



INSIDER

Looking to Buy/Sell ?

We know the difference between Home & House



**Nlight
Real
Estate**

Sharanjit Singh Thind
Real Estate Broker/Notary Public

Tel: 516 NLIGHT4

Vol. 20

47

Friday 14 January to 21 January 2022

\$ 1

www.thesouthasianinsider.com

Checkmate. Putin has the West cornered



annexed Crimea and dispatched "little green men" into Ukraine's Donbas region. An all-out land invasion of Ukraine is now a real possibility.

But let's face it. Putin could care less about the West's threats, sitting as he does in the enviable position of being able to call the shots. Europe is in the grip of an energy crisis with low reserves. And with Russia supplying some 40% of the European Union's gas imports, the Kremlin has already shown its ability to checkmate the West's harshest sanctions by limiting production and potentially triggering rolling blackouts across the continent.

(Contd on page 30)

(SAI Bureau)-As 2022 nears, the West is trying to figure out Russian President Vladimir Putin's next move on a complex geopolitical chessboard -- and preparing an "aggressive package" of sanctions, should he decide to make another land grab in Ukraine. Tensions are now at their highest since 2014, when Russia illegally

How the U.S., U.K. and Pakistan Teamed Up To Stop Another 9/11



(SAI Bureau)-August 9, 2006. It was evening in Walthamstow, East London. Two local men had arranged to meet at the Town Hall complex to discuss an urgent matter. They met in the parking lot, briefly rummaging around in the back of one of their cars, before walking off toward the Walthamstow War Memorial. There, they leaned against a wall in the dark, chatting. A little way off in the darkness, the command crackled over the police comms

(Contd on page 29)

The Ferozepur Blunder

Why PM Modi's security breach is not about politics



On January 5, TV visuals showed the exceptional image of a stationary black SUV, easily identifiable among a motorcade of white cars, on a flyover a few kilometres from the heavily guarded Hussainiwala border. The SUV, a veritable sitting duck protected by only a handful of officers, was carrying the holder of the office of the Prime Minister of India, one of the most important positions in the world. The car could easily have been targeted by a well-positioned sniper or grenade-launcher, or faced an attack from a drone, (Contd on page 28)

The Metaverse Ideas From CES 2022 That We're Most Excited—and Confused – About

A version of this article was published in TIME's newsletter Into the Metaverse. Subscribe for a weekly guide to the future of the Internet. You can find past issues of the newsletter here.

Over two thousand companies descended on Las Vegas last week for the annual tech exhibition CES, which is organized by the Consumer Technology Association. Given the way that the last year has gone you can probably guess the conference's buzzword.

Hint: It was "metaverse." Ina Fried, writing in Axios, joked that "Many CES observers suggested



a drinking game in which mentioned—but that would have keynote watchers took a shot been a recipe for alcohol every time the metaverse was poisoning." (Contd on page 28)



Insurance

Tel : 516 NLIGHT 8 (516 654 4488)

Protests In US After Black Man Shot Dead By Off-Duty Police Officer



Officer Jeffrey Hash, employed by the city since 2005, was off duty when the shooting occurred on Saturday afternoon

(Insider Bureau)-The death of an unarmed African-American man shot by an off-duty white police officer under mysterious circumstances has fueled outrage in Fayetteville, North Carolina, where relatives of the victim are calling for protests Thursday.

Prominent rights lawyer Benjamin Crump and the family of Jason Walker have scheduled a "rally for justice" at 8:00 pm (0100 GMT) in the city.

Small clusters of residents have already marched this week in Fayetteville to demand the arrest of officer Jeffrey Hash, in a case that has revived debate over whether police use excessive force in the United States, particularly against minorities.

Hash, employed by the city since

2005, was off duty when the shooting occurred on Saturday afternoon.

The officer was driving in his vehicle with his wife and daughter when they neared Walker, an unarmed 37-year-old Black man crossing the street near his parents' house.

Moments later, Hash opened fire, and soon Walker lay dead of gunshot wounds. Exactly what transpired is in dispute.

In an amateur video, filmed just after the shooting and posted online, the police officer explains to colleagues called to the scene that Walker jumped into the middle of the street and that he braked to avoid him.

According to Hash, Walker then threw himself on the vehicle, tore off a windshield wiper and used it

to hit the windshield, prompting Hash to draw his weapon to protect his family.

But witnesses say Hash hit the pedestrian before stopping.

"I saw him brake, completely stop and then keep going," Elizabeth Ricks told an ABC station. "I saw him hit Jason... then his body was slammed into the windshield."

She then heard shots fired, Ricks said. "I think he fired the first shot through the windshield and three more times outside the vehicle," she said. According to police, Hash's black pickup truck had no visible dents and Walker's body did not show any signs of impact other than bullet wounds. The officer was placed on administrative leave, but has not been arrested or charged with a crime. State investigators have

begun a probe into the killing.

Crump said the family and broader Fayetteville community were demanding answers to why Walker was "senselessly shot and killed" by an off-duty officer. "We have reason to believe that this was a case of 'shoot first, ask later,' a philosophy seen all too often within law enforcement," Crump, known for his fight against police brutality, said in a statement. US police officers kill an average of 1,000 people each year, with an overrepresentation of African Americans among the victims. Police are rarely prosecuted, although the major anti-racism protests of 2020 prompted some changes in the courts, with convictions against some police and others in high-profile shooting deaths.

Awesome TV announces Raj Soin, President and CEO of the Soin Group of Companies, as a Senior Advisor to the network



(Insider Bureau)-Awesome TV announces Raj Soin, President and CEO of the Soin Group of Companies, as a Senior Advisor to the network. Soin, an entrepreneur and businessman, has started, owned and operated several businesses for the past 29 years. It includes a chain of retail stores, vocational education business, commercial & residential real estate Investments, development, construction & property management in the US and India. "I'm honoured to join the Awesome TV team," said Raj Soin. "Awesome TV is already making a name for itself by innovating how viewers connect with Bollywood and Hollywood. I'm excited to help grow the organization, advice to solve business problems and explore new growth opportunities."

"It is with sincere pleasure I would like to welcome Raj Soin as a Senior Advisor of Awesome TV, a visionary entrepreneur with talent, skills that will help Awesome TV grow" informed Ritesh Parikh Creator and Founder of Awesome TV. Awesome TV proudly claims of being the most affluent online platform in North America and around the globe, with original Bollywood and Hollywood content. More people watch, follow and engage with Awesome TV than any other South Asian Network from the USA.

"Dad Changing Future", Says Son After Man's Pig-Heart Transplant

(Insider Bureau)-The son of a transplant recipient who was implanted with a genetically modified pig heart in a first-of-its-kind surgery, called his father's procedure "a miracle."

The surgery, performed by a team at the University of Maryland Medicine on January 7, is among the first to demonstrate the feasibility of a pig-to-human heart transplant, a field made possible by new gene editing tools.

If proven successful, scientists hope pig organs could help alleviate shortages of donor

organs. For 57-year-old David Bennett of Maryland, the heart transplant was his last option.

"This is significant for my dad, for the United States, for the world," David Bennett Jr., the patient's son, said on Thursday.

"This is groundbreaking, this is remarkable and frankly, this is a miracle."

"I myself have some heart issues at 37 years old so my dad is

certainly changing the future for even myself."

On the morning of the surgery, the transplant team removed the pig's heart and placed it into a special device to preserve its function until the surgery. "He was in the operating room three days straight. He's got a lot of swelling throughout his body, and so he's suffering a great deal. This healing is going to be a process

and so again, the first words out of his mouth were 'I can't take this' but I know how strong my dad is." Pigs have long been a tantalizing source of potential transplants because their organs are so similar to humans. Prior efforts at pig-to-human transplants have failed because of genetic differences that caused organ rejection or viruses that posed an infection risk. Scientists have tackled that problem by editing away potentially harmful genes and adding human genes linked with immune acceptance





Jammu-Srinagar National Highway closed again due to fresh landslides in Ramban

The national highway was reopened for traffic on Monday after remaining closed for the past three days owing to heavy snowfall and multiple landslides in Ramban district

The Jammu-Srinagar national highway was closed again due to fresh landslides in Ramban district on Tuesday, triggering massive traffic jams on the stretch, official sources said. Many truckers, who were stranded on the highway for the past several days, blamed the traffic management authorities for not allowing them to move on, causing

them huge financial losses as perishable goods they carry have been damaged. The highway was closed to traffic due to a landslide in the Mehar area of Ramban, the official sources said. The men and machines are working to clear the highway of the debris and shooting stones, which pose a grave danger to the lives of the people, they said.

Massive traffic jams were seen at many places on the highway. The 270-km Jammu-Srinagar national highway was reopened for traffic on Monday after remaining closed for the past three days owing to heavy snowfall and multiple landslides in Ramban district. The highway, the only all-weather road linking Kashmir with the rest of the country, was closed for traffic on Friday

afternoon, shortly after it was opened after two days' closure, following heavy snowfall and multiple landslides between Chanderkote and Ramsu. While passenger vehicles and some vehicles carrying essentials were allowed to move towards the Kashmir Valley on Monday, others remained stranded on the stretch. Some vehicle owners protested over their halt on the highway and

said the perishable items in their vehicles have been destroyed. "We have been stranded on the highway for the past five days. We are carrying vegetables and most of them have perished. If they allow vehicles to carry chicken, why have they halted vehicles carrying vegetables? It has caused us a grave loss," a trucker, Sadiq, told reporters.

Hyderabad police recover stolen Covid vaccines, two arrested

Hyderabad police arrested two people for allegedly stealing Covid vaccines from a Public Health Centre. The police recovered vaccines and other stolen items from them

The police arrested two people for allegedly stealing Covid vaccines from an Urban Public Health Centre (UPHC) in Telangana's Hyderabad. The Mirchowk police recovered the vaccines and other stolen articles. The accused have been identified as Javeed Khan and Ghouse Pasha. They allegedly stole 24 vials of Covishield and 17 vials of Covaxin on January 9. The duo broke into the UPHC in Jambagh and swindled vials containing 340 doses of



Covishield and 270 doses of Covaxin. They also removed the tyre of an auto-rickshaw parked at the compound. The healthcare workers used to conduct door-to-door vaccination camps in the nearby lanes on the auto. Based on the complaint of the hospital staff, the police started the investigation and arrested the duo. Both the accused are residents of Mirchowk and have been charged with other cases in the past.

India recorded 1,94,720 new Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours as of Wednesday, January 12. India also reported 4,868 omicron cases with 1,805 recoveries

On Wednesday, January 12, India reported 1,94,720 new cases of Covid-19 in the last 24 hours, which is 15.9% higher than yesterday. This brings the total caseload to 3,60,70,510.

India also recorded 4,868 cases of the omicron variant today with 1,805 recoveries.

The top five states which have registered maximum cases are Maharashtra with 34,424 cases, followed by Delhi with 21,259

cases, West Bengal with 21,098 cases, Tamil Nadu with 15,379 cases and Karnataka with 14,473 cases.

While 54.77% of the new cases

are reported from these five states, Maharashtra alone is responsible for 17.68% of the new cases.

In the last 24 hours, 165 deaths

were reported in the country, increasing the total reported death count to 4,84,378.

Maximum casualties were reported in Delhi (23), followed

by Maharashtra with 22 daily deaths.

India's active caseload stands at 9,55,319. In the last 24 hours, active cases increased by 1,33,873.

VACCINATION AND RECOVERY STATUS

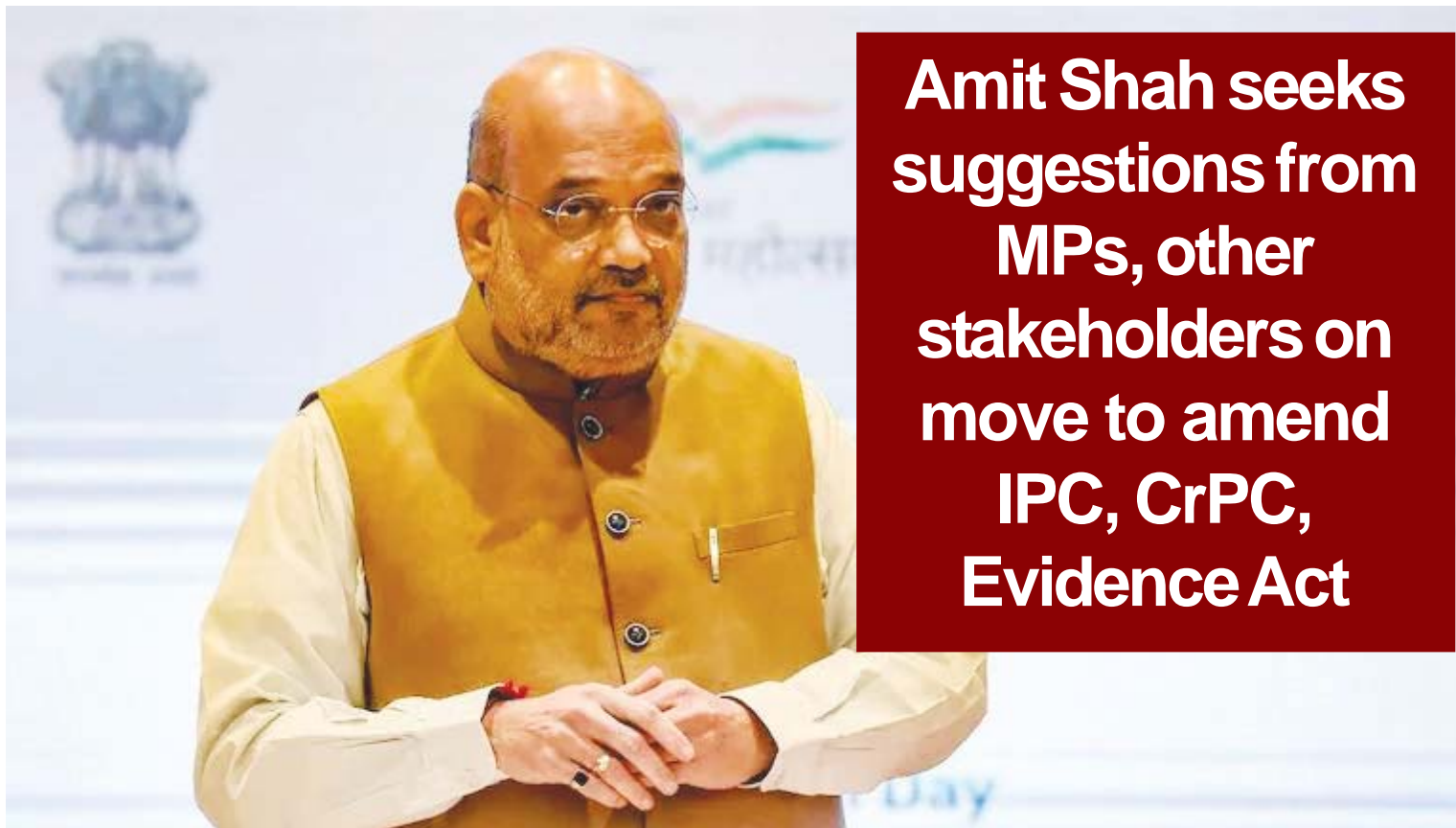
A total of 60,405 patients recovered in the last 24 hours, which brings the total recoveries to 3,46,30,536 across the country. India's recovery rate now stands at 96.01%.

India has administered a total of 85,26,240 doses in the last 24 hours, which brings the total tally of doses administered to 1,53,80,08,200. A total of 69.52 crore Covid tests have been conducted in the country so far.

A total of 17,61,900 samples were tested in the last 24 hours. The daily positivity rate is at 11.05% while the weekly positivity rate is at 9.82%.

India reports 1.94 lakh new Covid cases, 4,868 omicron cases in 24 hours





Amit Shah seeks suggestions from MPs, other stakeholders on move to amend IPC, CrPC, Evidence Act

a paradigm shift in the criminal justice system by the government of India will actually be an enormous exercise of public participation, which can only be successful with the participation of all stakeholders," he said.

In this regard, the home minister said, he has requested the Chief Justice of India, Chief Justice of High Courts, state chief minister, administrator of Union Territories, Bar Councils and Law Universities to send their suggestions.

"The Ministry of Home Affairs intends to make comprehensive amendments to criminal laws after receiving suggestions from various stakeholders," he said.

Shah said Parliament is one of the three important pillars of democracy and, as Members of Parliament have a significant role in the law-making process, their suggestions will be invaluable in this exercise of comprehensive amendments to criminal laws.

"Therefore, you are requested to send us your valuable suggestions regarding amendments to the IPC, CrPC and Indian Evidence Act at the earliest," he said.

(News Agencies)-Union Home Minister Amit Shah has sought suggestions from Members of Parliament and other stakeholders on the proposed amendments to the Indian Penal Code, CrPC and the Indian Evidence Act.

In a letter to the MPs and others, the home minister said that the

experience of seven decades of Indian democracy calls for a comprehensive review of the criminal laws, especially the IPC 1860, the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) 1973 and the Indian Evidence Act 1872 and adapt them in accordance with the contemporary needs and aspirations of the people.

"The government of India intends to create a people-centric legal structure," he wrote.

Shah said the Central government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with its mantra of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas,' is committed to ensure speedy justice to all the

citizens of India, especially those belonging to the weaker and backward sections.

In conformity with these constitutional and democratic aspirations, he said, the government has resolved to make comprehensive changes in the framework of criminal laws.

"This endeavour of bringing about

The indigenously developed Man-Portable Anti-Tank Guided Missile (MPATGM) is a low weight, "fire and forget" missile

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) on Tuesday successfully flight tested the Man-Portable Anti-Tank Guided Missile (MPATGM).

The defence ministry said the anti-tank missile was flight-tested in its final "deliverable configuration".

The indigenously developed MPATGM is a low weight, "fire and forget" missile.

"The Defence Research and Development Organisation successfully flight tested the final deliverable configuration of Man-Portable Anti-Tank Guided Missile (MPATGM) on January 11," the ministry said.

"The missile impacted the designated target and destroyed it. The final impact event was captured on camera and the test has validated the minimum range successfully," it said.



It said the test firing was carried out to prove the "consistent performance" for the minimum range. The missile has a range of 2.5 km.

"All the mission objectives were met. The missile has

miniaturised infrared imaging seeker and advanced avionics for onboard control and guidance. The missile performance has been proven for the maximum range in earlier test trials," the ministry said.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh congratulated the DRDO for the consistent performance of the anti-tank missile and said that it is an important step towards "Atmanirbhar Bharat" (self-reliant India) in the development of

advanced technology-based defence systems.

DRDO Chairman G Satheesh Reddy congratulated all those involved in the project for the "excellent performance" of the missile, the ministry said.

Channi govt colluded with Badals, saved Bikram Majithia in drugs case, says AAP MP Bhagwant Mann

(News Agencies)-Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Punjab president and MP Bhagwant Mann on Tuesday alleged that the Charanjit Singh Channi government colluded with the Badal family as the latter saved the chief minister's brother in the City Centre scam.

Bhagwant Mann further alleged that Channi returned the favour by saving SAD leader Bikram Singh Majithia in a drugs case. He said that the Punjab government had done nothing in the last 111 days and failed to maintain law and order in the state.

"That's why the people of Punjab have made up their minds to support AAP in the upcoming Assembly elections," the MP asserted while addressing a press conference. Bhagwant Mann accused CM Channi of taking a light and time pass action against Bikram Majithia in the drugs case. He

alleged that there was a 'deal' between CM Channi and the Badal family in place even before the FIR. He also alleged that the Congress government would file a 'weak' case against Bikram Majithia and no concrete action would be taken.

"That's why the Congress government did not arrest Bikram Majithia even after FIR or the rejection of his anticipatory bail from Mohali District Court," he said.

The AAP MP stated that legal action against Bikram Majithia in the drugs case met the same fate as Raja Warring's action against the buses of Badal family, because Congress leaders did not take legal actions to punish mafia but to mislead the people of Punjab. He said that Badal's buses are on roads today and Majithia will roam free as it is.

"If AAP comes to power in Punjab, we will reopen these



files and cases to take exemplary action against every mafia and corrupt leaders," he said.

Taking a jibe, Bhagwant Mann said that former chief minister Captain Amarinder Singh had sworn a sacred oath with 'Gutka Sahib' in his hands to eliminate

the drug mafia from Punjab in just four weeks, but didn't take even a single action against Bikram Majithia during his tenure of four and half years. He added that now it is clear to everyone that Congress, Amarinder Singh, SAD and BJP are all partners.

