his leading lady today. Sharing a

motion poster with the actress sitting on a bike with her back turned towards the camera, it had Tiger's vocals playing in the background. He says, "Apan bhi wait kar raha hai, ki kab mudegi." Finally he has confirmed that it's Kriti Sanon.

GANAPATH FIRST-LOOK POSTER

In November of 2020, Tiger Shroff announced his next action film Ganapath with a teaser poster. He wrote, "This one is special for me, and especially for you guys! Presenting #Ganapath - get ready for more action, thrill and entertainment! #VikasBahl #VashuBhagnani @jackkybhagnani @deepshikhadeshmukh @pooja_ent @rajeev_chudasama (sic)."

WHAT DID KRITI SAY ABOUT STARRING IN GANAPATH?

Kriti Sanon, who worked with Tiger Shroff in Heropanti said about being a part of Ganapath, "I'm thrilled to reunite with Tiger after about 7 years and also to be directed by Vikas in a space that is so new to me."

Taapsee Pannu decodes what confidence is with new pic. Boyfriend Mathias reacts

Taapsee Pannu, who often treats her fans to photos from the sets of her films, took to Instagram to share a picture from a gorgeous photoshoot. In the picture, the actress can be seen in a grey maxi dress, and along with that, she wrote a few words of wisdom to inspire her fans. But what grabbed attention was her boyfriend Mathias Boe's comment on her picture.

WHAT DID TAAPSEE PANNU POST?

Taapsee Pannu posted a stunning throwback picture in a grey maxi and talked about what confidence means. In the picture, that's been clicked outdoors, Taapsee let her signature curls frame her face as she accessorised her look with a round black pair of sunglasses.

Exuding confidence in the glam avatar, Taapsee captioned the post, "Confidence is not walking into a room thinking you are better than everyone else. It's walking into a room and not having to compare yourself to anyone else in the first place. #HappySunday (sic)."

HOW DID BOYFRIEND MATHIAS BOE REACT?

As soon as Taapsee Pannu posted the picture, her fans started showering love on the post. But obviously, her boyfriend Mathias Boe's reaction stood out. He dropped heart-eyed emojis in the comments section of Taapsee's photo. Take a look:



Is Big B's granddaughter Navya Naveli dating Meezaan? Dad Jaaved Jaaferi responds

Amitabh Bachchan's granddaughter Navya Naveli and Meezaan Jaaferi have been in the headlines for quite some time now owing to their dating rumours. Meezaan's father Jaaved Jaaferi has now reacted to the rumours pertaining to their alleged relationship.

JAAVED JAAFERI REACTS TO NAVYA AND MEEZAN'S DATING

RUMOURS

Jaaved Jafferri told Times Of India



in an interview that Navya and Meezaan are just friends. He

added that Navya has been his daughter's friend since school and they have grown up together. Meezaan and Navya have a common group of friends and they are always together. This makes it convenient for people to link them. "People want content. Being good friends with somebody is considered to be

something else always. These children have grown up together; my daughter and Navya have been friends since school. They have a common group of friends. Even Sara Ali Khan and Meezan were in the same school. They used to come home, hang around till 3 am.

Deepika Padukone was obsessed with doing laundry for friends on her bachelorette

Deepika Padukone has shared a fun video with her school friend, Hiteshi Mehta. The two participated in a Bake Off challenge. In the clip, Hiteshi revealed many details about Deepika Padukone's life. She talked about how the actress was obsessed with doing everyone's laundry on her bachelorette as she didn't get to do laundry otherwise. **DEEPIKA DID LAUNDRY ON HER BACHELORETTE**

Hiteshi said, "She was obsessed with doing everyone's laundry on her bachelorette. She forced us to give our

clothes only so that she could put them in the washing machine."

Hiteshi also talked about how Deepika would write her exam papers and about their school days. Deepika is seen at her candid best in the video. By the end of the video, the two best friends successfully make chocolate cookies. **WHAT'S ON THE WORK FRONT?**

Deepika will next be seen in Shakun Batra's next. The actress has completed the shooting of the film. The yet-to-be-titled film also stars Ananya Panday and Siddhant Chaturvedi in lead roles.

Apart from this, the Chhapaak actress will also be seen opposite Hrithik Roshan in Siddharth Anand's next film Fighter. It will release on September 30, 2022. She also has the tentatively titled Prabhas 21 in her kitty. The sci-fi flick is directed by Nag Ashwin of Mahanati fame. It stars Prabhas in the lead role.