AAP MP Bhagwant Mann on Tuesday accused Punjab CM Charanjit Singh Channi of taking a light and time pass action against SAD leader Bikram Majithia in the drugs case. He also alleged that there was a 'deal' between the CM and the Badal family

Exuding confidence that AAP would form the government in Punjab, the MP said, "AAP already has a roadmap ready for the development of Punjab. Roadmap for the development of farming sector, industries, education, medical treatment and eliminating unemployment and poverty is ready. AAP is a secular party and we will establish brotherhood and positive politics in state."

Bhagwant Mann also said that there is no double-dealing going on in the seat allotments.

"If anyone has any proof then come forward, AAP will take action against it. The party has an agenda. Leaders may change but our policies won't," he further said.

Geeta Sexena
Bureau Chief (Punjab))

Gagandeep Singh
Deputy News Editor

Sharanjit Singh Thind
Editor in Chief

Susmita Ghosh
Deputy Managing Editor

Josh India WebTV

The South Asian
INSIDER
Published Weekly from New York

Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp



BJP leader Dilip Ghosh stopped from campaigning in Bengal's Asansol for flouting Covid norms

On Tuesday, BJP leader Dilip Ghosh entered into an argument with the police after his election rally ahead of Asansol civic body polls was stopped by the police for flouting Covid rules

(News Agencies)-BJP national vice-president Dilip Ghosh on Tuesday entered into an argument with the police during campaigning for party candidates in Asansol Municipal Corporation election after his rally was stopped there for allegedly flouting Covid safety norms.

While the police claimed that Ghosh was campaigning with a large number of people and stopped him from canvassing, the former state BJP president denied the charge and asserted that only five party members were with him.

"The West Bengal Police personnel are working under the instruction of the Trinamool Congress. People want to meet me, interact with me. If they

want to talk to me when I am having morning tea, can they be added to the list of campaigners? But they cannot deter us in this way. We will campaign within the ambit of SEC guidelines," he said.

Sharing Few glimpses of election campaign at ward 67,68,69 & 71 of Asansol Municipal Corporation. #BJP4Asansol pic.twitter.com/n4yBFntc8O

- Dilip Ghosh (@DilipGhoshBJP) January 11, 2022
He was seen having an altercation with police officials.

In protest against the police action, he sat on a dharna for some time at a spot in ward no. 66 of the Asansol Municipal Corporation in Paschim

Bardhaman district.

Ghosh alleged that at ward 66, the local Trinamool Congress candidate came to the side of his car and started raising various allegations against the sitting BJP councillor who is seeking reelection.

"I told him to tell the voters whatever he has to, why me? This is an act of intimidation," Ghosh said. He alleged that he was prevented from campaigning also in another ward of the AMC where election is scheduled to be held on January 22.

Reacting to his charges, TMC MP Sougata Roy told PTI: "Dilip Ghosh is seen campaigning with a large number of people exceeding the cap of five and the administration has done its job."

Govt making efforts to secure release of 7 Indians on board ship seized by Houthis: MEA

All seven Indian sailors on board a United Arab Emirates-flagged cargo vessel that was seized by Houthis off the port of Hodeidah in Yemen are safe and the government is making all efforts to secure their early release

(News Agencies)-All seven Indian sailors on board a United Arab Emirates-flagged cargo vessel that was seized by Houthis off the port of Hodeidah in Yemen are safe and the government is making all efforts to secure their early release, the external affairs ministry said on Tuesday. Arindam Bagchi, the spokesperson in the ministry, said India has been closely monitoring developments following the seizure of the UAE-flagged ship Rwabee by the Houthis on January 2.

"We also understand from the company and other sources that all Indian crew members are safe. The government of India is making all efforts to secure



their early release," Bagchi said.

The Houthi rebels have a strong presence in parts of Yemen. "We are in touch with the company operating the ship and have been informed that out of the 11 crew members on board the ship, seven are from India," Bagchi said while replying to a media query on the issue. "We urge the Houthis to ensure the safety and well-being of the crew members and release them immediately. India is concerned at the recent intensification of fighting in Yemen and hopes that all parties will come to the negotiating table to find a peaceful resolution to the Yemen issue," he added.



Amit Shah, Yogi Adityanath attend key BJP meeting over Uttar Pradesh polls

Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath attended a key BJP meeting on Tuesday to discuss strategies for the Uttar Pradesh assembly elections

(News Agencies)- Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath attended a key BJP meeting on Tuesday as party leaders discussed the ongoing campaign for the state assembly polls ahead of the announcement of its candidates for the initial phases in a few days. Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya and Uttar Pradesh BJP chief Swatantra Dev Singh also attended the meeting besides several other leaders, with its national president JP Nadda, who had contracted the coronavirus, attending it virtually. With the filing of nominations for the first phase of the seven-phase Uttar Pradesh polls set to begin from January 14, the party's CEC may meet soon to finalise the names of candidates, sources said. The Uttar Pradesh BJP core group has been working to shortlist probable candidates for the assembly elections, especially for the seats which will go to the polls in the initial phases, they said, but there was no official statement on the confabulations in the meeting held at the party headquarters here. The Election Commission's decision to ban rallies and roadshows due to surging Covid cases till January 15 has also prompted parties, including the BJP, to tweak its strategy with focus shifting to reaching out to voters through extensive use of social media and door to door campaigns. Polls will be held in 58 seats in the first phase on February 10 and in 55 in the second phase on February 14, and the BJP is likely to announce the names of most of its candidates for these constituencies soon.

What made Swami Prasad Maurya resign from Yogi govt, BJP

Uttar Pradesh cabinet minister Swami Prasad Maurya resigned from the BJP. Four more MLAs close to him announced their resignations from BJP a few hours later

Just before the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly election, the ruling party, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has suffered a major setback. In the UP government, cabinet minister Swami Prasad Maurya resigned from the BJP. In the hours that followed, four more MLAs close to him, Roshan Lal Verma, Brijesh Prajapati, Bhagwati Sagar and Vinay Shakyia announced their resignations.

Importantly, it has been said that Maurya was dissatisfied with the organisation and the government for a few months. Earlier on an



occasion, he had said that the decision about the next Uttar Pradesh chief minister would be taken in the meeting of the legislature party after the election if the BJP returned to power.

"The high command can also send any other face. The CM face can also be someone else. Everything is to be decided by the central leadership", he said. Sources said Maurya did not have faith in the leadership of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and was angry about the working style. The second reason is that Swami Prasad Maurya was asking for a ticket to the Legislative Assembly for his son Ashok. But the BJP was not inclined to accept the demand as Swami Prasad Maurya himself was an MLA and a minister. Maurya is an MLA from

Padrauna Vidhan Sabha seat of Kushinagar. His daughter Sanghamitra Maurya is a BJP MP from Badaun Lok Sabha seat. Swami Prasad Maurya was also unhappy with the functioning of officers. Swami Prasad Maurya was constantly complaining to the central leadership of the BJP regarding some issues of the government. With the resignation of Swami Prasad Maurya, the BJP is facing major trouble to retain lost 13-14 MLAs and dissatisfied ministers.

5-member committee headed by ex-judge Indu Malhotra to probe PM Modi's security breach



The Supreme Court appointed a five-member committee to probe Prime Minister Narendra Modi's security breach matter, putting a stay on all existing inquiries into the issue

calvacade was stranded for around 20 minutes on a flyover due to farmers' protest on January 5.

This triggered a political row with the Congress-led Punjab government, the state police and even the Special Protection Group (SPG) -- responsible for the prime minister's security -- facing flak over the matter.

While the Centre dubbed the incident a "major lapses in security", Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Channi denied any breach. Charanjit Channi also welcomed the Supreme Court's decision to form a panel over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's security breach.

Meanwhile, an investigation by India Today revealed that the Punjab Police knew about protesting farmers but didn't act.

(News Agencies)-The Supreme Court has appointed a five-member committee to probe the alleged breach in the security of Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to Punjab earlier this month.

The Supreme Court announced the formation of the five-member committee after staying all existing inquiries into the issue.

It said Justice Indu Malhotra will head the committee which will investigate the alleged lapses in PM Modi's security.

"A registrar general of the Punjab and Haryana High Court will form the committee which will look into PM Modi's security breach. The committee will also recommend further action to prevent similar incidents," the

Supreme Court bench said on Wednesday.

Chief Justice of India NV Ramana said the committee needs to submit the report at the earliest.

"The terms of reference will be the cause of breach, what are the safeguards required for such safety of the Prime Minister. The committee will submit a report

at the earliest," Chief Justice of India NV Ramana said.

The five-member panel will investigate what led to the lapses in the security of PM Modi during his visit to Punjab. An FIR was also filed in connection with the matter earlier.

The case pertains to the incident when PM Modi's

TMC takes dig at govt e-magazine for misreporting facts on 1857 revolt

which celebrates India in its 75th year of Independence, in which Swami Vivekanand's teachings were termed to be a precursor to the revolt of 1857.

Swami Vivekanand was born in 1863.

TMC tweeted, "Something fishy about the Amrit in Amrit Mahotsav. Swami Vivekananda Ji was born in 1863. We're still trying to figure out how he influenced the 'Revolt of 1857', if that's what we're going to call it... @PIB_India, can you send some help?"

Something fishy about the Amrit in #AmritMahotsav.

Swami Vivekananda Ji was born in 1863.

We're still trying to figure out how he influenced the 'Revolt of 1857', if that's what we're going to call it... @PIB_India, can you send some help? <https://t.co/ZhJFtlwk2q>

ZhJFtlwk2q

- All India Trinamool Congress (@AITCofficial) January 11, 2022

The article mentioned that during the Bhakti Yug, sants and mahanta from every part of the country, be it Swami Vivekanand or Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, were concerned about spiritual consciousness. The article also stated that it was a precursor to the revolution of 1857.

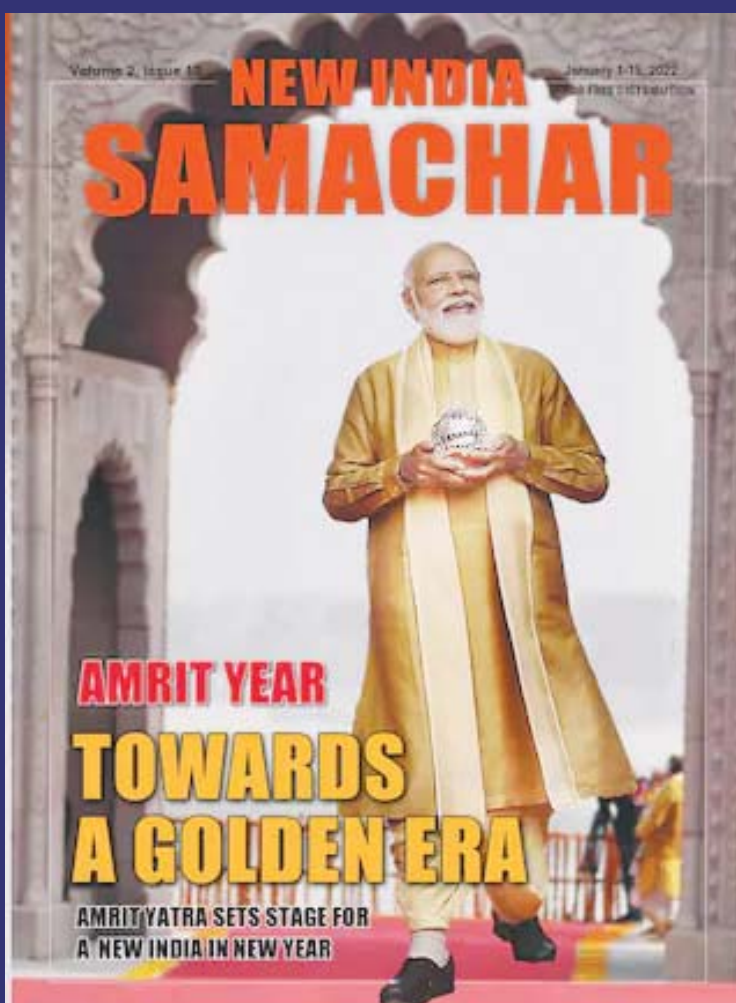
TMC questioned the chronology on how the teachings of Vivekananda influenced the revolt of 1857 if he was born in 1863.

The error was later rectified by PIB and a tweet was also put up to inform of the same. The error was, according to PTI, only in the English version of the e-magazine, while the Hindi version had mentioned the facts

correctly.

"The English version of latest issue of #NewIndiaSamachar inadvertently mentioned Swami Vivekananda and Raman Maharshi as contemporaries of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. The error is regretted and has been corrected. The Hindi version had mentioned the facts correctly," PIB tweeted.

The English version of latest issue of #NewIndiaSamachar inadvertently mentioned Swami Vivekananda and Raman Maharshi as contemporaries of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. The error is regretted and has been corrected. The Hindi version had mentioned the facts correctly. <https://t.co/NB9Ho4miG6> [pic.twitter.com/yqcW9PoXD9](https://t.co/yqcW9PoXD9)



The Trinamool Samachar, government's Congress (TMC) took a dig at fortnightly e-Magazine that the latest issue of New India marked the 'Amrit Mahotsav',

Implement transparency, punish fake news offenders: Global fact-check body writes to YouTube



While some social media giants, such as Facebook, have at least put in place a mechanism to check the free flow of hate and misinformation, other popular platforms, such as YouTube, still have a long way to go

checked information is more effective than deleting content." "And given that a large proportion of views on YouTube come from its own recommendation algorithm, YouTube should also make sure it does not actively promote disinformation to its users or recommend content coming from unreliable channels," it added. The IFCN went on to suggest a slew of measures for YouTube to check the dissemination of fake news on the social media platform. Seeking "commitment to meaningful transparency about disinformation on the platform", it suggested, "YouTube should support independent research about the origins of the different misinformation campaigns, their reach and impact, and the most effective ways to debunk false information. It should also publish its full moderation policy regarding disinformation and misinformation." Pointing out YouTube's "misplaced priorities", the letter says, "Beyond removing content for legal compliance, YouTube's focus should be on providing context and offering debunks, clearly superimposed on videos or as additional video content. That can only come from entering into a meaningful and structured collaboration, taking the responsibility and systematically investing in independent fact-checking efforts." It also sought action against "repeat offenders that produce content that is constantly flagged as disinformation and misinformation, particularly those monetizing that content on and outside the platform, notably by preventing its recommendation algorithms from promoting content from such sources of misinformation".

(News Agencies)-Time and again India has borne the brunt of disinformation on social media intended to widen the fault lines between different social and religious groups, and even lead to unrest.

While some social media giants, such as Facebook, have at least put in place a mechanism to check the free flow of hate and misinformation, other popular platforms, such as YouTube, still have a long way to go.

By some estimates, there are nearly 46 crore YouTube users in India. This means one in three Indians accesses the platform for content related to entertainment or news. But the fact that there are no checks and balances on the kind of information served on YouTube makes it a lucrative forum for rumour mongers who generate revenue through misleading clickbaits.

This has forced global fact-checkers to take note, and now the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) has written to YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki in this regard. The letter, dated January 12, 2022, urges the social media platform to implement policies to check the flow of disinformation and also suggests measures for the same.

Sample these.

Hundreds of anti-vaccination sermons have been watched on YouTube by millions of users

across the globe, including in India. Many bogus cures for cancer to Covid are still flooding the platform. The repercussions have been heavy for governments and health workers in the fight against the pandemic. Disinformation regarding government schemes or content targeting specific communities, especially during elections, manage to get a free passage on YouTube.

Unsurprisingly, such videos influence a lot of minds, which is detrimental to India's social security. In such a scenario, it is imperative for YouTube to filter the content dished out on the platform. For disinformation is a global menace, as witnessed during the infamous United States Capitol riots early last year.

The IFCN letter pulled up YouTube for being "one of the major conduits of online disinformation and misinformation worldwide". It says, "What we do not see is much effort by YouTube to implement policies that address the problem. On the contrary, YouTube is allowing its platform to be weaponized by unscrupulous actors to manipulate and exploit others, and to organize and fundraise

themselves."

The letter lists out how YouTube has been the go-to platform for global conspiracy groups from Europe to Latin America, and unsubstantiated accusations of electoral fraud from the United States to Taiwan. It also expresses concern at the numerous hate content targeting vulnerable groups or those trying

to whitewash crimes by dictators and military strongmen. The examples are too many to count. Many of those videos and channels remain online today, and they all went under the radar of YouTube's policies, especially in non-English speaking countries and the Global South," the letter states.

Expressing dissatisfaction over YouTube's approach to disinformation, the letter further

says, "Your company platform has so far framed discussions about disinformation as a false dichotomy of deleting or not deleting content. By doing this, YouTube is avoiding the possibility of doing what has been proven to work: our experience as fact-checkers together with academic evidence tells us that surfacing fact-



TRS and RJD agree to join hands to fight 'anti-people' BJP at Centre: Sources

RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav and Telangana CM K Chandrashekar Rao met in Hyderabad on Tuesday. According to top sources, the two leaders agreed that there is an "urgent need to unite to defeat the divisive BJP" at the Centre. Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Tejashwi Yadav and Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao met in Hyderabad on Tuesday to discuss politics on the national stage. According to top sources in the Telangana Chief Minister's office, the two leaders agreed that there is an "urgent need for all democratic secular forces to unite to defeat the divisive and anti-democratic BJP" at the Centre.

Further, they agreed that the BJP-led Union government's policies were "anti-people, anti-farmers and anti-Dalit" and needed to be fought till the party is ousted, sources said. They decided to work together in the "ongoing anti-BJP struggle", sources added.

It is learnt that Tejashwi Yadav, son of former Bihar Chief Minister



Lalu Prasad Yadav, emphasised during the meeting that "India's political struggle towards a united front of secular democratic forces" should be intensified.

The two leaders also discussed the upcoming Uttar Pradesh election and the recent resignation of several MLAs from the BJP. They appreciated the announcement made by NCP chief Sharad Pawar regarding his party's support for the Samajwadi

Party in the UP polls. Earlier, (BJP-free nation).

Telangana Chief Minister and KCR SPEAKS TO LALU ON PHONE

Telangana Rashtra Samithi chief K Chandrashekar Rao had held meetings with representatives of Left parties and discussed the creation of a 'BJP-mukt bharat' call. Lalu Prasad Yadav asked

him to come forward and play an active role in national politics.

Sources privy to the conversation said that Lalu Prasad Yadav told K Chandrashekar Rao that all "secular forces" are needed to "save the country from the BJP's anarchy". "The secular democratic environment [of the country] must be maintained," Yadav said as per sources.

"You fought hard for Telangana. Sacrificed and achieved the intended goal. Today, the state of Telangana is leading the development trajectory to make the country proud. Your experience of ruling in favour of all religions, castes and sub-communities is dear to the country," Lalu Prasad Yadav reportedly told K Chandrashekar Rao. He also reminded the Telangana CM that his party had supported the formation of Telangana.

Police seize 1.5 kg of heroin worth Rs 10 crore in Assam's Karbi Anglong



(News Agencies)-Police on Tuesday seized 1.5 kg of heroin worth around Rs 10 crore and arrested a person in Assam's Karbi Anglong district.

Based on secret information, Karbi Anglong district had set up a naka-check at Laharijan area under Bokajan police station on Tuesday morning. The police team had intercepted a truck which was coming from Manipur's Imphal and on a thorough search of the vehicle,

110 boxes of soap cases containing 1.5 kg of heroin were recovered concealed in a plastic sheet.

John Das, SDPO of Bokajan in Karbi Anglong district, said that the value of the seized drugs is estimated to be Rs 10 crore. In this connection, the driver of the vehicle was arrested and he was identified as Deepok Chetry hailing from Manipur," John Das said.

FBI TEN MOST WANTED FUGITIVE

BHADRESHKUMAR CHETANBHAI PATEL

Unlawful Flight to Avoid Prosecution - First Degree Murder, Second Degree Murder, First Degree Assault, Second Degree Assault, Dangerous Weapon with Intent to Injure



Photograph taken April 2015

DESCRIPTION

Alias: Bhadreshkumar C. Patel

Date(s) of Birth Used: May 15, 1990

Hair: Brown

Height: 5'9"

Sex: Male

Nationality: Indian

Place of Birth: Kantrodi Ta Viramgam, Gujarat, India

Eyes: Brown

Weight: 165 pounds

Occupation: Employee of donut shop

REWARD

The FBI is offering a reward of up to \$100,000 for information leading to the arrest of Bhadreshkumar Chetanbhai Patel.

REMARKS

Patel was last known to be in the Newark, New Jersey, area.

CAUTION

Bhadreshkumar Chetanbhai Patel is wanted for allegedly killing his wife by striking her multiple times with an object while they were both working at a donut shop in Hanover, Maryland, on April 12, 2015. A local arrest warrant was issued in the District Court of Maryland for Anne Arundel County on April 13, 2015, and Patel was charged with first degree murder, second degree murder, first degree assault, second degree assault, and dangerous weapon with intent to injure. A federal arrest warrant was issued in the United States District Court, District of Maryland, Baltimore, Maryland, on April 20, 2015, after Patel was charged with unlawful flight to avoid prosecution.

SHOULD BE CONSIDERED ARMED AND EXTREMELY DANGEROUS

If you have any information concerning this person, please contact your local FBI office or the nearest American Embassy or Consulate.

Field Office: Baltimore

Russia-Ukraine crisis offers Biden moment to save his presidency



No early media "lid" at the Oval Office today: The administration begins three rounds of talks with the Russians looking at next steps in the crisis over Ukraine.

Expectations that this exercise in diplomacy will deliver a better night's sleep for the White House are low. Still, President Biden has a real opportunity here. Global events could well push the next catastrophe for the president's foreign policy by a month or so, giving the administration more time to find its footing. This week's high-level meetings include direct talks between Washington and Moscow, a meeting of NATO with Russia, and a session of the Organization of Cooperation and Security in Europe (OCSE). That's a lot of talking. As Winston Churchill said, "Jaw-jaw is always better than war-war." Churchill, however, would recognize this crisis for what it is. It is not a diplomatic problem. Putin intentionally created this situation with a massive deployment of forces on Ukraine's border and then issued an outrageous, impossible list of concessions. This is just naked old-fashioned aggression.

The White House has said the president is looking for ways to "deescalate" the crisis. A statement that suggests they understand the problem exactly wrong. Deescalation suggests there is a need for both sides to back down. But there are not two sides to this story. There is just bullying from Putin, blackmail and the threat of war that could put the fate of 44 million Ukrainians at risk.

This isn't a disagreement. This is a threat to kill, destroy and create a massive refugee crisis overnight.

Yet the administration says it wants to test Putin with discussions about missile deployments, troop placements and military exercises. Bet on this. Any concessions the U.S. does grant, Putin will just put in the bank and push for more later. Indeed, even if the U.S. grants major concessions, Putin might march anyway. If the White House goes down the path of giving Putin something for nothing, they will

spend all their diplomatic energy beating up on Ukraine and the Northern and Central Europeans to give in to what Putin wants. There is no way, if Biden chooses this option, that we don't wind up with a shakier NATO and heightened risk of future wars.

What Biden needs to do is flip the script. Instead of talking concessions, he should look at how quickly he can reinforce the sovereignty and independence of Ukraine, and make every effort to contribute to the self-defense of Ukrainian territory by Ukrainians. Biden, thanks to a blessing he does not deserve, may have a window there to preemptively move to buck up NATO rather than plead with Putin.

The Russians are moving big time to clean up the mess in Kazakhstan. Can Putin really handle both Kazakhstan and invading Ukraine at the same time? Some experts think not.

Meanwhile, China must surely want to keep everything low-key until after the Olympics. At the same time, the Iranians are trying to wrangle every concession possible out of Biden in the Middle East. Biden could have a month more to jump on building up NATO conventional deterrence and aiding Ukraine. He can be making deals to strengthen European energy security. He could be consulting with all the NATO allies. He could be reinforcing Ukraine's diplomatic efforts rather than participating in multinational dialogues that include every interested party but Ukraine. He could not be calling an early lid at the White House every day. He could cut back on the beach trips. He could stop using the White House for partisan attacks and refuse to push out ridiculous diatribes from his press room on COVID and the economy worthy of Pravda. He could pull a Harry Truman and seriously throw himself into confronting America's adversaries and protecting U.S. interests.

Biden may have the most consequential opportunity to save his presidency. But it won't last long. The clock is ticking.

China-Sri Lanka cooperation, cause of worry for India

By Susmita Ghosh

Sri Lanka is in urgent need of debt restructure, owed to China. Sri Lankan president Gotabaya Rajapaksa opened diplomatic channels to discuss the matter, as a part of finding solutions to the present economic crisis of the Island nation. As a direct result of the Covid pandemic, the Sri Lankan economy suffered a major blow. The travel and tourism sector, one of their chief sources of revenue was the worst hit. Under the circumstances, the Sri Lankan President had to try and meet the Chinese foreign minister to relieve the pressure on the country's economy. The total foreign debt of Sri Lanka is around 52 billion USD, out of which 10 percent is owed to China alone. The debt restructures, if it finally arrive, will provide Sri Lanka a major relief as the country tries to turn the tide in its favour. However, China will try and wrench out some benefits as its own pound of cake. Most probably, it may end up in another event like the Colombo port deal, which offers long-term Chinese control on Sri Lanka heartland itself. Sri Lanka's economy is in a tumultuous condition now, as the country's reserve of foreign currency is depleting rapidly. The value of Sri Lankan currency is deteriorating swiftly with no sign of improvement in the export sector too. They made a similar offer of debt moratorium to India too in 2020. However, New Delhi did not move forward with the matter and it went to stability, which may have triggered the Sri Lankan economy downfall. The Sino-Sri Lankan relationship dynamic is surely proving reason enough for worrying to the neighbouring countries, like India. Another powerhouse in the Southeast Asian

region, India is in an alliance that does not take the Chinese aggression lightly. In the last decade, there have been several cases of aggression across India's northern borders, which have kept India wary of Chinese expansion goals.

There have been several strategic developments by the Chinese side with the goal of surrounding India from all sides. In the west, with a partnership with Pakistan and influence over the Karachi port by debt trapping, China is advancing dangerously. A close diplomatic relationship with the Bangladesh politicians and the Chinese top brass is in the cards too. As a final key to the south, the value of Sri Lanka and its ports are now immense. The Colombo port's tactical advantage in the regional maritime affair is huge, as it offers a vantage point to most parts of southern India. At the same time, the Andaman Islands, the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean are easily accessible from here. If China can gain a foothold here, their dominance over the South China Sea region is only a matter of time. It can have an ominous effect, not only on India but on Japan, Australia, and the other countries that are in an anti-China cohort along with the USA. Even now, India is yet to reply positively to Sri Lankan requests for a line of credit for help in an emergency, which will help the import of food, medicines and so on. Yang Yi, the Chinese foreign minister stated that the Chinese-Sri Lankan relationship should not be interfered by any third party, without mentioning India.

(Contd on page 29)



ISSN No. 1554 06X

Editor in Chief & Publisher :

Sharanjit Singh Thind

Editor (Political Affairs-India) :

Aruna Singh

Dy Managing Editor India :

Susmita Ghosh

(Legal Columnist) Anusha Syed

Special Correspondents:

Gagandeep Singh (India)

(Insider Show Host) Geeta Saxena

Chief Photographer : Vijay Shah

Editorial Intern: Roubin Singh Thind

Web Coordinator : Harpreet Singh

A Publication of Media Partners Capital, Inc.

REGD & MAILING OFFICE :

P.O Box 7005 Hicksville New York 11801

Phone: 917 612 3158

editor@thesouthasianinsider.com, thesouthasianinsider@gmail.com

www.thesouthasianinsider.com

Disclaimer The South Asian Insider is a weekly newspaper published every week by The South Asian Insider. It's available in community & religious centers, ethnic grocery stores and also available by mail, email & online to subscribers. The opinions, beliefs and viewpoints expressed by the various writers, authors and forum participants in The South Asian Insider do not necessarily reflect the opinions, beliefs and viewpoints of the Editor. All advertisers advertising in The South Asian Insider assume responsibility for accuracy of their advertisements. The South Asian Insider and/or people associated with it are not responsible for any claims made by the advertisers and don't endorse any product or services advertised in The South Asian Insider. We strongly urge consulting your lawyer before buying/contracting/hiring through the ads published in the newspaper. We are in the business of selling space and claims made by the advertisers are not authenticated or confirmed by an independent source



How to Get What We Want From Putin

We'll never agree with the Russian leader on principles, but we might be able to negotiate a better security structure for Europe

The talks on European security that are now underway between the U.S. and Russia will be difficult because the two countries don't trust one another, not even a little. Many in the West are convinced that Moscow actually wants the discussions to fail, and quickly, because it wants a pretext for attacking Ukraine, and that Russian President Vladimir Putin has already decided to do so. Why else, they ask, would he have made public two draft treaties - one between Russia and the United States, the other between Russia and NATO - that insist on binding Western guarantees relating to Russia's security, and with obviously unacceptable terms, such as a ban on further NATO expansion or U.S. security cooperation with former Soviet states? Others insist that the United States should demand that Russia withdraw its forces from Ukraine's border before agreeing to start negotiations: no talks, they argue, while a Russian gun is pointed at Ukraine's head.

But Russia is almost certain to keep its troops and arms in place until serious negotiations begin, if not longer. It began building up troops around Ukraine from 2015 onward, though it beefed up the number recently. Moreover, Putin reportedly told his diplomats in mid-November that a certain

amount of tension would force the West to take Russia seriously. Even though Putin's actions have precipitated this crisis, the Biden administration has wisely agreed to start discussions without preconditions. It has acknowledged that some Russian proposals could serve as the basis for talks, even as it rejected others outright. The White House has also made clear that the talks cannot focus solely on Russia's security concerns because the West has its own list of unacceptable and threatening Russian conduct, stretching back over decades, to discuss.

The immediate task is to defuse the current crisis. But these talks offer the Biden administration the opportunity to do something bigger and more enduring: the creation of a pan-European security order that includes Russia and reduces the risks of crises and confrontations on the continent.

History shows that new security orders between countries that espouse irreconcilable positions, as the United States and Russia do today, are usually imposed by the victor in the aftermath of a major war. But war between two nuclear-armed powers would be catastrophic for both, and indeed the world. So the challenge for the Biden administration is to do this without an armed confrontation. That requires striking a judicious balance between accommodating some of Russia's

principal security concerns - so as to prevent intermittent crises like the current one - and defending vital Western interests and principles. While this larger task will take considerable time, it is not impossible.

Here's how to get there.

The starting point is the recognition that American and Russian principles regarding European security are irreconcilable. The American position that European states (specifically, Ukraine) are sovereign and have the right to freely choose the countries with which they associate cannot be squared with Russia's insistence that it needs a sphere of influence in Europe (whether it calls it by that name or not) in order to feel secure. These positions are even more difficult to reconcile because they flow from divergent conceptions of national identity and statecraft. So the key to progress is to avoid fruitless debates over first principles and instead move to a discussion of concrete steps to defuse tensions and promote stability.

The U.S.-Russian bilateral talks should be the primary negotiating forum. The Biden administration rightly insists that its allies and partners must be involved and that no decisions will be made solely by Russia and the United States. But multilateral talks are a recipe for stasis: they can allow the most recalcitrant ally or partner to stall progress, or

even effectively veto it.

Insisting on multilateralism also sidesteps the realities of power on the European continent. The United States, the ultimate guarantor of Europe's security, and Russia, the preeminent revisionist power, are the only two countries with the military might to alter the European balance of power. Their ability to cut deals and willingness to act with restraint will go a long way to determining the outcome of any negotiations, even if they will still have to sell their arrangements to other states who will be parties to any final agreement. Moreover, Moscow will only negotiate seriously with Washington, in part because such bilateral talks validate Russia as the other great power in Europe, and in part because it believes that Washington calls the shots, that NATO's other members are at best junior partners. The West can keep Russia constructively engaged only if it demonstrates that it takes its concerns seriously and is committed to making progress - which is not the same thing as meeting Moscow's every demand. There are several areas in which Russia and the West should, in principle, be able to reach mutually beneficial agreements without inordinate delay, even though protracted discussions will be required to nail down the details.

Akhilesh Yadav's Big Haul Will Allow BJP To Rein In Yogi



With exactly a month to go before Uttar Pradesh votes, two things are clear: Akhilesh Yadav 2.0 is hitting peak form and Yogi Adityanath is strapped to a major predicament.

As Chief Minister, Yogi Adityanath, according to sources, has the state Criminal Investigation Department watching many MLAs; his own vigilante army, the Hindu Yuva Sena, also apparently provides surveillance.

If that is indeed the case, they were embarrassingly bested by Swami Prasad Maurya, hugely popular in the eastern part of the state as an Other Backward Caste (OBC) leader, who resigned yesterday as a cabinet minister; four other MLAs, who are his supporters, took their cue from him. Their group exit has played out like the limbo at a wedding, all of them managing to evade detection till their boss made it official with his shock announcement. The timing was impeccable: the offensive rolled out as Yogi Adityanath was at a meeting in Delhi with party bosses including Amit Shah to select candidates for an election with increasingly more high stakes.

One of the MLAs involved said to me, jubilantly, "Yogi Maharaj ke ghar mein seend lag gayi, unhe pata bhi nahi laga" ("seend" is a particularly UP expression meaning an ingress into a home without the owner discovering it). Swami Prasad Maurya, 68, quit the BSP in 2016, formed his own outfit, and then joined the BJP in 2017. He is key to the OBC vote and was instrumental to the BJP's successful strategy in 2017 of appealing to both upper caste and backward caste voters. The OBCs form around 45 percent of the population in UP; the Yadavs, as a subset, are nine percent; and the Kushwaha caste, which Swami Prasad Maurya belongs to, are six percent.



A Better Way to Fix the Student Loan Problem

Instead of blanket debt relief, let people pay what they can afford

Joe Biden isn't making anyone happy lately when it comes to student loans.

The administration sought to strike a balance last month when it announced that it was extending the Covid-related moratorium on federal student loan repayments. But the move was criticized by both moderates, who see the moratorium as unnecessary and regressive, and progressives, who think it does not go far enough and want to see outright loan forgiveness.

However, this debate misses the true nature of the student loan debt problem. What really matters is not the total amount owed by any borrower, but the amount of the monthly payment relative to the borrower's income. Large debts owed by high-income borrowers are often affordable, while smaller debts of those who do not complete college or attend predatory for-profit schools can pose crushing hardships.

There is no question that for a large and growing number of borrowers, student loan debt is unaffordable. Twenty years ago, the amount of student loan debt was so small that the Federal Reserve Board did

not even maintain statistics on it. Today, it is the largest body of consumer debt following mortgages, even though it is concentrated among a smaller share of the population. Student loan debt is starting to have negative macroeconomic effects, including by delaying debtors' entry into the homeownership market and dissuading Americans from pursuing education.

So some measure of student loan debt relief is clearly warranted. The question is how best to do it. Proposals to forgive some amount of student loans across the board - whether the \$10,000 the president has suggested or the \$50,000 urged by some Democratic members of Congress or all of it, as some borrower advocates would like - are problematic for legal, economic and political reasons.

Legally, the president's authority to forgive any amount of student loans on a blanket basis is uncertain. While there are serious legal arguments that the education secretary has that authority, such an action could be considered unauthorized spending by the administration, particularly

by a hostile Supreme Court.

Economically, across-the-board loan forgiveness raises serious fairness concerns, both among existing borrowers and vis-a-vis future borrowers. Blanket loan forgiveness does not distinguish between borrowers who can easily repay their loans and those who cannot.

Blanket relief could end up routing too much relief to those who do not need it and too little to those who do.

A Harvard graduate pulling in half a million dollars on Wall Street will get the same relief as a community college graduate working as a barista. That could fuel a sharp political backlash, with Republicans all too happy to argue Democrats are bailing out young elites.

Blanket relief could also seem unfair to former and future borrowers. Those who scraped by to pay off their loans last year may feel like suckers for having done the responsible thing, while those just entering school will be facing even larger debt burdens, but without the prospect of loan forgiveness at any time in the near future because the political

pressure to do so will have been relieved by a one-off forgiveness event. While some forgiveness could be justified because of the failures of the loan system, it would leave some of the biggest problems unsolved.

Going forward, there's a better and fairer way of helping student borrowers: Let them make payments based on their income level.

Federal student loans currently allow almost all borrowers to opt into income-driven repayment (IDR) plans. These plans cap the borrower's annual payment as a percentage of the borrower's income reported on tax returns to the IRS, much like the Affordable Care Act does for health insurance premiums. The borrower pays only an affordable amount for 20 or 25 years under these plans, after which any remaining amount is forgiven. Thus, under an IDR plan, the borrower's total debt is largely irrelevant because much of it will eventually be forgiven.

The problem is that under the current student loan system, IDR is not the default repayment plan for borrowers. Instead, borrowers

need to take affirmative steps to enroll in IDR and then need to recertify their eligibility every year. Many borrowers are unaware of IDR options and federal loan servicers are not incentivized to ensure that borrowers know about their choices. Even those borrowers who are aware of IDR options often fail to stay on top of their annual paperwork. And it's difficult for borrowers in default to get into IDR, even though they need it the most. As a result, hundreds of thousands of borrowers who should be in IDR are not and end up with massively larger - and often unaffordable - student loan payments.

Congress could readily fix this problem: provide that repayment of all federal Direct Loans be done on an IDR plan and direct the IRS to share the tax returns of all federal Direct Loan borrowers with Federal Student Aid and its loan servicers. Alternatively, by shifting all borrowers to IDR, Congress could simply have student loan repayments collected through tax withholding, as is done successfully in other countries like Australia and the United Kingdom.

Tackling India's unemployment wave



Over the last few months, the Government of India and the mainstream media have highlighted the return of economic growth. However, very little attention has been paid to the job market. India's unemployment rate has been soaring. It went up to 7.91 per cent in December 2021 from 6.3 per cent in 2018-2019 and 4.7 per cent in 2017-18, when the trend started to change - a sign that this phenomenon is not just due to Covid. In urban areas, this has gone up to 9.30 per cent in December 2021 from 8.09 per cent in January 2021. In rural areas, it has gone up to 7.28 per cent against 5.81 per cent.

Clearly, unemployment is more in the urban areas as compared to the rural areas. Between 2019-20 and December 2021, the manufacturing sector has lost 9.8 million jobs; by contrast, agricultural jobs jumped by 7.4 million. One probably needs to get back to the Raj years to see such a movement towards ruralisation: Workers are back in their villages even though urban jobs provide better wages.

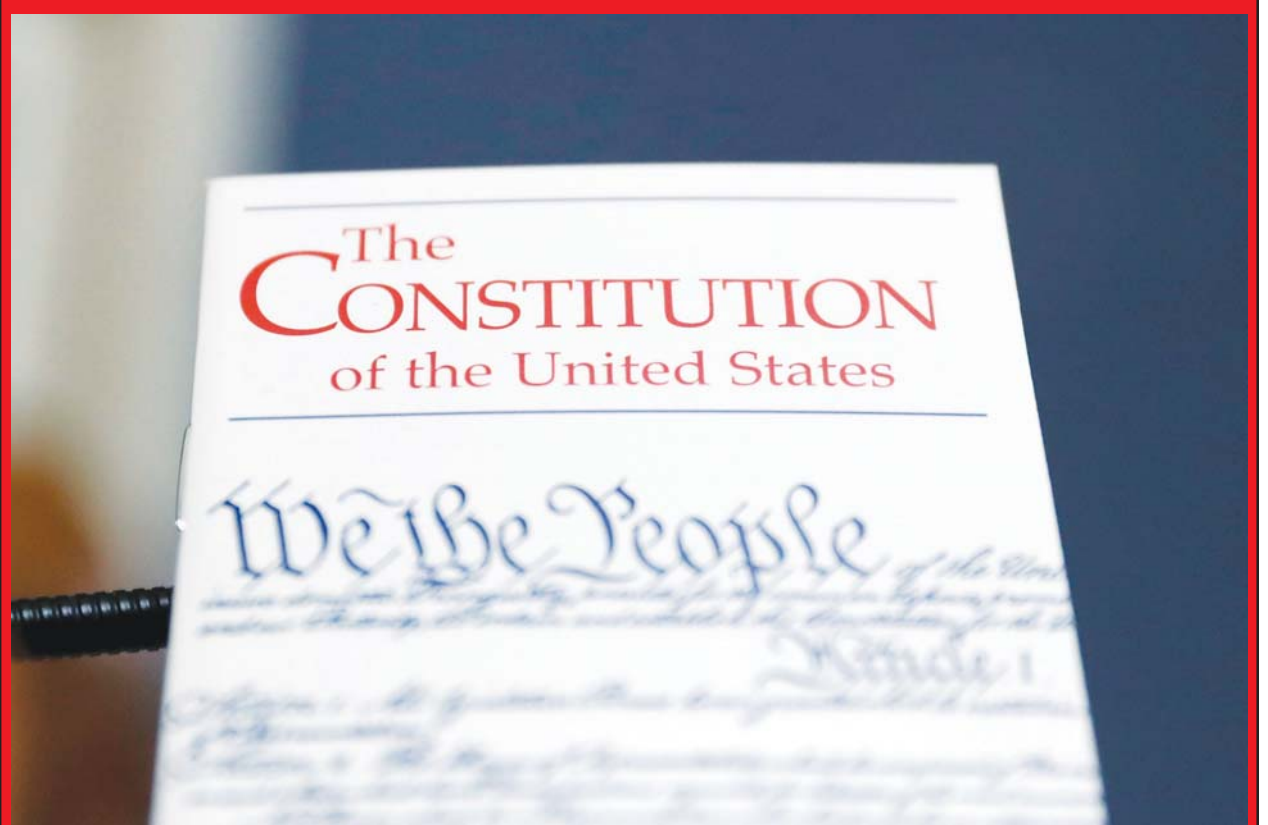
The quality of jobs is also at stake. The percentage of salaried people has dropped from 21.2 per cent in 2019-2020 to 19 per cent in 2021, which means that 9.5 million people have left the salariat and become jobless or part of the informal sector. But the informal sector itself has shrunk, so much so that - to return to aggregate figures - the employed population, over the same period, has decreased from 408.9 million people to 406 million, at a time about 10 million young Indians were entering the job market. The age pyramid does not help, despite the belief in the so-called demographic dividend.