Vin Diesel's F9 teaser out. Film looks like a family reunion

A promo for the new Fast & Furious film, titled F9, was released during the Super Bowl on Sunday, February 7. The film is helmed by Justin Lin, who also directed Fast Five. **ABOUT THE F9 TEASER** - The newest instalment in the Fast & Furious franchise promises an action-packed ride. Even though the promo is only 30 seconds long, it promises an emotional reunion of almost all the members of the Fast & Furious family. While Vin Diesel is seen taking charge of affairs in the new promo, one can see an intense John Cena eyeing to make a comeback. Not only that but the viewers are also given a glimpse of Charlize Theron and Helen



Mirren's character, both of who seem to be enjoying the non-stop action. The official synopsis of the film reads, "Vin Diesel's Dom Toretto is leading a quiet life off the grid with Letty and his son, little Brian, but they know that danger always lurks just over their peaceful horizon. This time, that threat will force Dom to confront the sins of his past if he's going to save those he loves most. His crew joins together to stop a world-shattering plot led by the most skilled assassin and high-performance driver they've ever encountered: a man who also happens to be Dom's forsaken brother, Jakob (John Cena)."

Janhvi Kapoor drives e-rickshaw on sets of Good Luck Jerry

Janhvi Kapoor likes to have fun while shooting her films. Today, the actress shared videos and pictures from the sets of her upcoming film Good Luck Jerry. In one of the videos, the actress is seen driving an e-rickshaw.

JANHVI'S FUN TIME ON GOOD LUCK JERRY SETS

The actress's team members are seen sitting in the passengers' seat as she drives them away in an e-rickshaw. They can be heard saying, "Humein bachao,"

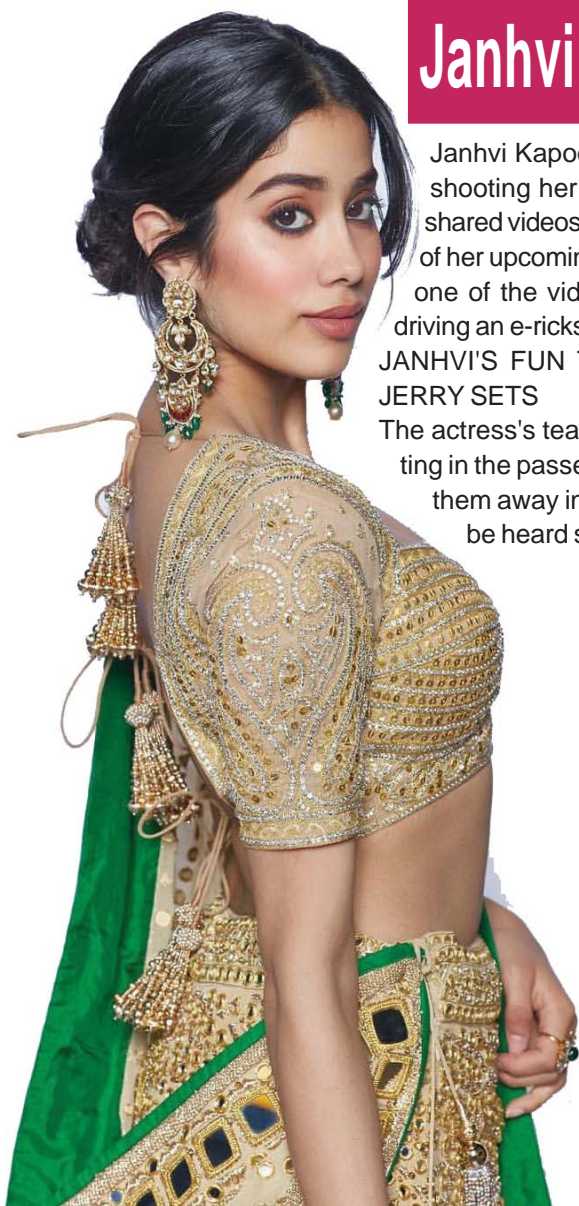
in the video. Janhvi also shared a picture of sister Khushi Kapoor, who is accompanying her as she shoots for the film. Janhvi captioned the post as, "Film shoots are fun" **JANHVI PLAYS CRICKET ON GOOD LUCK JERRY SETS**

This isn't the first time we have seen Janhvi have a fun time on the sets of Good Luck Jerry. The Dhadak actress earlier shared videos of her playing cricket on the sets of the film. She captioned it as, "It is safe to say I am a pro." The actress is seen taking clean

shots at the game.

ABOUT GOOD LUCK JERRY

Good Luck Jerry is the Hindi adaptation of the 2018 Tamil film Kolamavu Kokila, starring Nayanthara. It is directed by Siddharth Sengupta and produced by Aanand L Rai. The film also stars Deepak Dobriyal, Mita Vashisth, Neeraj Sood and Sushant Singh in pivotal roles. The film's shoot had been disrupted twice by farmers in Punjab who are protesting against the Centre's three farm laws.