India's Labour Force Participation (LPR) does not compare favourably with other emerging countries - a category that is vanishing quickly. According to the World Bank, it stood at 46 per cent in 2020 (it has not improved since then), while that of Brazil stood at 59 per cent, Chile's at 57 per cent, China's at 67 per cent, Ethiopia's at 76, Ghana's at 66, per cent, Indonesia's at 66 per cent and Malaysia's at 64 per cent.

Certainly, there are variations among Indian states. As per CMIE data, the unemployment rate in December 2021 was the highest in Haryana (34.1 per cent), followed by Rajasthan (27.1 per cent), Jharkhand (17.3 per cent) and Bihar (16 per cent).

There are also variations age-wise. Based on the data from CEDA-CMIE (between January 2019 and July 2021), the year 2020-21 saw 42.4 per cent fewer 15-19-year-olds employed in comparison to 2019-20. The age group of 20-29-year-olds saw the average monthly employment numbers go down by 15.6 per cent.

In fact, according to the NSSO, in 2019, when India had the highest unemployment rate in the last 45 years, this rate was particularly high among India's youth: 34 per cent for those between 20 and 24 years. For urban dwellers in this age group, this rate was 37.5 per cent. This figure is coherent with the CMIE figures: For the age group of 20-29 years old, the rate was around 28 per cent, meaning that nearly 30.8 million young people in this age group were jobless, compared to 17.8 million in 2017. An astonishing fact is that the more educated the people, the more unemployed they were - 63.4 per cent of graduates falling in the age bracket of 20-24 years were unemployed. This number has increased with time.



It's Time to Amend the Constitution

With Congress incapable of legislating, Constitutional amendments are now the country's best way to tackle its biggest problems

President Joe Biden's Supreme Court Commission ended with more whimper than bang. Created in response to continued criticisms of the court's conservative decisions and President Donald Trump's three appointments, this group of 34 of our country's brightest legal minds considered proposals to fundamentally alter the third branch of our government. For months, they heard testimony and circulated drafts on adding justices to the court, 18-year term limits for justices, stripping the court of jurisdiction to hear certain types of cases, requiring a supermajority of justices to overturn acts of Congress - any of which could dramatically change our constitutional order.

And yet their final report was met with a collective yawn by all but the most ardent court followers.

And why is that? The Commission took a more descriptive rather than prescriptive approach, noting the "profound disagreement among Commissioners on these issues." But it wasn't that their conclusions were boring; it's that they were useless. Nobody who's been paying attention thinks any of it will happen. Aside from adding justices (and even then there was notable disagreement among the commissioners), all of these changes would require a constitutional amendment. And amending the Constitution has become virtually impossible.

Our Founders designed the

Constitution so that amending it would be hard, but not impossible. In fact, they ratified the document with many of the amendments that would become the Bill of Rights already in mind. George Washington dedicated a good chunk of his first inaugural address to the subject of amendments. And, of course, Thomas Jefferson would later tout the necessity of changes to the Constitution by successive generations: "We might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy as civilized society to remain ever under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors."

But today, thanks in large part to growing negative partisanship and shrinking Congressional interest in doing anything, the amendment process has been relegated to the dust heap while our national problems - from climate change to an outdated immigration system - pile up without political accountability. The resulting constitutional stagnation is a threat to the Republic - one that should scare you even if you think the Supreme Court has gotten every decision right (narrator: it hasn't).

We need to amend the amending. Article V of the Constitution explains how to amend our shared governing contract. In short, 38 state legislatures have to ratify an amendment after it is proposed either by 67 senators and 288 house members or 34 states. Of course, our population isn't evenly divided across the states. The smallest 12 states

comprise roughly 14 million people. And in a country of 330 million people, that means that, in theory, 96 percent of us could have to agree to change the Constitution - that is, if all the least populous states don't vote in favor of an amendment.

It's not an easy process. Of the nearly 11,000 Constitutional amendments that have been proposed over the past 233 years, only 27 have made it through. But it has also become increasingly difficult of late. In today's dysfunctional Congress, garnering two-thirds support for anything of is a laughable notion.

Over half of the Constitution's amendments were made in the first third of our country's existence. The first 10 - the Bill of Rights - happened almost immediately. The next two - protecting states from lawsuits and electing the president and vice president as a ticket - were ratified within a few years. The three civil rights amendments were made following the Civil War, and ratification by the rebelling states was required for reentry into the Union. The other 12 were all ratified in the 20th century. The most recent amendment - the 27th, which prevents a congressional pay raise from going into effect until after the next congressional election - was actually proposed with the Bill of Rights and took an impressive 202-year ratification period to finally get enough state votes to become part of the Constitution in 1992.



State cannot ignore incidents of vigilante justice

Lynchings in Punjab are an affront to the cherished idea of constitutional justice and the Sikh ethic of mercy

The sensitive border state of Punjab was rocked by disruptive violence following the attempted sacrilege within the sanctum sanctorum of Sri Harmandir Sahib. The outrage led to lynching of the offender by the enraged. Another lynching of a person wrongly accused of sacrilege followed thereafter in Kapurthala, raising several questions concerning the quality of our democratic arrangement and political structures.

That the reprehensible desecration of holy books deserves to be unreservedly condemned in the strongest terms is unquestionable, but unlawful retribution even for an unpardonable sin is an affront both to the cherished idea of constitutional justice and the Sikh ethic of daia (mercy/compassion), inspired by the teachings of revered gurus. While the state government has done well by apprehending those responsible for the murder in Kapurthala, thereby asserting the inviolability of the principles of due process, those guilty of lynching in Amritsar are yet to be arraigned. Need we remind ourselves that democratic accountability is about taming passions of the populace to the discipline of the Constitution without which democracy regresses into anarchy. Hopefully, the insouciance of political parties and their leaders, captive to the lure of fleeting electoral victories, will not be seen as legitimisation of

individual retribution. Barack Obama had reminded us that "most of the sins of politics are derivative of the larger sin - the need to win, but also the need not to lose".

Events in Punjab and elsewhere raise larger issues about the functioning of our constitutional democracy. That a crowd consumed by religious or political passions can be the prosecutor, judge, jury, and hangman at the same time offends the first principles of government by and under the law. Mob violence and vigilante justice pose grave danger to democracy, political stability and national security. Frenzied mobs endanger lives, undercut security, infract human dignity and challenge the state's lawful authority in the ordering of society. Can the state look away when confronted with situations that challenge its very existence? Surely, the alternative to inaction or tardy action by the state cannot be a surrender to uncontrolled passions that thrive on vengeance. Leadership is tested in trying circumstances. Abnegation of duty to protest injustice and a reluctance to take principled decisions in testing situations annuls leadership and robs the democratic state of a willing allegiance of free people. Leaders must assert moral authority, calm passions, restore sanity and ensure social harmony. Leadership is about doing what is right. It is about shaping the popular mood and not being led by it because the one merely

following the crowd cannot travel beyond it. It is an inescapable lesson of history that leaders willing to sacrifice principle for power forfeit their claim to democratic leadership. Diminished leaders, we know, erode democracy while the taller ones define it. Winning elections is important but who wins if justice fails, is the question we must repeatedly ask ourselves. Indeed, democratic politics must defer to demands of justice as an index of responsive democracy and the government's badge of moral authority over its constituents. The quality of democracy is also reflected in how the ruling dispensations treat their political opponents. In recent years, the nation has witnessed the silencing of political adversaries through coercive processes of the criminal justice system, thereby obliterating the substantive distinction between lawful prosecution and political persecution. The Opposition in Punjab alleges likewise, albeit without evidence thus far. A reminder from history and experience in Punjab tells us that political high-handedness, however camouflaged, invariably rebounds. We must learn from history to disprove the despondent conclusion of Alexis De Tocqueville that man is wandering in obscurity "as the past has ceased to throw light upon the future". Abuse of power is a ground for questioning the right to it. And we know that waters close with

astonishing speed over the political careers of those drunk on power. Narrow political impulses and transient passions cannot trench upon the sacrosanct constitutional principles that provide an enduring edifice of the nation, the foremost being the citizens' right to justice according to procedures established by law. Recent events in Punjab and elsewhere seen in their historical context impel us to revisit our politics and priorities so that social accord and communal harmony are not sacrificed at the altar of individual ambitions and vanities. Lest we forget, the arrogance of power does not sit well with the idea of justice. Also, little minds and leadership go ill together. Marrying power to justice remains a perennial challenge of aspiring and evolving democracies. To recall the celebrated American judge, Justice Benjamin Cardozo, "the process of justice is never finished but reproduces itself generation after generation". A progressive vision of our collective future anchored in the harmonious coexistence of all our people and untarnished by narrow partisan politics should define the distinction of our democracy. In an era of democratic decline, we must strive for robust "institutional predicates of democracy" - the integrity of constitutional institutions, that allow democratic engagement without fear, as a practised reality.

The Novak Djokovic saga has turned the spotlight on deep divisions in Australian society



This was not part of Novak Djokovic's plan. The tennis star who posed with a big grin Tuesday, planes on the tarmac behind him, announcing that he'd been granted a medical exemption to play at the Australian Open and was about to fly Down Under, was instead about to embark on a saga of epic proportions.

Had things gone according to Djokovic's plans, he would have arrived in Australia Wednesday night and be out on Rod Laver Arena in the Melbourne summer sun by Friday at the latest, working out the kinks from the flight and preparing for the Australian Open.

Instead, Djokovic spent Wednesday night at Tullamarine Airport. And he'll spend at least the next four days at Melbourne's Park Hotel, after apparently traveling to Australia on a visa that does not permit medical exemptions for the unvaccinated, according to comments Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison made to CNN.

Djokovic, 34, has not publicly revealed his vaccination status and has repeatedly cited privacy issues when asked. On Thursday, Morrison said in a news conference that Djokovic "didn't have a valid medical exemption" to the vaccination requirement for arrivals.

The multimillionaire tennis star is now a man in limbo, currently staying in a hotel used as an immigration detention center, and which has since become a magnet for protesters of all stripes -- from Djokovic supporters to refugee advocates. Djokovic fans even got a wave and a "heart" sign from their hero, from behind the hotel-room window.

But according to accounts from some asylum-seekers who have stayed there, the Park Hotel is a place of tiny rooms without fresh air and the location of a coronavirus outbreak in October. It's where some occupants have waited years for a resolution to their cases.



I was relieved when my sons got mild Covid-19. Then I thought about this

Covid-19 continues its rampage across the US with the Omicron coronavirus variant spreading here, then there, then everywhere. Two months ago, the US had less than 100,000 new cases diagnosed each day; now the number is over 600,000, according to data from Johns Hopkins University, with no signs of slowing down. Despite the dizzying number of new cases, Omicron appears, at least in the early reports, to cause much milder symptoms than previous variants, especially among the vaccinated and boosted. These two novel aspects of Omicron -- high transmissibility and mildness of symptoms -- played out recently for me when my two adult sons contracted Covid-19 soon after attending a large raucous wedding. Once they were diagnosed, I repeatedly reread the reports describing the mildness of the disease caused by the current variant, though as an infectious disease specialist I already knew the facts; these were my sons, after all. I also talked to the many friends who themselves had developed Covid-19 during the Omicron surge, seeking reassurance. And, being a parent, I didn't sleep much.

My sons, who were both fully vaccinated and boosted, had the usual symptoms: first a sore throat, then some fever and aches and fatigue for several days. Within a week, they were mostly back to themselves. An unpleasant week for sure, but were it not for the pandemic, probably not quite bad enough to go see a doctor.

In fact, they got so well so (relatively) quickly that I began to wonder whether it might be more expedient from a public health perspective if we just quit trying to stem the pace and extent of the pandemic and just, well, let it rip. Once everyone got Covid and recovered, we could all be ourselves again, immune and carefree. Out with the masks, in with the face-to-face gatherings. New York could be the Big Apple once again!

After this initially exhilarating thought experiment, though, the dangers of the "let it rip" approach became evident. Perhaps having sick sons had warped my judgment. Opening the gate to more infections is a very terrible idea; even if it might improve the Covid-19 statistics transiently, it would leave a trail of individual tragedies.

First, there are the sheer case numbers: The statistics of death

and severe illness would become mighty big numbers if a million people a day were to catch the infection. Emergency rooms, many of which are already packed to the brim, would be even more backed up with the Omicron sick, making it still more difficult for people with other conditions to be seen quickly.

Hospital staff, already frazzled by two years of the pandemic, would be under even greater pressure again. Plus, an illness that makes it hard to work for a week or two punches large holes in the workforce, making routine aspects of life a daily challenge.

On the medical side, millions of people in the US have weakened immune systems, whether from cancer or cancer treatments, drugs given for conditions like lupus and similar conditions, or a wide array of other diseases. Their ability to mount an effective response to any virus is compromised, as is their ability to respond to a vaccine, making an unchecked virus a clear danger.

Furthermore, since they have trouble clearing the virus, it may linger for months in their body, possibly creating a hothouse environment to promote new

variants, any one of which might be the next variant of concern.

There are still more reasons to remain vigilant: We don't know the frequency of long Covid among those infected by Omicron, and we don't know the rate of more recently identified consequences of acute Covid-19 infection such as type 1 diabetes.

Finally, letting any virus run wild across a large swath of the population is asking for trouble. This will lead to much more virus circulating indoors and out, which is never a good thing. A few decades ago, HIV researchers introduced the term "community viral load" to describe how much virus is out there and, by extension, the likelihood of catching it from a sexual encounter. The higher the community viral load, the greater the risk of the infection being transmitted.

Though HIV is an unrelated virus that is transmitted very differently than SARS-CoV-2, the point is the same. More circulating virus, as would occur with a "just let it rip" approach, means more chances for transmission and, with each new case, more chances for a consequential mutation to occur, which could lead to further

surges and countless avoidable deaths.

Our current quandary of trying to resume a normal life while being hit by wave after wave of new variants gets at the core of the differences between an individual's illness, such as my sons' -- where the model is one patient, one doctor, one problem, one remedy -- and the daunting demands of guiding public health. There, the consumer is not one patient but rather an entire country, and the coin of the realm is a bulky unforgiving data set analyzed under the harsh gaze of often unreasonable politicians.

In truth, public health officials can never give the correct advice to everyone every time, so they settle for most of the people most of the time -- an imperfect fit, especially in a time of screaming need like during a pandemic. This unresolvable tension between the needs of the person and the needs of the public didn't bother Josef Stalin at all; in fact, he exploited it. According to many, he observed that "one death is a tragedy; a million is a statistic," seeking to hide his cruelty under a welter of numbers and percentages. For those interested in humanity, however, this will never do.



Photo Illustration

Rand Paul and Anthony Fauci debacle reflects our own state of disarray

Tuesday's Senate hearing on COVID may have been intended to clear up the confusion and frustration most people feel. But, if anything, it ended up further confusing many Americans.

It was disturbing enough to hear that the rapid home tests many people are looking for are still stuck in warehouses. And that Centers for Disease Control and Prevention director Dr. Rochelle Walensky, an expert infectious disease and public health specialist, still wasn't able to fully clarify the issue of who should be isolated and for how long. But there was also an all out verbal brawl between Senator Rand Paul and Dr. Anthony Fauci, head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

Tuesday's debacle involving Sen. Paul and Dr. Fauci struck me as more emblematic of a state of disarray in our society than any of their previous arguments during a Senate hearing. For one thing, Dr. Fauci linked the story of a lunatic who was reportedly en route to Washington, D.C. with an AR-15 before being apprehended, with the derision and accusations he was enduring from Sen. Paul. Earlier, after answering questions from Senator Roger Marshall, who is also a physician, Dr. Fauci was heard calling the senator a "moron." That contributed to a lowering of the discourse.

It all made the whole thing personal for viewers, and it was difficult not to reflect that, for all his flaws, Dr. Fauci remains a superb immunologist and

vaccinologist who understands SARS COV 2 deeply. Though his public health decisions regarding lockdowns, masks, and other strategies have been rightly questioned. I have interviewed Dr. Fauci many times and have always found him to be thoughtful, sincere, respectful, and kind. He deserves kindness and respect in return.

On the other hand, the point Senator Paul (who is an accomplished ophthalmologist and Emergency Room physician himself) raised about NIH leaders possibly trying to suppress experimental or "fringe" treatments early in the pandemic is worthy of consideration. Sometimes today's fringe treatments are tomorrow's cures. And hydroxychloroquine, for one, was overly politicized and studied too late in the clinical course at a time when we had little else to offer patients.

Of course, it is also true that excess fascination with an unproven and potentially harmful treatment as appears to be the case with Ivermectin, for example, can do more harm than good. And promoting it may therefore violate the Hippocratic oath. Despite that, I'm against suppression of inquiry and against censorship of any kind.

Dr. Fauci discussed the elaborate process involved with drug development including for Pfizer's Paxlovid and Merck's Molnupiravir, but I couldn't help but think that all the bureaucratic slowdown kept the needed drugs from the

real world. There's also the failure of the Biden administration to take a chance and pay for the treatments in advance to get the ball rolling so that production was already geared up at the time of approval, similar to the way the Trump administration acted for the vaccines.

The Biden administration's massive failure here was the elephant in the room. Paxlovid was already well studied and appears to be extremely effective when given early. So, too, are the monoclonal antibodies, especially Sotrovimab for the Omicron variant. We lack some of the main tools we need to exit the pandemic.

The Biden administration has been a one trick pony with the one tool it was given: the vaccine. Dr. Fauci made the point yesterday that the vaccine, especially when boosted, has greatly decreased risk infection, hospitalization, and death - though the first is clearly less true with Omicron. This doesn't mean we shouldn't take it. Everyone should have as much immunity against this tricky virus as possible, whether its from maximized vaccine or prior infection. It would behoove the Biden team to focus on new vaccines in development while recognizing the immunity from prior infection as important. At the same time, they should embrace the notion that the massive outbreak will soon decline because Omicron will burn out as it did in South Africa and appears to be in the UK.

Chinese Foreign Minister's Sri Lanka visit highlighted Beijing's relentless drive in Indian Ocean region, and India's challenge



The visit by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Sri Lanka as part of a five-nation swing-through, that also covered three African nations and the Maldives, has highlighted Beijing's relentless drive for influence over the Indian Ocean region. In Colombo, Wang spoke of creating a forum for Indian Ocean "island countries" that shared "similar experiences and common needs" and development goals to strengthen "mutually beneficial co-operation". Such fora already exist. China is a dialogue partner of the Indian Ocean Rim Association, along with Russia, the US and several European countries. Since 2008, an Indian Ocean Navies Symposium brings together 24 countries in the region, in which, too, China, which is not an Indian Ocean country, is one among several observers. It is significant that Beijing, which has pumped in so much money into many of these countries, but by virtue of its geography, is not a full member in any of the region's groupings, now believes there should be another forum representing the region. Wang's proposal, which bears a curious resemblance to the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) doctrine articulated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his first term, during a visit to Mauritius in 2015, is a sign that the India-China rivalry in the maritime sphere is set to intensify.

Wang left no one in any doubt about this when he described the China-Sri Lanka relationship as not targeting "a third party" and as one that "should not be interfered with by any third party". The term "third party" was first used by the Chinese embassy in Colombo to obliquely describe India, after Delhi objected to a Chinese solar farm project on Sri Lankan islands close to the Tamil Nadu coast. Wang described Beijing's relationship with Colombo as one that has "injected positive energy into regional peace and stability". For India, which has had to deal with two episodes of territorial creep by the People's Liberation Army in the last six years - one more round of talks on Ladakh is scheduled to take place today - and has put the Army on full alert all the way from Ladakh to Arunachal along the contested Line of Actual Control, it is impossible to share the same warm and fuzzy feelings about China's economic and political inroads in Sri Lanka, or the Maldives for that matter. India has long-established ties with Colombo and Male, and needs no lectures on how to conduct its diplomacy in the region - from a third party.



SVEN HOPPE/PICTURE ALLIANCE/GETTY IMAGES

Why travel restrictions are a bad idea

On November 24, the Network for Genomic Surveillance in South Africa identified a new coronavirus variant of concern, dubbed Omicron. Since the variant's initial identification in South Africa, it has been discovered in a number of countries spanning multiple continents, and on Wednesday, the first case of Covid-19 caused by this variant was reported in California. Two days after news of Omicron's existence was announced, after it had also been detected in Hong Kong and Botswana, the UK issued a travel ban on all foreign travelers from South Africa and a handful of neighboring nations with more than 20 countries, including the US, following suit in some form. This felt like a slap on South Africa's wrist -- and one that will likely hurt the South African people while providing little protection from Omicron to the rest of the world. South Africa should not be punished for being quick to identify the variant and notify the world of its presence. The promises heads of states made at the G20 summit in October to be collaborative in rebuilding the world tourism sector have seemingly been disregarded -- and these travel restrictions are a misguided result. To date, South Africa has identified two variants of concern. This is thanks to the advanced genomic surveillance system established in May 2020, created

to provide rapid sequencing in order to understand the behavior of the virus and ultimately inform policy. Shortly after the travel bans were implemented by many countries, the variant was identified in Japan, Brazil, multiple European countries, and on Wednesday it was identified in the US. Nonetheless, it is South Africa and its surrounding nations that are being hit particularly hard by travel restrictions. This begs the question, if Omicron cases had first emerged in a North American or Western European nation, would similar travel bans have been implemented? Or is it

South Africa's geography and relatively lower GDP that makes it the target of these restrictions, despite the service we provided to the world by sounding an alarm as early as possible about this new variant? Travel bans and restrictions that were first used to contain the spread of Covid-19 were largely unsuccessful, except in island nations like Australia and New Zealand, which closed their borders to the rest of the world during the early stages of the pandemic. On a whole, the world realized that the spread of the virus could not be contained. As the pandemic raged on and

coronavirus variants emerged, travel restrictions were imposed in an attempt to delay or control their importation from one country to the next. This was often too late, as variants were identified only after dispersion had occurred. While delaying the spread of variants could buy countries a little time to better prepare their health care systems, travel restrictions create economic loss, particularly for countries that rely heavily on income associated with tourism. As it stands, nearly two years into the pandemic, high-income nations have many of the necessary

public health resources in place to combat Covid-19, as well as readily available vaccines. The benefit of minimizing the spread of Omicron in these nations through travel bans does not outweigh the economic cost to South Africa and other banned nations. Many economies of lower-middle-income countries in the global South heavily rely on December tourism from the UK, Europe and the US. Just before the pandemic hit, tourists spent R116.9 billion (about \$7.34 billion in US terms) in South Africa in a year, according to the South African Tourism Annual Report.

The BJP's Biggest Weakness Is Being Exploited By Akhilesh Yadav

If the 2017 UP assembly elections were defined by the Hindutva Wave, then can 2022 be defined by the fightback of Mandal Politics? It may be too early for a prediction, but there seems to be a new yearning amongst the backward castes (OBCs). The intensity of this reassertion will determine the result of the UP election. The resignation of Swami Prasad Maurya and Dara Singh Chauhan from the BJP and their probable entry into the Samajwadi Party is certainly a defining moment in the Opposition's campaign in this politically-crucial state. Swami Prasad Maurya is no ordinary caste leader in UP politics. He had a long and

resourceful innings in the BSP and was part of Mayawati's core team. But after Mayawati's defeats in 2012 and 2014, he moved to the BJP on the eve of the 2017 state election. The BJP racked up a spectacular victory and Swami Prasad Maurya was rewarded with a cabinet job. Though he was never close to Yogi Adityanath, he stayed loyal to the BJP till a few months ago. He belongs to the Maurya community, the third-biggest OBC in the state (the Yadavs and Kurmis are ahead) and comprises 8% of the total population. Swami Prasad Maurya is an MLA from the Padrauna constituency in Kushinagar district in Eastern UP; his influence on his caste extends around Raibareilly,

Unchahar, Shahjahanpur and Badayun districts. It is assumed that Mauryas have a sizable presence in more than 100 of UP's 403 seats. It is no surprise therefore that this community, in order to enhance its bargaining power, has formed its own party called Mahan Dal. And it is also no coincidence that Akhilesh Yadav formed an alliance with Mahan Dal before his campaign began. Like Swami Prasad Maurya, Dara Singh Chauhan, who also resigned as a minister in UP today, belongs to an OBC. He is from the Nonia caste which is considered the most backward among OBCs and forms 3% of population in eastern UP. This community is spread around

Varanasi, Chandauli and Mirzapur. Though the BJP has an alliance with the Prithviraj Jan Shakti party which focuses on the Nonias, Dara Singh is the biggest leader of the community. Before Swami Prasad Maurya joined him, Akhilesh Yadav struck very important electoral deals with two other powerful castes. In 2017, the Jat community in western UP had wholeheartedly supported the BJP. Though the Jat community is only 2% of the population, historical reasons as also the stature of former Prime Minister Charan Singh, makes it a very powerful player with a huge presence in western UP, Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab.

Pak Taliban Fugitive, Missing Since 2014, Killed In Afghanistan

Muhammad Khurasani's death comes weeks after another senior Pakistan Taliban leader escaped unhurt from a suspected drone strike in Afghanistan

A high-profile member of the Pakistan Taliban has been killed in Afghanistan, a senior security official said Monday, after being on the run since 2014 when the army cracked down on the terrorist group.

Muhammad Khurasani, spokesman for the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), died in the eastern province of Nangarhar, the official said, asking not to be named. "We are in the process of gathering information from



Afghanistan on how he was tracked down and killed," the official added, declining to say who was responsible.

Afghan officials in Nangarhar told news agency AFP they were checking the reports.

Khurasani's death comes weeks

after another senior Pakistan Taliban leader escaped unhurt from a suspected drone strike on a safe house in eastern Afghanistan.

It is still not clear who was responsible for that attack, though Pakistan does have the

capability and the US said it may still carry out strikes even after withdrawing from Afghanistan on August 31.

The TTP -- a separate movement that shares roots with Afghanistan's Taliban -- plunged Pakistan into a period of horrific

violence after forming in 2007. Pakistan officials have said Khurasani -- whose real name is Khalid Balti -- ran a "terrorist training camp" in rugged North Waziristan before fleeing to Afghanistan after the army crackdown.

"He masterminded several attacks in close liaison with the TTP chief Noor Wali Mehsud on Pakistani security forces and innocent citizens while hiding in Afghanistan," the security official said.

The TTP has been blamed for hundreds of suicide bomb attacks and kidnappings across the country, and for a while held sway over vast tracts of the country's rugged tribal belt, imposing a radical version of Islamic law. But, after the 2014 massacre of nearly 150 children at a Peshawar school, the Pakistan military sent huge numbers of troops into TTP strongholds and crushed the movement, forcing its fighters to retreat to Afghanistan.

Insurance

Nlight
Solid like a Rock

Are you paying too much for Auto, Home, Business, Workman Compensation, Contractors, General Liability, E&O ?

Call us today for complimentary analysis of your policy.



Sharanjit Singh Thind
Licensed P&C Insurance Broker - Notary Public
(Service with Honesty & Smiles Since 2012)

Tel: 516-654-4488

insure@nlightfin.com www.nlightfin.com

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

WWF

Afghanistan's China envoy leaves after months without pay

Afghanistan's ambassador to China, Javid Ahmad Qaem, left his post after months without pay from Kabul

Afghanistan's ambassador to China, Javid Ahmad Qaem, left his post earlier in January after months without pay from Kabul following the Taliban's seizure of power, he said on Twitter.

In a handover letter dated Jan. 1, also posted on Twitter, Qaem said that many diplomats at the embassy had already left, and Kabul had not sent them salaries since August.

"There are many reasons, personal and professional, but I don't want to mention them here," he said of his decision to leave.

China shares a short border with Afghanistan and Beijing has sent humanitarian supplies to the country since the Taliban's abrupt return in



August.

In his letter, Qaem said a new person had been assigned to the embassy, naming him only as "Mr. Sadaat." The Afghanistan foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment on who Qaem's successor would be.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said at a daily briefing on Tuesday that Qaem had left China, without giving details of when or where he went to International governments, including China, have not recognized the Taliban's government as legitimate.

Strict sanctions have paralysed the country's public finances.

The Taliban's abrupt return to power has left hundreds of Afghan diplomats overseas in limbo, fearful for families back home and desperate to secure refuge abroad.

Qaem's letter said that as of

Jan. 1 there was \$100,000 left in one of the embassy's bank accounts, as well as an undisclosed sum in another. The letter also noted that keys to the five embassy cars will be left in Qaem's office and that two cars need to be scrapped.

"I have paid all the local staff up to 20th Jan, 2022. Their jobs are finished," he said. Since August, China has called on the Taliban to pursue moderate policies while stamping out groups it sees as threatening stability in its far western region of Xinjiang.

Beijing has also called for Western powers to end sanctions and send aid to Afghanistan.

Looking to Buy/Sell?

We know the difference between Home & House

Honesty, Integrity & Experience



Specializing in Investment & Income Producing Real Estate

Nlight Real Estate

Tel: 516 NLIGHT4



Sharanjit Singh Thind
Real Estate Broker/Notary Public



Since 2007

180 Broadway, PH 3A, Hicksville NY 11801

Email: homes@nlightrealestate.com

www.nlightrealestate.com



ਪੰਜਾਬ, ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਅਤੇ ਪੰਜਾਬੀਅਤ ਦਾ ਤਰਜਮਾਨ

ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਦੁਨੀਆ

Since April 2005 Editor: Sharnjit Singh Thind PUNJABI DUNIYA Weekly

Vol. 14 Issue 15 Wednesday 02 Jan to 08 Jan, 2019 www.PUNJABIDUNIYA.com Published Weekly from New York

ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਉਡਾਰੀ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਖਰਚੇ 27000 ਕਰੋੜ

ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਉਡਾਰੀ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਖਰਚੇ 27000 ਕਰੋੜ

ਸੱਜਣ ਕੁਮਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਸਿੱਧਾਂ ਕੋਲੋਂ ਬਚਾ-ਬਚਾ ਕੇ ਰੱਖੇਗਾ ਜੇਲ੍ਹ ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਾਸਨ

ਨਵੀਂ ਦਿੱਲੀ: ਸਿੱਖ ਨਾਸਤਿਕਤਾ ਵਿਚ ਸੋਧਵਾਦੀ ਭੂਮਿਕਾ ਨਿਰਾਸ਼ਿਤ ਵਾਲੇ ਭਾਗਿਸ਼ਾ ਦੇ ਸਾਥੀਆਂ ਸੰਗਤਾਂ ਦੇ ਮੌਤ ਹੋਣ ਤੋਂ ਬਾਅਦ ਸੱਜਣ ਕੁਮਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਸਿੱਧਾਂ ਕੋਲੋਂ ਬਚਾ-ਬਚਾ ਕੇ ਰੱਖੇਗਾ ਜੇਲ੍ਹ ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਾਸਨ।

ਨਵੇਂ ਸਾਲ ਮੌਕੇ ਅਮਰੀਕੀ ਫੌਜ ਨੇ ਬੰਬ ਦਾ ਟਵੀਟ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਮੰਗੀ ਮੁਆਫੀ

ਪ੍ਰਿੰਸਟਨ: ਅਮਰੀਕਾ ਦੇ ਸਰਕਾਰੀ ਹਵਾਈ ਫੌਜ ਨੇ ਨਵੇਂ ਸਾਲ ਮੌਕੇ ਅਮਰੀਕੀ ਫੌਜ ਨੇ ਬੰਬ ਦਾ ਟਵੀਟ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਮੰਗੀ ਮੁਆਫੀ।

ਭਾਰਤ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨੇ ਪਾਕਿਸਤਾਨ ਸਿਰੋਬਲ ਫੌਜ ਤੇ ਪਾਬੰਦੀ ਲਾਈ

ਨਵੀਂ ਦਿੱਲੀ: ਭਾਰਤ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨੇ ਪਾਕਿਸਤਾਨ ਸਿਰੋਬਲ ਫੌਜ ਤੇ ਪਾਬੰਦੀ ਲਾਈ।

Insurance
Property & Casualty
(See Full Page Advt. on Page 31)

Business, Liability, Disability, Workers Comp., E & O, Auto, Home,

917-612-3158
www.whitestonecorpusa.com

Taliban increase payment in wheat as economic crisis deepens

Taliban said that wheat is being used to pay 40,000 workers 10kg of wheat per day for working five hours a day

The Taliban administration said on Tuesday it was expanding its 'food for work' program, in which it uses donated wheat to pay thousands of public sector employees instead of cash as a financial crisis intensifies.

Wheat, largely donated by India to the previous U.S.-backed Kabul government, is being used to pay 40,000 workers 10kg of wheat per day for working five hours a day, agriculture officials told a news conference.

The scheme, which has largely paid labourers on public works programs in Kabul, will be expanded around the country, they said.

"We are ready to help our people as much as we can," said Fazel Bari Fazli, deputy minister of administration and finance at the Ministry of Agriculture.



The Taliban administration has already received an additional 18 tonnes of wheat from Pakistan with a promise of 37 tonnes more and is in negotiation with India for 55 tonnes, according to Fazli.

"We have lots of plans for food the growing conundrum faced for work program," he said. by the Taliban administration as It was not clear how much of the cash in the country dries up and donated wheat would be used could raise questions among as direct humanitarian aid and donors over the use of humanitarian aid for government expanding program underlines purposes while strict restrictions

remain on financial flows into the country.

International sanctions on Taliban members, frozen central bank assets and the sudden drop off in international assistance that once formed the backbone of the economy has left the Taliban government with limited government finances and a growing economic crisis. Humanitarian aid has continued as foreign governments attempt to prevent millions from starving, but is designed to bypass Afghan government channels and is mostly distributed by international multilateral institutions.

U.N. agencies on Tuesday asked donors for \$4.4 billion in humanitarian aid for Afghanistan in 2022, calling the funds an "essential stop gap" to ensure the country's future.

**TEXT AND
WHATEVER
JUST
DON'T
TEXT
AND**



STOPTEXTSSTOPWRECKS.ORG



WE THANK OUR CUSTOMERS FOR THEIR TRUST & LOYALTY

28 YEARS OF EXCELLENT CUSTOMER SERVICE



INDO US EXPRESS, INC.

HICKSVILLE, NEW YORK

WORLDWIDE COURIER  FREIGHT-FORWARDER

DOMESTIC & LOCAL DELIVERY

CALL US AT: 212-447-5720 or FAX 516-932-3750

ALTERNATE NUMBER: 347-538-7041

OR EMAIL US: INDOUSEXPRESS@GMAIL.COM

www.indousexpress.com

GREAT SERVICE, 7 DAYS A WEEK, 365 DAYS A YEAR!

AUTHORIZED AGENT FOR:

UPS - FedEx - DHL - USPS - Amazon

CALL ABOUT OUR SPECIAL RATES

TO & FROM INDIA/WORLDWIDE





How the soaring cost of living is hitting Sri Lankans hard

Cooking gas cylinder prices have almost doubled and we cannot afford it anymore," says Niluka Dilrukshi. The 31 year-old mother-of-four has always cooked with gas to prepare food for her family, but now says firewood is her only option.

"I used to provide fish and vegetables daily to my children. Now we are giving them one vegetable with rice," she says. "Earlier we used to have three meals a day, now sometimes we can afford only two."

Mrs Dilrukshi and her family live in a suburb of Colombo, in Sri Lanka. Her husband is a day-wage labourer but the soaring cost of essential items, particularly food, means they are suddenly struggling to make ends meet.

Over the past four months, the price of a standard cooking gas cylinder has shot up from \$7.50 to \$13.25 - an increase of around 85%.

Sri Lanka, an island nation of 22 million people, is facing an unprecedented economic crisis. Its foreign exchange reserves dropped to around \$1.6bn by the end of November, only enough to pay for just a few weeks of imports.

As a result, the government has been forced to restrict the import

of several essential commodities - including food items - in a desperate bid to hang on to its vital dollar reserves. This move, combined with increasing fuel and freight costs, has pushed the price of essentials such as milk powder and rice much higher.

This sharp rise in living costs is not just a problem for Sri Lanka. Several other nations in Asia, such as neighbouring India and Pakistan are also battling soaring inflation - people across the continent are having to tighten their belts to cover the cost of every day food and energy costs. The situation is particularly acute in Sri Lanka, because it is a smaller island nation that's very reliant on overseas imports to feed its population. For example, the country's tiny dairy industry cannot meet local demand so it imports powdered milk.

View from the market

But in the bustling main vegetable market in Colombo dozens of shop owners are selling plentiful supplies of carrot, beetroot, curry leaves and many other greens. Many shoppers openly complain about the surging prices and are bargaining hard to reduce the price, or buying very limited quantities.

"With our current monthly salary, we can survive only for two weeks because the prices have shot up.

We don't have any hope for the future. Rice prices have also increased. There's a long queue outside government-run shops," one of the shoppers, Ms Swarna explains.

With several essential food items in high demand, Sri Lanka's food prices increased by a record 21.1% last month on a year-on-year basis.

Following a sharp hike in milk powder prices - up 12.5% - the café owners' association has decided to suspend selling popular staple, milk tea, entirely. They say milk tea will only be offered on demand, at a higher price.

"Sri Lankans are quite sensitive to food price inflation. There has been already a lot of negative sentiment regarding the constraints that we are seeing," says Deshal de Mel, an economist with think tank Verité Research. "I think it is probably close to a point of a lack of tolerance if this level of price escalation [continues]."

Just before the New Year, the government managed to increase the reserves to \$3.1bn reportedly through currency swap arrangements.

But Sri Lanka's total external debts are estimated to be more than \$45bn and it needs to find more than \$6bn this year for debt

servicing. It's not the only nation in this position, Pakistan and the Maldives are also thought to be suffering.

The pandemic and the rising global fuel costs have added to Sri Lanka's woes. The country's biggest revenue earner, tourism, has taken a huge hit due to the pandemic with international flights grounded.

Sri Lanka earned nearly \$4bn from tourism in 2019 - and that has dropped by around 90% due to the pandemic.

The government says its options are limited.

"We had to go into a restriction of imports because the pressure on our current account, as well on our trade deficit, was increasing due to the pandemic situation. But as a responsible government we need to manage it," Shehan Semasinghe, a Sri Lankan minister tells the BBC.

The opposition party meanwhile has held protests over rising living costs. "This has been building up for a long time. We have been living beyond our means. We have been absorbing more than we have been producing," says Harsha De Silva, an opposition MP and a former minister of economic reforms.

To calm growing public anger over rising costs, the government

recently announced a \$1bn relief package - including a pay and pension hike for government employees. It also lifted tax on some food and medicine and simultaneously announced income support for its poorest citizens.

This is set against a backdrop of high global oil prices, the average cost of shipping a standard container from Europe to Asia has increased from around \$2,000 in 2020, to over \$10,000 last year.

The UN agency, Unctad, recently warned that the recovery of the global economy is threatened by high freight rates. It forecasts that small island nations like Sri Lanka - which are dependent on deliveries by sea - are likely to be hard hit by a spike in import prices.

The rising fuel and energy prices have had a cascading effect on wholesale prices with transporters increasing charges. In neighbouring India, the annual wholesale price-based inflation reached an all-time high of 14.2% last November. And in Pakistan, consumer price inflation rose to 12.3% in December, the highest in nearly two years - the hike in food prices and other essentials being blamed on rising fuel costs.

Pakistan PM Imran Khan says his govt's relationship with military 'exceptional'

On Tuesday, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan emphasised that his government's relationship with the country's military is "exceptional"

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has reiterated that his government's relationship with the country's powerful military was "exceptional" and the Opposition's narrative regarding a rift between the two was "dead and buried", a media report said on Tuesday.

In an apparent response to his detractors, Khan told a meeting of the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) party spokespersons on Monday that "civil-military relations are unprecedented these days", Dawn newspaper reported.

Khan said that the relationship between his government and the military was "exceptional" and the Opposition's narrative regarding a rift between them was "dead and buried", the paper said.

He had shared similar views during a meeting with a journalist last week, according to the paper.