Judas and the Black Messiah India release on March 5

After opening to critical acclaim internationally, Judas and the Black Messiah is now set to hit the cinemas in India on March 5. The historical drama is backed by Warner Bros and helmed by Shaka King, marking his studio feature film directorial debut.

JUDAS AND THE BLACK MESSIAH IS INSPIRED BY TRUE EVENTS

The motion picture is inspired by true events and is set in the America of the 1960s, which was one of the most tumultuous times and crucial periods for American history. Based in Chicago, the film revolves around the betrayal of Fred Hampton, who was chairman of the Black Panther Party of the 1960s, by an FBI informant named

William O'Neal.

CAST AND CREW OF JUDAS AND THE BLACK MESSIAH



The film stars Daniel Kaluuya, Lakeith Stanfield, Jesse Plemons and Dominique Fishback in pivotal roles. Actors like Martin Sheen and Ashton Sanders also feature in the period drama.

Shaka King, who is known for helming TV shows and short films, has penned the script of the movie along with his writing partner, Will Berson. King has also produced the film along with the Black Panther director, Ryan Coogler, and Charles D King, who has backed titles like Fences and Just Mercy in the past.



New world order emerging post-Covid, India can be a leader: PM Modi

(SAI Bureau)- Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday replied to the motion of thanks on President's address in the Lok Sabha where he said that India has to become a world leader in the post-Covid world. New world order is emerging in post-Covid world. We have to decide if we have to be spectators, or emerge as world leader. India has to be self-reliant, empowered and capable if it has to emerge as a leader in the world," PM Modi said.

"We're knocking at the doors of 75 years of Independence. It's a matter of pride for every Indian and an occasion to move forward. We may be in any corner or belong to any strata of society but we must make a new resolve that where do we want to take India at 100 years of freedom," he further said. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) issued a three-line whip



to its Lok Sabha members to be present in the House today and support the government's stand. The Prime Minister had replied to the motion of thanks in the Rajya Sabha on Monday in which he talked about
(Contd on page 35)

"Right To Protest Cannot Be Anytime, Everywhere": Indian Supreme Court



(SAI Bureau)- New Delhi: The right to protest and express dissent comes with certain duties and cannot be held "anytime and everywhere", the Supreme Court said in an order, dismissing a review petition on the anti-citizenship law protests held in Delhi's Shaheen Bagh in 2019. **(Contd on page 35)**

Bumble founder becomes a billionaire at 31

Woman exec who quit Tinder after accusing male co-founders of sexually harassing her floats her female-friendly dating app for \$13bn



Bumble founder Whitney Wolfe Herd has become a billionaire at 31 after taking the dating app public, boosting her wealth from \$500million to \$1.6billion. Wolfe Herd already lives a life filled with lavish parties, overseas trips and A-list friends after founding the female-empowering dating app in 2014, following her departure from Tinder over claims of sexual discrimination and harassment from male co-founders. **(Contd on page 35)**

Life on Mars ? Escaping water vapour offers new clues

(SAI Bureau)- Researchers have observed water vapour escaping high up in the thin atmosphere of Mars, offering tantalising new clues as to whether the red planet could have once hosted life. The traces of ancient valleys and river channels suggest liquid water once flowed across the surface of Mars. Today, the water is mostly locked up in the planet's ice caps or buried underground. But some of it is vaporising, in the form of hydrogen leaking from the atmosphere, according to the new research co-authored in the journal Science Advances by two scientists at Britain's Open University. They detected the vapour by analysing light passing through the Martian atmosphere using an instrument called the Nadir and Occultation for Mars Discovery. The device is travelling aboard the ExoMars Trace Gas Orbiter, a joint mission between the European Space

Agency and Russia's Roscosmos. "This fantastic instrument is giving us a never-before-seen view of water isotopes in the atmosphere of Mars as a function of both time and location," Manish Patel, senior lecturer in planetary sciences at the Open University, said. "Measuring water isotopes is a crucial element of understanding how Mars as a planet has lost its water over time, and therefore how the habitability of the planet has changed throughout its history," he said. It has been a busy week for Martian research. On Wednesday, the Chinese Tianwen-1 probe entered the planet's orbit after launching from southern China last July, in the latest advance for Beijing's ambitious space programme. The day before, the United Arab Emirates' Hope probe also successfully entered Mars' orbit, making history as the Arab world's first interplanetary mission.

Why Logan Act is Un-Constitutional.

By Ravi Batra

It was April 2, 2020, and dear Eliot L. Engel, then-Chairman of House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC) issued a Tweet:

"Deeply concerned by Pakistan court's overturning of convictions for the abduction & killing of Daniel Pearl. It's critical Pakistan demonstrate a real commitment to addressing its longstanding terrorism problem by holding those involved accountable."

And, Tejinder Singh, Chief editor of IAT, had already called me earlier, to inform me of this travesty.

(Contd on page 12)