'NOT UNDER ANY PRESSURE': IMRAN KHAN

When asked - in the context of rumours of a possible deal between the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and military to send his government packing - whether he felt threatened from any quarters, Khan said he personally was not under any kind of pressure.

He said that he enjoyed the support of government allies and expressed the confidence that



his government would complete its mandated five years.

The powerful army, which has ruled Pakistan for more than half of its 70 plus years of existence, has hitherto wielded considerable power in the matters of security and foreign policy. **PAK PM PRAISES MILITARY FOR MURREE RESCUE OP**

A close aide to Khan told the paper after attending the meeting that he praised the military for swiftly rushing to the aid of those stranded in Murree and carrying out a rescue operation in the calamity-hit hill station.

Pakistan's popular hill station Murree was declared a calamity-hit area on Saturday after at least 23 people, including nine children, froze to death in their stranded vehicles due to unprecedented snowfall and rush

of tourists to the picturesque town in Punjab province. Khan said the number of tourists in the country had increased while the infrastructure was the same as it was several decades ago, stressing the need for improving facilities and constructing new hotels in tourist spots. Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin also told the meeting about agreements made by the government with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). He also claimed that prices of food items were on the decline, according to the paper.

Former Xinjiang paramilitary chief to lead Chinese People's Liberation Army in Hong Kong

Former paramilitary chief of the Xinjiang Peng Jingtang will lead Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) in Hong Kong. Citing PLA's spokesman, state broadcaster CCTV reported that Chinese President Xi Jinping has signed the order of Peng's appointment. Former paramilitary chief of the Xinjiang Peng Jingtang will lead Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) in Hong Kong. Citing PLA's spokesman, state broadcaster CCTV reported that Chinese President Xi Jinping has signed the order of Peng's

appointment. Peng was previously the deputy chief of staff of China's paramilitary police force, the People's Armed Police. He had also served as the chief of staff of the Armed Police Force in Xinjiang. Currently, he holds the rank of major general. China has been accused by Washington of genocide in Xinjiang, a far-western region where human rights campaigners say authorities have detained vast numbers of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in camps and are stamping out their culture.



The ONLY temple in the world outside India dedicated to Shri Shani Maharaj

Shri SHANI DEV Mandir, New York
Sarvamangala Shri SANEESWARA Temple, New York

Regular Poojas' and Homas' are conducted on daily basis:

Special Poojas:

+ Sri Saneeswara homam

+ Sri Saneeswara - parikara pooja

+ Sri Saneeswara harati

+ Sri Navagraha Homa

+ Poornima: vrata Pooja

+ Pradosham Pooja

+ Sri Sankatahara chaturthi Pooja

+ Sri Satyanarayana Vratha

+ Birthdays / Weddings / Upanayanam & More



1616 Hillside Avenue, Temple Suites
New Hyde Park NY 11040
Ph: 718 740 9400 / 516 358 9400
Email: temple.navagraha@gmail.com

Temple Hours: 8.00 am to 9.00 pm

The Temple entrance is in the western side parking lot behind Hot Breads & Maharajas in New Hyde Park NY

Functions of the space:

Temple / Community Events / Senior Social Day Care Center / Art & Music School / Library / Spiritual Lounge / Gift Shop

www.NavagrahaUSA.com

Prominent Taliban Critic Released After Arrest, Says Daughter

A prominent Afghan university professor arrested by Taliban authorities after criticising them on television was released on Tuesday, his daughter said.

Professor Faizullah Jalal was detained in Kabul on Saturday and taken to an unknown location by Taliban forces, who came back to power in August. Since their takeover, the hardline Islamists have cracked down on dissent, forcefully dispersing women's rights protests and briefly detaining several Afghan journalists.

"After more than four days of detention on baseless charges, I confirm that Professor Jalal is now finally released," tweeted his daughter Hasina Jalal, a fellow at Georgetown University in Washington, after launching a social media campaign calling for his release.

Government spokesman

Zabihullah Mujahid had tweeted that Jalal had made statements on social media in which he was "trying to instigate people against the system".

"He has been arrested so that others don't make similar senseless comments... that

after the arrest.

Clips of Jalal's television appearances attacking the Taliban's forceful rule and the worsening economic situation had previously gone viral on social media, sparking concern he risked Taliban retribution.

In one live talk show, he called Taliban spokesman Mohammad Naeem -- who was also participating -- a "calf", a grave insult in Afghanistan.

Jalal, in his late 50s, had refused offers to leave the country after the Taliban

seized power, living mostly in hiding in Kabul while his family fled to Europe, his daughter said.

A long-time professor of law and political science at Kabul University, Jalal has earned a reputation as a critic of Afghanistan's leaders over the past decades.



Eye on China: Taiwan to spend extra USD 8.6 billion on defence

(News Agencies)- Taiwanese parliament on Tuesday cleared an extra defence funding bill of USD 8.6 billion in its latest attempt to boost its defence capabilities. This is likely to draw sharper reaction from China which has been viewed as being increasingly aggressive towards Taiwan.

China does not recognise Taiwan as a separate country and considers it as its own province.

The Taiwan government proposed a five-year special defence budget of around TW\$237.3 billion from 2022 as Chinese warplanes breached its air defence zone at unprecedented levels last year. Democratic Taiwan lives under constant threat of an invasion by authoritarian China, which claims the self-ruled island as part of its territory to be seized one day -- by force if necessary. Beijing's sabre-rattling towards the island has increased considerably since President Tsai Ing-wen came to power in

2016, as she regards the island as a sovereign nation and not part of "one China." Last year, Taiwan recorded incursions by around 970 Chinese warplanes into its air defence zone, according to a database compiled by AFP, more than double the roughly 380 carried out in 2020.

On Tuesday, Taiwanese lawmakers agreed unanimously to pass the special budget, although cut it by TW\$310 million. The package comes on top of a record annual defence budget of TW\$471.7 billion set for 2022. It aims to acquire various precision missiles and mass-manufacture high-efficiency naval ships "in the shortest period of time" to boost the island's sea and air capabilities, the government said.

J Michael Cole, a Taipei-based political and military analyst, called the special budget "an encouraging and much-needed development" as Taiwan prioritises "asymmetrical" capabilities, such as unmanned vehicles, anti-ship missiles and air-to-ground cruise missiles.

ADVERTISEMENT



Some Call us a Media House
Others call us an Institution to learn from



Delivering News,
uncompromised
& Unbiased for the
Last 19 years

Email: editor@thesouthasianinsider.com
www.thesouthasianinsider.com



US announces \$308 million in humanitarian aid for people of Afghanistan as crisis grows

The US will provide \$308 million in additional humanitarian aid to support the people of Afghanistan who are facing a crisis under the Taliban

The United States on Tuesday announced \$308 million in additional humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan, offering new aid to the country as it edges toward a humanitarian crisis since the Taliban takeover nearly five months ago.

White House national security council spokesperson Emily Horne said in a statement that the new aid from the US Agency for International Development will flow through independent humanitarian organizations and will be used to provide shelter, health care, winterization assistance, emergency food aid, water, sanitation and hygiene services.

The country's long-troubled economy has been in a tailspin since the Taliban takeover. Nearly 80 per cent of Afghanistan's previous government's budget came from the international community. That money, now cut off, financed hospitals, schools, factories and government ministries.

Desperation for such basic necessities has been further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic as well as health care shortages, drought and malnutrition.

READ: Iran offers to assist India in transportation of aid to Afghanistan

The International Rescue Committee, a global humanitarian aid organization, said community health workers it supports have reported seeing a sharp increase in the number of children with severe acute malnutrition in Khost and Herat provinces. The group also reported that food prices in Afghanistan have risen by an estimated 10% to 20% compared with the previous five years.

The IRC's president and CEO, David Milliband, said the "cause of today's humanitarian disaster is clear: the economic tourniquet applied to Afghanistan." "It is way past time for a change of approach," he said.

The USAID called on the Taliban to allow "all aid workers,

especially women ... to operate independently and securely" as humanitarian groups look to assist those suffering.

"The United States continues to urge the Taliban to allow unhindered humanitarian access, safe conditions for humanitarians, independent provision of assistance to all vulnerable people, and freedom of movement for aid workers of all genders," the agency said in a statement.

Separately, the United Nations 2022 Humanitarian Response Plan for Afghanistan, unveiled Tuesday, found the country requires \$4.4 billion in funding, the largest humanitarian appeal ever launched for a country.

"Events in Afghanistan over the past year have unfolded with dizzying speed and with profound consequences for the Afghan people," said Martin Griffiths, the UN undersecretary general for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief coordinator. "The world is perplexed and looking for the right way to react.

Meanwhile, a full-blown humanitarian catastrophe looms."

The new Biden administration commitment brings U.S. humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan to more than \$780 million since the chaotic ending of the 20-year-old war in August. The United Nations says 22 per cent of Afghanistan's 38 million people are living near famine and another 36% are facing acute food insecurity.

In addition, the White House pledged that it would send Afghanistan 1 million additional Covid-19 vaccine doses through COVAX, an initiative by the World Health Organization to improve access to vaccines. With the new influx of doses, the U.S. will have sent 4.3 million doses to Afghanistan, which has struggled to deal with the unrelenting pandemic.

International funding to Afghanistan was suspended and billions of dollars of the country's assets abroad, mostly in the United States, were frozen after

the Taliban took control of the country in mid-August.

The decision by the U.S. and the international community not to recognize the Taliban government, which governed with a strict interpretation of Islamic law when it was in control from 1996 to 2001, has created a quandary for Western powers about how to provide enough aid without giving the Taliban legitimacy. They hope that by giving money directly to independent aid organizations they'll be able to keep it out of the hands of the Taliban.

The lack of funding has led to increased poverty, and aid groups have warned of a looming humanitarian catastrophe. State employees, from doctors to teachers and administrative civil servants, haven't been paid in months. Banks, meanwhile, have restricted how much money account holders can withdraw. The Taliban have called on the international community to release funds and help stave off a humanitarian disaster.

Poet Maya Angelou becomes first Black woman to appear on US coin

The US Mint has begun shipping the first coins with Maya Angelou's likeness on the American quarter, a 25-cent piece. She is the first Black woman to appear on a US coin

Poet and activist Maya Angelou has become the first Black woman to appear on the US quarter, in a new version of the coin unveiled by the US Mint on Monday.

Angelou, author of "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," will also be the first figure commemorated through the American Women Quarters Program, which was signed into law in January 2021.

The US Mint "has begun shipping the first coins" with Angelou's likeness on the American quarter, a 25-cent piece, according to a press release from the agency.

"It is my honor to present our nation's first circulating coins dedicated to celebrating American women and their contributions to American history," said Mint Deputy Director Ventris Gibson.

"Each 2022 quarter is designed to reflect the breadth and depth of

accomplishments being celebrated throughout this historic coin program. Maya Angelou, featured on the reverse of this first coin in the series, used words to inspire and uplift."

The program directs the US Mint to issue quarters each year between 2022 and 2025 featuring five different female American trailblazers.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said she was "proud that these coins celebrate the contributions of some of America's most remarkable women."

"Each time we redesign our currency, we have the chance to say something about our country -- what we value, and how we've progressed as a society," she said in a statement.

For much of the last 90 years, the quarter has depicted the first US president, George Washington, on one side and an eagle on the other.

In 1999, the US launched a series of

quarters honoring the 50 states, with a state's design depicted on the coin's reverse. The program was expanded to include US territories and national parks.

The new quarters -- which have been minted in Philadelphia and Denver -- show Washington on one side and Angelou on the other.

The other figures set to appear on the coin in 2022 are: Sally Ride, the first American woman in space; Wilma Mankiller, first female principal chief of the Cherokee Nation; Nina Otero-Warren, a suffrage leader; and Anna May Wong, a Chinese-American film star.

LEGACY HONORED

Born in Missouri in 1928, Angelou was an essayist and poet who worked with civil rights leaders Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X.

Angelou, who delivered the poem at Bill Clinton's first presidential inauguration,

died in 2014.

Yellen has also signaled support for recognizing former slave and abolitionist Harriet Tubman on US currency.

Former president Barack Obama launched an effort to put Tubman's face on the \$20 bill but it stalled under Donald Trump's administration.

Putting Tubman, a black woman who escaped slavery and became a leader of the pre-Civil War abolitionist movement, on the bill would be an "honor" but designing banknotes takes time, Yellen said in September.

Many US lawmakers celebrated the release of the Angelou quarters, including congresswoman Ayanna Pressley. "Black women have historically done the most for our country while receiving the least recognition," the Massachusetts Democrat tweeted.

"Glad to see Maya Angelou, a shero of mine, have her legacy honored."

Sanctions row: US fears Iran plotting assassination attempt against Trump officials

According to reports, US officials have threatened "severe consequences" against Iran after it imposed sanctions against former President Trump administration officials calling it an assassination threat.

Former President Trump had imposed large scale sanctions against Iran and had walked out of the nuclear deal in 2019 citing national

US chairman of the joint chiefs of staff Mark Milley for his alleged role in the assassination of General Soleimani. The Iranian regime had also imposed sanctions against 50 Americans including senior officials.

The Iranian Quds force once again reiterated the threat relaying it its state media saying "we will provide for the basis of revenge against the

Americans from within their houses and by people by their side without us being present," while adding that, "if wise people in America are found who deal with those who committed the atrocity of assassinating commander Soleimani."

Iran had also imposed sanctions against Trump's former national security advisor Robert O'Brien and ex-envoy to the UN Nikki Haley.

In a hard-hitting reply, the US said the country is united against "threats and provocations" while adding that it will work with allies "to deter and respond to any attacks carried out by Iran." The development comes even as the US and other Western powers are engaged in talks to revive the 2015 nuclear deal. The talks stalled last year after the new regime came to power in Iran, although it had restarted but several issues are yet to resolved even as the US has insisted that time is running out for the deal.



security threats as Iran revived its nuclear programme.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said the US will "protect and defend its citizens" including "those serving the United States now and those who formerly served."

Iran's Revolutionary Guard had vowed to take revenge after its commander General Soleimani was killed in a US drone in Iraq's capital Baghdad on January 3, 2020.

Iran on Saturday had announced sanctions on

US calms European allies' fears over its talks with Russia over Ukraine

US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, the top US negotiator in US-Russia talks over Ukraine, briefed NATO allies on Tuesday after inconclusive talks with Kremlin. Sherman held talks with Russia in Geneva on Monday (January 10). She met Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov.

Some European officials have complained that Washington is taking the lead in talks with Moscow.

They fear being excluded from moves to resolve tensions on the Ukraine border and to head off confrontation.

But Sherman insisted that European allies are being kept in the loop, after meeting NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg and ambassadors from the NATO member states. "The United States is committed to working in lockstep with our allies and partners to urge de-escalation and respond to the security crisis caused by Russia," she

tweeted.

With Stoltenberg, Sherman "affirmed a unified NATO approach toward Russia, balancing deterrence and dialogue, and stressed our unwavering support for Ukraine".

And, in a tweet addressed to Ukraine's deputy minister of foreign affairs Emine Dzhaparova, she assured Kiev that the allies "will not make decisions about Ukraine without Ukraine".

After more than seven hours of negotiations in Geneva on Monday, the Russian and US officials both offered to keep talking, though there was no sign of a breakthrough.

The high-stakes meeting came as fears simmered of a Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Moscow has demanded wide-ranging security concessions from Washington and its NATO allies, which in turn have threatened severe economic sanctions if there is any Russian attack.

The Metaverse Ideas From CES 2022 That We're Most Excited-and Confused - About

Nima Zeighami, who works in the immersive technology industry and was at the conference, posted an extremely entertaining and derisive Tweet thread chronicling all of the uses of the word "metaverse" on various ads and branding exercises.

While some of the uses of the term bordered on meaningless, there were also several pieces of technology to get genuinely excited about. (My colleague Patrick Lucas Austin also has a more general roundup here.) And for many at CES, the buzzword was simply an entry point into more specific and technical dialogues. "The concept of the metaverse is starting to pivot from just a hot topic into a way to have more informed conversations about these technologies: the difference between AR (augmented reality) and VR (virtual reality), between digital twins and virtual objects," Chris Stavros, the founder of the AR/VR platform MakeSea who attended CES and spoke on a panel about education in virtual spaces, says. Here were the announcements coming out of CES that caught my eye, for better or worse:

A full decade after Google announced Google Glass—eye glasses with built-in smart displays—smart glasses have yet to permeate mainstream culture in the slightest. But the public's lack of interest isn't stopping many companies from developing their own prototypes. The concept makes a lot of sense in the abstract: since we spend so much time looking at screens, why wouldn't we want to transpose some of that information onto what we see in the real world? On the other hand, the idea of

smart glasses poses a bevy of privacy and security risks. Such devices open the door to people being surveilled without their knowledge more easily. The technology could also be hacked or abused by stalkers.

Regardless, the Chinese electronics maker TCL unveiled smart glasses that enable you to take and share photos, navigate with GPS directions that are projected into your field of vision and set up a work display with multiple virtual monitors. Microsoft announced a partnership with Qualcomm to develop lightweight AR glasses. And smart contact lenses are coming, too. Mojo Vision is partnering with Adidas and other athletic-focused companies to develop contacts that provide real-time performance data, like your running pace or the upcoming turns on a ski slope. The company, however, is still awaiting FDA approval.

So when might you see people wearing smart glasses on the street? John Egan, the CEO of the tech analyst firm L'Atelier, told me last month he thinks it will still be quite a while. "If the utility of a product is very high, the aesthetic barrier is lowered, and vice versa," he says. "Lensware and glassware have not reached the point where they have achieved an aesthetic value for which people will accept the low level of utility. That's a chasm that it has to cross."

VR that doesn't weigh you down

VR (virtual reality) headsets, which completely cover your field of vision to transport you into 3D graphic worlds, have also been slow to take off. Personally, I've found wearing a headset disorienting and headache-

inducing; I have a hard cap of how long I can wear the thing before my temples start throbbing. (It seems like many people are having better luck, though: Meta's Oculus VR app was the most downloaded app at Christmas.)

And, a couple of new prototypes were announced at CES that could make VR even more mainstream. Playstation's VR2 promises "new sensory features" and eye-tracking, which allows you to swivel your eyes to look to your left and right instead of turning your head. Panasonic, in contrast, is going for utility with its headset MeganeX, which weighs about half of Meta's Oculus Quest 2.

Feeling something in the metaverse

To bridge the physical disorientation of spending time in virtual worlds, companies are developing projects that allow you to feel bodily sensations based on what's happening inside the metaverse. The Spain-based startup Owo is hawking \$450 haptic jackets that are meant to allow users to feel "a gunshot, the wind, someone grabbing your arm and even a hug from a loved one." Shiftall, a subsidiary of Panasonic, has a bodysuit that makes you feel temperature changes via a sensor placed on the nape of the neck. These flourishes might seem trivial, but a recent study from the National Research Group found that a majority of consumers responded that a key draw of the metaverse would be its ability to "more closely resemble physical interactions."

NFT displays

One of the main questions the general

public had about NFTs last year was "how do you even look at them?" Well, Samsung thinks it has the answer: its new TV sets will be compatible with NFTs, so that you can view your Bored Apes and browse NFT marketplaces on a big screen. It's not exactly high up on the list of things the world needs, but I bet plenty of newly wealthy NFT whales will buy them.

Hyundai goes all in

Few companies expressed as much enthusiasm at CES for metaverse-related developments than Hyundai Motor Company, who used a lot of lavish rhetoric to wax poetic about a lot of big, nebulous metaversian ideas. (I'd honestly love for someone to explain to me what metamobility is.) The company also announced a partnership with Unity to build digital twin factories; I wrote about the phenomenon in an earlier newsletter.

Education in the metaverse

There were also a couple of metaverse-focused panels at CES, including "Learning in a Virtual World." The panel may have lacked splashy announcements, but gave a solid overview of progress made in the space. Stavros, the founder of MakeSea, was one of the panelists; he's excited about how MakeSea is starting to be used in K-12 education across disciplines. "One kid is doing drone scanning, another one is looking at skeletons and MRI scans. We've got a student who's focused on architecture and modeling, and another kid that was working on a robotics project," he says. "They're learning how to use this technology as a universal communication tool."

The Metaverse Ideas From CES 2022 That We're Most Excited-and Confused - About

an IED, or some other similarly easily-procured weapon.

The best way to understand the gravity of the security lapse that took place on the flyover between Bathinda and Hussainiwala is by beginning to imagine the chaos and confusion that would have ensued in the wake of an attack on the prime minister. Such a process examines potential adverse events, the probability of their occurrence, the potential impacts on the wider community and the nation, and finally lays down lessons and amendments to protocols for posterity. This approach recognises the obvious reality that while outcomes are a matter of chance, security breaches can be assessed as more or less serious depending on objective process-based criteria. The panel constituted by the Supreme Court to investigate the incident can be expected to follow such a course, and is therefore a welcome development amid coverage that has been dominated by political recriminations.

Politically motivated statements defy the common-sense view that the personal security of the head of government of the world's largest democracy cannot be left to the vagaries of political considerations and the logic of prevailing electoral

alliances. The pre-decided alternate route was not adequately protected by the Punjab Police, which is clear from the uncontested fact that a large number of demonstrators managed to block the pre-decided route, nor were any serious attempts made to remove these demonstrators.

Nor do the local forces present near the relevant area appear to have provided any notice of the presence of the demonstrators to the SPG unit handling the "proximate" security of the PM, which at least would have allowed the prime minister's convoy to stop in a relatively secure zone. One need only briefly note the arguments being proffered by politicians' intent on minimising the extent of the security lapse to realise their absurdity. That the PM returned to Delhi unscathed is, from a professional standpoint, entirely beside the point. The fact remains that the prime minister stood exposed on a narrow road at an elevation, and with little by way of an escape, for a substantial amount of time. So is the Punjab chief minister's claim that since there were persons carrying the BJP banners on the flyover where the PM's convoy was stranded, the PM

could not conceivably have been under serious threat. It is worth remembering that the assassin who killed ex-Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had in fact masqueraded as a supporter. The most dangerous response, however, comes from those trying to link the security failure to wider political developments.

One must remember that the history of the Punjab is one of bloodshed and violence. If, God forbid, something had happened to the prime minister, the nation could have been thrown into a frenzy of violence and carnage reminiscent of our not-so-distant history. Inane reactions and commentary borrowed from the world of comedy shows should surely not be allowed to dominate conversations involving national security.

One would also do well to remember that in 1984, then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was advised on the basis of intelligence inputs, and in the backdrop of the anger being fanned within the Sikh community by divisive forces over Operation Blue Star, to remove Sikh policemen from her security contingent. She did not agree. She was shot dead in broad daylight by her own guard in her own house. On a personal note, prior to

1984, I remember hearing the best "Sardar" jokes from Sikhs. After 1984, it is no longer possible to make such jokes without eliciting defensiveness from fellow Sikhs. This is perhaps one of the least serious, but also one of the most real, indications of the sense of persecution that many Sikhs feel to this day. It is of some significance that the NSG was in fact formed in this background.

There have been many serious security breaches since that fateful incident, notably including the one that led to the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991, but never perhaps one so brazenly politicised. Similarly, his security is not just a question of his personal security but of the security of an institution that has a crucial bearing on national security, and indeed, on the life of every citizen.

As policemen, we are trained to appreciate the professionalism that is required in securing holders of constitutional offices. It would be worthwhile if the entire country, too, would realise the importance of emphasising the value of professionalism over politics in such matters. After all, no one knows better than Indians the ghastly consequences that can flow from a failure to secure the prime minister.



LEONAR ABUCHAYAN/GETTY

Checkmate. Putin has the West cornered

Putin's endgame is USSR 2.0, coming almost 30 years to the day the Soviet Union collapsed. His next moves come at a delicate geopolitical moment, with Western fears of a Ukraine invasion, the colonization of Belarus, a Europe-wide energy crisis, German Chancellor Angela Merkel stepping down as EU chief negotiator and concerns over US President Joe Biden's discombobulated foreign policy. If you've any doubt about Putin's plans to roll back the clock, just read his 5,000-plus-word essay on why Russia, Belarus and Ukraine are doomed without closer integration with Mother Russia. Or his audacious demands Friday for a veto on who joins the NATO alliance and limits in stationing troops and weaponry in any country which joined the alliance after 1997. Without firing a shot, Putin has managed to send the West into a collective panic -- or at least into a position where they feel the need to appease the aging autocrat.

For the past four months, and particularly between September 7 and December 5 according to western intelligence sources quoted by CNN, Putin has been amassing tens of thousands of

troops and heavy weaponry as close as 30 miles to Ukraine's borders. U.S. intelligence reports suggest a build-up of up to 175,000 troops, enough to stage a swift and immediate incursion. Another land grab would add to the territory seized in 2014 when Russia illegally annexed Crimea and sent Russian-backed combatants into the heavily industrialized eastern Donbas region of Ukraine.

With so much muscle, Putin could be gunning for a land bridge between Russia proper and Crimea -- a move which could be designed in part to free-up water resources blocked by Ukraine in the North Crimean Canal, which once accounted for up to 85% of the peninsula's water needs. The Kremlin's actions have not been limited to Ukraine. Russia has been engaged in hybrid warfare with the West, including cyberhacking one of the US's largest pipelines, spreading disinformation about coronavirus vaccines, interfering in US elections, and neutralizing opponents on foreign soil.

Most recently, Putin opened up another front with the West by establishing a military alliance with the man often dubbed "Europe's last dictator," Belarus President Alexander

Lukashenko. Emboldened by the Kremlin's backing, Lukashenko has acted with impunity by jailing opponents, forcing down a Ryanair jet with a political opponent onboard and sending migrants toward its border with EU neighbors.

Yet, as recently as Thursday, European leaders were responding to Putin's bullying tactics and intimidation by trying to nudge him toward the bargaining table. This could be a sign that the bloc fears that even if they sign off on further harsh sanctions on Russia should an invasion take place, Putin could respond by holding back gas production.

Andrei Soldatov, a Russian investigative journalist and security services expert, told me that the country is already heavily sanctioned, and that targeted Russian companies have been effectively inoculated with lucrative contracts from the defense forces and intelligence entities.

Russia has likely seen the impact of the 2018 harsh western sanctions on Iran and calculated it can withstand punitive measures even if it means suspension from the international SWIFT payment system.

Perhaps not coincidentally,

Russia and China pledged this week to work jointly toward a closed trading network that would reduce dependence on the international financial system and limit transactions in US currency. At home, Putin has been brandishing the state's power through fear and cohesion -- chiefly by banning civil society groups, jailing high profile opponents and threatening Russian nationals who work for foreign embassies.

What are the tools left in the West's diplomatic toolbox? Depressingly few. But some options remain: banning Russians from travel, blocking those multimillion dollar property deals which have transformed

London and Miami into playgrounds for wealthy Russians -- even ordering the immediate expulsion of Russian nationals from Western countries. In other words, whatever it takes short of direct military conflict.

Clearly, video chats with Biden and threats from European leaders of "serious consequences" will not deter Putin. With an invasion of Ukraine imminent, the West needs to clarify the pain that awaits Putin should he decide to make his next move. The appearance of a lack of resolve, whether in diplomacy, on the battlefield or on the chessboard, is never a winning strategy.

China-Sri Lanka cooperation, cause of worry for India

The impact of China and its aggressive foreign policy does not bode well for any country and the recent trends attest to that. Even though the policies may sound lucrative initially, the demon lies in the small prints with the terms and conditions. Debt traps, policy micro-management, local asset acquisition - Chinese foreign policy thrives on exploiting even the friendly countries. The same

is set to be repeated with Sri Lanka unless there are any better alternative options offered by the neighbours or the global juggernauts. Chinese aggression can pose a serious threat to the global economy. Unless nipped at the bud, the Sri Lanka-China relationship will provide the stepping stone to a domino effect, which will impact the world on the whole.

By Susmita Ghosh



How the U.S., U.K. and Pakistan Teamed Up To Stop Another 9/11

The surveillance team watching the men from afar was ordered to move in and arrest them immediately. Their high-priority targets had converged on a single spot, and there was little time to waste. But this was Great Britain, where the police do not carry guns. These men and women were suddenly tasked to arrest the two top suspects in al-Qaeda's largest terror plot in the West since 9/11 - and they didn't have a single firearm among them. All they had were, at best, cuffs and a stern voice. And so the team aggressively approached the men, hoping they wouldn't have a gun or a knife. Or a bomb, possibly hidden in one of the cars, ready to detonate with a flick of the switch.

Utterly caught off guard, two men who had spent the last several months plotting to bring down multiple passenger planes over the Atlantic Ocean gave up without a fight.

Thus began a massive crackdown throughout the United Kingdom. That night and into the following morning, scores of police kicked down doors across London and elsewhere, tackling suspects on the street, dragging others from their homes and safehouses. It was the

culmination of Operation OVERT, a massive investigation that had been whirring relatively quietly for months as the U.S., the U.K. and Pakistan worked together to crush what would come to be known as the transatlantic aircraft plot: a terrorist conspiracy to kill thousands of passengers by detonating liquid explosives hidden in plastic bottles.

OVERT was a huge undertaking; over 800 surveillance officers worked on cracking that cell, with teams pulled in from Northern Ireland and the military. "If the Boy Scouts had a surveillance team," Steve Dryden of the London Metropolitan Police dryly noted, "we'd have used them as well." Across the Atlantic, the White House, CIA, NSA and other departments were providing as much assistance to their British counterparts as possible. Cooperation from the United States, as well as from Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), had been critical to the effort that ended with the raft of arrests on that August night.

Most people remember the transatlantic terror plot - if they do at all - as the reason they cannot bring more than 3 oz. of

liquid on a flight. But the thwarted scheme has a bigger legacy: as an object lesson in how to successfully fight transnational terror alongside allies and without resorting to illegal or legally dubious tactics. The U.S. war against terrorist groups over the last two decades has had a mixed track record at best. But the 2006 disruption of the liquid bombers stands out as a highlight in a long, and still ongoing, struggle to keep citizens of democracies safe while respecting civil liberties, human rights and the rule of law.

By mid-2006, British authorities were monitoring a London native named Abdulla Ahmed Ali, tipped off by his communications with a man who had tried and failed to blow himself up on the Underground the year before. The British quickly informed the Americans that Ali was in contact with other suspicious individuals in Pakistan and Britain with known and suspected al-Qaeda ties. It became increasingly clear that the terror group was planning something big. Because the suspects were British citizens trained in Pakistan, all the countries' intelligence agencies had to get involved. London

focused on the plotters, Washington monitored their emails, and Islamabad began to try to locate the mastermind hiding somewhere inside Pakistan. As the fuzzy bits of data sharpened, intelligence officials realized the men they were tracking planned to blow up several passenger flights bound for North America. What ultimately became a model for successful international cooperation against a major terror plot was not always such, because of fundamentally different perspectives about how to confront the adversary. The United States, still reeling from the trauma of 9/11, saw the conflict against al-Qaeda as a war against an implacable foe that needed to be destroyed one way or another. London, perhaps informed in part by decades of battling the Irish Republican Army, viewed this more as a law enforcement problem - quite serious, certainly, but requiring a scrupulous commitment to collecting evidence for a future trial.

But that didn't mean the U.K. wouldn't play close to the edge. In their quest to build an airtight case by catching the plotters red-handed, the British wanted to

let the terrorists proceed far longer than what the Americans could stomach. At one point, according to a former CIA official, London floated an unorthodox proposal: They would permit the plotters to pass through Heathrow Airport security with their explosives, board North America-bound planes and let them settle onto their flights. At a predetermined time, the pilots would announce regretfully that the planes had some sort of mechanical problem and ask all passengers to get off. The authorities would be waiting at the entryways, beyond the jet bridge, where they would arrest the suspects.

When briefed on this plan, the Americans couldn't believe it was serious. They gently responded, yes, it might work. Then again, the bombers might see each other inside the terminals and realize what was about to happen. One of the plotters might then decide to blow up right then and there - within the confines of a crowded airport or a fully fueled U.S. plane with 250-plus people strapped inside. The plan didn't stay on the table for long.

As both American and British authorities unearthed bits and pieces of this plot, there remained "lots of angst and concern" in Washington that London was moving at the speed of molasses, according to Larry Pfeiffer, at the time chief of staff to CIA Director Michael Hayden. The CIA thought the 7/7 attacks the year before, in which al-Qaeda suicide operatives had struck London's transportation system at rush hour, showed that British security services needed to ruthlessly excise the Islamist threat before an even larger plot occurred. "People thought that was the wake-up call for them," Pfeiffer recalled of the subway bombings, "but here it was, a year later, and they still were struggling."

From Washington's perspective, each day the terrorists walked free, the United States was decidedly less safe. The Americans, many former officials told me, considered this plot to be the biggest operation since 9/11 and treated it as such. On the other hand, the British viewed the conspiracy as deadly but ultimately manageable through aggressive surveillance and policing. At any rate, the effort was consuming significant national security resources on both sides of the Atlantic, and the Americans wanted to crush this conspiracy as fast as possible.



A look back at Americans' reactions to the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol

The deadly riot that took place at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, drew widespread attention and condemnation from the American public. But Democrats and Republicans differed sharply over key aspects of it, both in its immediate aftermath and in the months that followed.

A year later, here's a look back at how Americans saw the events of Jan. 6 and how some partisan divisions grew wider over time. All findings in this analysis are based on Pew Research Center surveys conducted in January, March and September of last year.

1. Capitol, but partisan divides were clear even in the first days after Jan. 6. In a survey conducted from Jan. 8 to 12, 2021, around seven-in-ten U.S. adults (69%) said they had heard a lot about the riot, and another 28% said they had heard a little. In volunteered, open-ended responses to the survey from more than 2,600 adults, many Americans expressed strong negative emotions, such as shock and anger, as well as surprise and concern for the country. A slap in the face to democracy, something you would expect to see in a third world nation," said one man in his 60s. "Shocked, horrified and

sad for our country," said a woman in her 60s. "We were there a few years ago and were awestruck. How could fellow citizens violently enter federal buildings intending to destroy property and possibly harm our leaders?"

While negative reactions surfaced in both parties, Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents were much more likely than Republicans and GOP leaners to volunteer an emotion such as disappointment, disbelief or fear (48% vs. 27%). Republicans were more likely than Democrats to express doubts about who was behind the riot: Nearly one-in-five Republicans who volunteered a reaction (17%) said the destruction hadn't actually been instigated by Trump supporters, instead saying it had been done by groups such as Antifa or Black Lives Matter.

2. Republicans were divided in the wake of Jan. 6 over whether then-President Donald Trump bore responsibility for the actions of some of his supporters that day. Overall, 52% of U.S. adults said Trump bore a lot of responsibility for the violence and destruction at the Capitol, while 23% said he bore some responsibility and a similar share (24%) said he bore none at all.

Around half of Republicans and GOP leaners said Trump either bore a lot (18%) or some responsibility (34%) for the riot. But nearly as many (46%) said he bore no responsibility at all. An overwhelming majority of Democrats and Democratic leaners (95%) placed at least some blame for the riot on Trump, including around eight-in-ten (81%) who said he bore a lot of responsibility for it.

Americans were also deeply divided by party over whether it would be better for the country for Trump to be removed from office in the days after the riot. Around eight-in-ten Democrats (83%) said it would be better for Trump to be removed and replaced by then-Vice President Mike Pence for the final days of his term. Nearly as many Republicans (79%) said it would be better for the country for Trump to finish out his term himself.

Overall, more than half of Americans (54%) said it would be better for the country for Trump to be removed and replaced by Pence, while 45% favored Trump remaining in office until the end of his term.

3. Between March and September 2021, Americans became less likely to say it was important to find and prosecute

the Capitol rioters, with all of the decline occurring among Republicans. In a survey conducted in early March, 87% of U.S. adults said it was very or somewhat important for federal law enforcement agents to find and prosecute those who broke into the Capitol on Jan. 6. By September, that figure had slipped to 78%.

Around eight-in-ten Republicans (79%) said in the March survey that it was very or somewhat important to find and prosecute the Capitol rioters. By September, 57% expressed that view. Among Democrats, 95% said in both surveys that it was very or somewhat important to find and prosecute the rioters. In both parties, there was a decline in the share of adults who said it was very important to identify and prosecute the rioters. But the decrease was much more pronounced among Republicans (from 50% in March to 27% in September) than among Democrats (from 86% to 80%).

4. While some GOP elected officials publicly rebuked Trump in the wake of Jan. 6, Republicans in the U.S. became less open to intraparty criticism of the former president in the months after the riot. In mid-January 2021, 10 Republican

representatives joined all Democrats in a House vote to impeach Trump for his role in the violence at the Capitol. In February, seven Senate Republicans joined Democrats in a vote to convict him, though the effort still failed to reach the necessary two-thirds majority for approval.

Nationally, the share of Republicans who said their party should be very or somewhat accepting of GOP elected officials who openly criticize Trump declined from 43% in March to 36% in September, according to the Center's surveys. The share of Republicans who said their party should be not too or not at all accepting of such officials rose from 56% to 63%.

Democrats, too, became less likely to say their party should be accepting of Democratic elected officials who openly criticize President Joe Biden. Around two-thirds (68%) said in March that their party should be very or somewhat accepting of such officials, a figure that declined to 57% by September. Still, majorities of Democrats said in both surveys that their party should be accepting of officials who openly criticize the current president.

5. As of September 2021, there were wide partisan differences over the severity of the criminal penalties imposed on the Jan. 6 rioters and whether the House's investigation of the riot would be fair or not. In the months after the riot - which led to multiple deaths, as well as injuries to around 150 law enforcement officers - the U.S. Justice Department arrested and began to prosecute hundreds of people who participated. A select committee of the U.S. House of Representatives launched its own investigation.

In the Center's September survey, around half of U.S. adults (48%) said the criminal penalties that had been imposed on the rioters by that point had not been severe enough, while 29% said the penalties had been about right and 20% said they had been too severe.

Around seven-in-ten Democrats (71%) said the criminal penalties by that point had not been severe enough, while 21% said they had been about right and only 6% said they had been too severe. Among Republicans, similar shares said the penalties



had been too severe (38%) and about right (39%), while 19% said they had not been severe enough. In the same survey, a narrow majority of Americans (54%) said

they were either not too or not at all confident that the House committee's investigation into the Jan. 6 riot would be fair and reasonable. Here, too, partisan

differences were wide. Around eight-in-ten Republicans said they were either not too (37%) or not at all confident (40%) that the committee's

investigation would be fair and reasonable, while 63% of Democrats said they were at least somewhat confident that it would be.

ADVERTISEMENT

WARNING: MAY CONTAIN LEAD

Ayurvedic medicines can contain lead, which can cause learning and behavior problems in children, miscarriage in pregnant women, and infertility.

- If you use Ayurvedic medicines, ask your doctor for a blood lead test.

Call **311** or visit **nyc.gov/leadfree** for more information.

NYC
Health

Bill de Blasio
Mayor
Dave A. Chokshi, MD, MSc
Commissioner

Senators grill feds over Jan. 6 riot probe

Democrats challenged prosecutors for not seeking terrorism-related sentences, while Republicans often steered away from the insurrection altogether

Democratic senators grilled top Justice Department and FBI officials on Tuesday for declining, so far, to declare Jan. 6 rioters' crimes as "domestic terrorism" as judges sentence those involved for their crimes. "When a mob of armed rioters use force in an attempt to overthrow the United States government, that is domestic terrorism," Sen. Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii) said as she pressed the department's National Security Division chief, Matthew Olsen, and senior FBI official Jill Sanborn about the approach to the prosecutions. "My understanding is prosecutors have not been pushing for the sentencing enhancements available for acts of domestic terrorism."

Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) wondered: "Why has the Department of Justice not used that statute that clearly applies to domestic, as well as international, terrorism?"

The questions came amid a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on the Justice Department's response to the storming of the Capitol building on Jan. 6, 2021. Democrats challenged prosecutors for not seeking the lengthier, terrorism-related sentences related to the insurrection, while Republicans often steered the discussion away from the Jan. 6 attack altogether.

The sharp questions repeatedly put both witnesses on the defensive as they described the massive post-Jan. 6 probe that has resulted in criminal charges against more than 725 people over their alleged roles.

Olsen used the hearing to announce that he is creating a domestic terrorism unit to "augment" prosecutors' work on such cases. But senators seemed largely uninterested in that bureaucratic initiative, pressing instead for answers on how the Jan. 6 investigation is being carried out.

POLITICO reported last week that while President Joe Biden, the FBI and the Justice Department have repeatedly called the insurrection an act of domestic terrorism, prosecutors have not to this point asked any sentencing judge to invoke a



provision that can lead to much lengthier sentences when criminal acts are carried out for political purposes. "I think it's entirely appropriate that Jan. 6 events are being investigated as acts of domestic terrorism. ... In any particular case, it will depend on the actual facts and circumstances of that particular case," Olsen said. "That statute is available in the context of the investigations and prosecutions of the July [sic] 6 defendants." Olsen stressed that large investigations typically begin with lower-level actors and then proceed to those most culpable. "Whether that terrorism enhancement might apply in any future case remains to be seen," he said.

Several Republican senators used their questioning to embrace and fuel a conspiracy theory that a man present during the Jan. 6 riot, Ray Epps, was secretly a government agent working to gin up the crowd. There's scant evidence supporting that theory, but it has exploded in pro-Trump media outlets promoting a range of claims that agitators working for the FBI fueled the Jan. 6 assault on the Capitol.

Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas), who recently apologized for numerous public comments he has made describing the Jan. 6 attack as terrorism, pressed Sanborn on whether FBI agents or informants took part. Cruz pressed the

theory that Epps - who was seen in videos on Jan. 5 encouraging Trump supporters to go into the Capitol - might be a government agency.

"A lot of Americans are concerned that the federal government deliberately

encouraged illegal conduct on Jan. 6," he said.

Sanborn initially declined to answer about Epps or other alleged informants or agents, but eventually said she was unaware of people linked to the FBI doing anything to aggravate the

situation on Jan. 6.

"Did federal agents or those in service of federal agents actively encourage violent and criminal conduct on Jan. 6th?" Cruz asked.

"Not to my knowledge, sir," Sanborn replied.

The committee later issued a statement refuting the Republican senators' assertions. "The Select Committee has interviewed Mr. Epps," it said. "Mr. Epps informed us that he was not employed by, working with, or acting at the direction of any law enforcement agency on January 5th or 6th or at any other time, and that he has never been an informant for the FBI or any other law enforcement agency." Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) also asked Olsen whether he agreed with Vice President Kamala Harris that the Jan. 6 events were comparable to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 and the terrorist strikes on the U.S. on Sept. 11, 2001.

PASRICHA & PATEL LLC
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

**NOW
REPRESENTING
LONG ISLAND &
QUEENS**

SINCE ITS ESTABLISHMENT,

Pasricha & Patel has always strived to provide superior legal representation to its clients in a vast array of fields such as:

Business
Closings

Technology
Law

Commercial
Litigation

Commercial
Transactions

25+
Years of
Excellence

- ✓ Real Estate
- ✓ Immigration
- ✓ Trust & Estates



55 NORTH BROADWAY, SUITE 201, HICKSVILLE NY 11801

Visit www.pasricha.com | Call 516-530-1596 | Write to us at law@pasricha.com

1794 Oak Tree Road
Edison, NJ 08820
T: (732) 593-6200

381 Park Avenue South, Suite 1220
New York, New York 10016
T: (646) 741-9399



Does DOJ treat Capitol rioters more harshly than violent 2020 protesters? Sen. Mike Lee still wants answers

Utah Sen. Mike Lee complained Tuesday that the Department of Justice has failed to answer questions about whether the agency treats rioters who stormed the U.S. Capitol last January harsher than those who took part in violent protests across the country in 2020.

In a letter to the DOJ last June, Lee and four other Republican senators demanded responses to a long list of questions comparing and contrasting the two investigations.

"DOJ's apparent unwillingness to punish these individuals who allegedly committed crimes during the spring and summer 2020 protests stands in stark contrast to the harsher treatment of the individuals charged in connection with the January 6, 2021, breach of the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington, D.C.," the letter says.

RELATED

Are U.S. Capitol rioters being treated worse than last year's protesters? Sen. Mike Lee wants answers

Lee said his office didn't receive a response until 4 ½ months, and it didn't address any of the questions.

"It was a statement of platitudes and cited publicly available resources about general policies. There was not one answer to a single one of our questions," he said.

Lee had the chance to ask some

of those questions Tuesday in a Senate Judiciary Hearing on domestic terrorism. But Matthew Olsen, the assistant attorney general over the DOJ's National Security Division, and Jill Sanborn, executive assistant director of the FBI's National

Sanborn didn't have any numbers but the mechanics of an arrest are specific to each individual case and what threat that person may or may not pose.

Lee suggested in a Senate hearing last March that the FBI might be inappropriately

more than 725 people, including eight Utahns, stemming from the attack on the Capitol.

In the hearing, Lee asked if any of them were charged with "insurrection."

"I'm not aware that anyone's been charged with that particular

break the law should be prosecuted," the letter says.

"However, the potential unequal administration of justice with respect to certain protesters is particularly concerning."

Lee also asked in the hearing how many people arrested in the 2020 riots were placed in solitary confinement, but was unable to get an answer. He said he would pose his questions in writing for Olson and Sanborn to submit as part of the hearing's record.

"I understand that you've got big jobs to do," Lee said. "But I don't want 4 ½ months to elapse again, and certainly don't want a response that is nonresponsive."

RELATED

What's happened to the 8 Utahns charged in the U.S. Capitol riot? Also in the hearing, Olsen said in his opening remarks that the DOJ is creating a new unit to counter domestic terrorism following the Capitol attack.

"This group of dedicated attorneys will focus on the domestic terrorism threat, helping to ensure that these cases are handled properly and effectively coordinated across the Department of Justice and across the country," he said.

"We face an elevated threat from domestic violent extremists," Olsen said. "That is, individuals in the United States who seek to commit violent criminal acts in furtherance of domestic social or political goals."



Security Branch, didn't have any answers for him.

Lee's questions included whether federal law enforcement used cellphone data to track protesters in 2020 as well as how many were arrested in pre-dawn raids with SWAT teams or were served with search warrants. He also asked how many "witnesses" to the events of Jan. 6 were arrested in those ways.

interviewing people who were in Washington on Jan. 6 but didn't enter the Capitol or participate in the violence. He said he had heard a number of accounts of people who were in the city that day but didn't go near the Capitol who were "inexplicably" contacted by FBI agents who apparently were aware of their presence.

To date, the DOJ has charged

offense, even if it is an offense. I'm just not aware of that," Olsen. The senators noted in the June letter that the FBI maintains and updates a website that lists the names of people charged in the Capitol riot but doesn't do the same for those arrested in the protests.

"Violence, property damage and vandalism of any kind should not be tolerated and individuals that

Jan. 6 Anniversary Exposes Two Opposing Truths

The rioters who stormed the U.S. Capitol building one year ago exposed a widening, terrifying, ugly rift between the far right and far left political factions in this country leaving our beloved Republic in peril.

This nation has never been more divided with no clear middle ground upon which to build. The far left Socialist Democrats see the Jan. 6 rioters as insurrectionists hell bent on destroying the country. The far right hard-line Conservative Republicans see the government headed by an illegitimately elected socialist as hell bent on destroying the country.

The corporately owned national media created a simple narrative; Jan. 6 Republicans bad and therefore wrong, Jan. 6 Democrats good and therefore right. Words matter and the national media has stuck with that narrative to this day.

From CNN: "They (Trump & his supporters) have falsely claimed all of the rioters were unarmed. They have falsely claimed the people at the Capitol merely held a "protest" against an election they falsely claimed was fraudulent. They have falsely claimed the rioters were welcomed into the Capitol by police officers.

They have falsely claimed the riot was orchestrated by left-wing groups or the FBI. And they have falsely claimed nonviolent rioters are being jailed as "political prisoners."

From Newsmax: "Unbridled violence across the nation, a disputed election, distrust of the mainstream media, and a sense that hypocrisy was everywhere among elected officials - all helped set in motion the events of Jan. 6, 2021.

In the aftermath of this day - when laws were clearly broken and behavior was at best uncivil and at worst violent - the media and Democratic politicians have advanced a disputed narrative of "insurrection."

"Jan. 6 started as a peaceful protest that became unruly and at times violent," says Jack Thomas Smith. "But it was not an insurrection. The protesters didn't seek to overthrow the government and did not bring firearms into the Capitol."

Neither side can see a middle ground; a space where



compromise is a decent word and a situation where decent individuals in leadership positions from both sides can sit down across the same table, break bread and focus on our commonalities; those uniquely American qualities that make us one whole nation.

It is an historic fact that the country has been divided politically and philosophically since before the Declaration of Independence was signed. The nation's greatest disgrace was the Civil War where states left the union and brothers fought against and killed each other over the politics of slavery and states rights.

This nation would not survive another such 'Civil' war.

The truth for the Socialist Democrats is that the rioters who stormed the Capitol that day, the groups they belong to and anyone associated with them are guilty of treason.

The truth for the Conservative Republicans is that the rioters that day were patriots fighting the corrupt government which was stealing an election behind closed doors.

Those truths and the individuals who hold to them are irreconcilable.

The facts are an over-zealous group of Trump supporters were at a Trump Rally in Washington supporting their defeated candidate. They were encouraged to walk to the Capitol and protest that defeat outside. The rioters who stormed past the security barricades injuring Capitol Police and broke into the Capitol building committed a crime. Everyone who went into the Capitol building uninvited that day are guilty of trespassing at the very least.

The Capitol police officer who

shot and killed Ashli Babbitt is at least guilty of manslaughter. The Democrats and the national media are guilty of pursuing a narrative that ALL Republicans are traitors by association, a charge which in and of itself is seditious.

No matter who is guilty of what,

the events of Jan. 6 2021 shook this Republic to its core and the effects will be felt for decades.

I will be sharply criticized by both sides for this article. There is no common ground; no room for each extreme side to see the events of that terrible day through the lens of the other

side. Democracy has been gravely wounded and both sides continue to twist the knife to this day.

There are two sad truths in this country today. And until those sad truths can be reconciled, the Republic remains in peril of collapsing from within.

Perhaps President Abraham Lincoln said it best:

"In my opinion, it will not cease, until a crisis shall have been reached, and passed -

"A house divided against itself cannot stand."

I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free.

I do not expect the Union to be dissolved - I do not expect the house to fall - but I do expect it will cease to be divided.

It will become all one thing, or all the other."

Let's go to explore a magical place

Come into the lap of Nature, Explore Hiking, Day Camping, *fishing & *Hunting on 100 Acres of Unexplored & Beautiful land backing to thousands of acres of state land.

Email: whitestone1979@gmail.com

Catskill, New York

*** Limited spots available, Terms & Conditions apply.**

APOLLO

FRONT PAGE CONTESTS & RESORTS



Trump's potential liability for Capitol riot faces major test in court

A federal judge in Washington, DC, questioned former President Donald Trump's actions during his speech on January 6, 2021, as he considers for the first time whether Trump is immune from liability related to his supporters attacking the US Capitol.

During a court hearing Monday, Judge Amit Mehta pointed out repeatedly that Trump on January 6 asked the crowd to march to the Capitol, but that he didn't speak up for two hours asking people to stop the violence.

"The words are hard to walk back," Mehta said. "You have an almost two-hour window where the President does not say, 'Stop, get out of the Capitol. This is not what I wanted you to do.'"

"What do I do about the fact the President didn't denounce the conduct immediately ... and sent a tweet that arguably exacerbated things?" the judge asked. "Isn't that, from a plausibility standpoint, that the President plausibly agreed with the conduct of the people inside the Capitol that day?"

Mehta didn't rule at the end of the nearly five-hour hearing Monday, and rarely showed which way he was leaning. He noted to the dozen or so participants on the call, including several members of Congress, that it was not an easy case.

The major hearing is part of a trio

of insurrection-related lawsuits seeking to hold Trump and other Republican figures like Rep. Mo Brooks of Alabama accountable at a time when the House select committee probing January 6 has aggressively investigated the political leaders who inspired the attack, and as the Justice Department is prosecuting more than 700 rioters for criminal offenses.

Mehta's line of questioning is a foreboding sign for Trump, at least as people seek damages through civil litigation following the insurrection. Some of the lawsuits at issue use a civil rights law, commonly called the KKK Act, that allows for lawsuits when officials are intimidated from doing their public duties.

It is the first major test of whether civil litigation is a viable route to holding Trump accountable for the violence toward Congress, after he was acquitted by the Senate in his second impeachment trial last February. If Trump's call to action at the rally was misinterpreted by the crowd, and they still became violent, "Wouldn't somebody who's a reasonable person say, 'That's not what I meant?'" Mehta asked a lawyer arguing against the insurrection lawsuits. The judge pointed out that even Donald Trump Jr., another defendant in court Monday, texted the White House chief of staff before Trump spoke up,

asking for the President to condemn the violence.

Trump and his close supporters say they're protected by the First Amendment, that Trump and others were speaking on January 6 as public officials and that they weren't agreeing to be part of a conspiracy with the violent crowd under the law.

Trump's lawyer, Jesse Binnall, has argued everything Trump said while serving as President should be immune from liability - including on January 6 as well as in a call to Georgia officials asking them to "find" votes in early 2021 and at campaign rallies -- and is protected from any lawsuits, because it was all part of his official actions as President.

Binnall also argued that Trump encouraged the crowd to act "peacefully and patriotically."

"You would have me ignore what [Trump] said in its entirety?" Mehta asked minutes into the hearing. The judge pointed to a Supreme Court case related to the Johnson and Nixon administrations that established the parameters of presidential immunity.

"To say that a speech before Congress is the equivalent to a campaign trail stump speech" doesn't appear to be what the Supreme Court had ruled on the boundaries of presidential immunity, Mehta said.

Democratic Rep. Eric Swalwell

of California, 10 other House Democrats, and Capitol Police officers James Blassingame and Sidney Hemby brought the three lawsuits at issue on Monday.

The lawmakers say they were threatened by Trump and others as part of a conspiracy to stop the congressional session that would certify the 2020 presidential election on January 6, according to the complaints. And they argue that Trump should bear responsibility for directing the assaults.

Swalwell, who described his position in the case in an interview on CNN on Sunday, said he expects Monday's hearing to be long. He noted, however, that he and others will not be permitted into the courtroom because of the recent surge in Covid-19 cases. Instead, the participants will speak to the judge over videoconference.

If the judge rules in favor of Swalwell and others who have sued, the California Democrat said he expects "it's going to speed up, and hopefully we'll move to more depositions and evidence discovery very soon." The police officers, in their lawsuit, say they were hit by chemical sprays and objects the crowd threw at them, like water bottles and signs, because Trump inspired the crowd.

"Defendant's followers, already primed by his months of inflammatory rhetoric, were

spurred to direct action," the lawsuit from Blassingame and Hemby said. "Had Trump committed directly the conduct committed by his followers, it would have subjected Trump to direct liability."

Six additional lawsuits against Trump and others for their roles in the insurrection are also in front of the same court, but haven't reached the point of being argued yet.

In the three cases before Mehta on Monday, the defendants include Trump, Brooks, Donald Trump Jr., Rudy Giuliani and right-wing groups the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers. In court, they are distancing themselves from the actions of the crowd on January 6, and asking Mehta to dismiss the cases. According to Trump's arguments, allowing the lawsuits to go forward would "drastically" chill political speech and prompt dozens of lawsuits aimed at damaging electoral opponents. Trump and his top advisers haven't been charged with any crimes. Several leaders in the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers who have been criminally charged with conspiracy have pleaded not guilty.

Congressman defends himself In an unusual situation for a court hearing, Brooks defended himself on Monday, saying he was acting in his job as a congressman when he warned

the pro-Trump crowd on January 6.

The Justice Department has argued that Brooks should be on his own as he's being sued -- not to be protected by the government, because his speech was at a campaign event and he was advocating for Trump.

When asked on Monday if Brooks had spoken as a way to campaign for Trump, he said he would "reject it." "Name the campaign," he added, echoing Trump's lawyers' claims that Trump's 2020 campaign ceased to exist when he lost the election in November and that he was speaking as President.

Brooks argues his speech on

January 6 -- when he called for "kicking ass" of Congress -- was generally about the Electoral College certification vote planned for that day.

Mehta seemed somewhat sympathetic to Brooks' position. If he rules in his favor, it could let Brooks off the hook from paying damages related to claims of injury Democratic members of Congress and police are pursuing.

The judge, questioning the Justice Department, quoted parts of Brooks' speech where he spoke about the congressional vote planned for that day.

It's typical for even outside lawyers to argue cases when

their clients are suing or are sued, even if the clients themselves are lawyers.

Brooks appeared to be speaking from his office on the videoconference with the court. When he wasn't speaking, he wore a black mask to cover his nose and mouth, printed with two words in red: "Free speech."

Calls for combat

The Democratic representatives' cases specifically focus on the language Trump, Brooks and others used at the "Stop the Steal" rally on the Ellipse in Washington, DC, directly before the attack.

Trump told the crowd to "show strength" and "walk down Pennsylvania Avenue," for

instance, while Brooks, in his speech, said, "Today is the day American patriots start taking down names and kicking ass." Also at the rally, Giuliani told the crowd to have "trial by combat."

Following the speeches, hundreds of pro-Trump rally-goers marched to the Capitol, severely beating law enforcement officers guarding the building and breaking through barricades and windows to get inside. Many then ransacked congressional offices and some chanted "treason" as they overtook the Senate chamber, from which lawmakers and then-Vice President Mike Pence had

been evacuated minutes before. "The President has been very clear he was there at the Ellipse as President," Binnall said in court Friday "He was advocating for Congress to take or not take certain actions. ... We are dead center on immunity."

After the Senate voted not to convict Trump last February, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell pointed to lawsuits as an avenue for retribution.

The Kentucky Republican said Trump was "still liable for everything he did while he was in office" and noted "we have civil litigation" from which a president would not be immune.

The lawsuits could take months or even years to see resolutions.

House panel dismisses 'unsupported' claims about FBI involvement in Jan. 6 Capitol riot



The House select committee investigating last year's deadly Capitol riot poured cold water Tuesday on a right-wing conspiracy suggesting the FBI helped to incite the invasion.

The conspiracy centers on Ray Epps, reportedly an Arizona man who said he traveled to Washington for former President Donald Trump's Jan. 6, 2021, rally outside the White House, which began shortly before a mob of his supporters invaded the Capitol. A widely shared video shows Epps loudly encouraging a crowd to "go

into the Capitol."

Epps was reportedly on the FBI wanted list, and then was removed from it without being charged. The move bred rampant speculation from right-wing media outlets about its significance.

"The select committee is aware of unsupported claims that Ray Epps was an FBI informant based on the fact that he was on the FBI wanted list and then was removed from that list without being charged," a spokesperson for the House panel probing the riot said in a statement.

"The select committee has

interviewed Mr. Epps. Mr. Epps informed us that he was not employed by, working with, or acting at the direction of any law enforcement agency on January 5th or 6th or at any other time, and that he has never been an informant for the FBI or any other law enforcement agency," the spokesperson said.

Multiple Republican politicians have also publicly asked about Epps' role in the riot, apparently to raise the specter of a conspiracy that government actors - rather than Trump and his supporters - provoked or carried out the attack.

Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, raised

those suspicions about Epps earlier Tuesday during a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on domestic terror threats.

"According to public records, Mr. Epps has not been charged with anything. No one's explained why a person videoed urging people to go to the Capitol, a person whose conduct was so suspect the crowd believed he was a 'fed,' would magically disappear from the list of people the FBI was looking at," Cruz said, pointing to a placard displaying a screenshot of an FBI website below red text

reading "FBI DROPS EPPS FROM LIST."

"A lot of Americans are concerned that the federal government deliberately encouraged illegal and violent conduct on Jan. 6," said Cruz, before asking two Department of Justice officials if federal agents "actively encourage[d] violent and criminal conduct on Jan. 6." FBI national security official Jill Sanborn replied: "Not to my knowledge, sir." A spokeswoman for Cruz did not immediately respond to CNBC's request for comment on the committee's statement about Epps.



What Happened to Jan. 6 Insurrectionists Arrested in the Year Since the Capitol Riot

More than 725 people have been arrested for storming the U.S. Capitol building on Jan. 6, 2021, with charges ranging from obstruction of an official proceeding to assault. But at the one-year anniversary of the attempted insurrection, a significant number of rioters are still awaiting their sentencing. Only around one-tenth of those arrested-71 individuals-have received criminal sentences, while the rest are waiting for their trials or haven't yet reached plea agreements. According to the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia, 31 defendants were sentenced to periods of incarceration, with longer prison terms for those who engaged in violence or threats. So far, the median prison sentence for the Jan. 6 rioters is 45 days. An additional 18 rioters have been sentenced to periods of home detention, while most sentences have included fines, community service and probation for low-level offenses like illegally parading or demonstrating in the Capitol, which is a misdemeanor. Hundreds of additional cases are expected to be adjudicated in the coming months, with a number of sentencing hearings already on the calendar in 2022. Here's a look at what happened

to nine of the most high-profile Jan. 6 rioters.

The Florida man who hurled wooden boards and a fire extinguisher at police officers guarding the Lower West Terrace tunnel of the Capitol was sentenced to more than five years in federal prison-the longest sentence given to anyone charged in the Jan. 6 riot. "Defendant's repeated violent assaults on law enforcement for the purpose of overturning a democratic election warrant a significant term of imprisonment," Assistant U.S. Attorney Robert Juman wrote in the sentencing memo Dec. 10. Palmer, age 54 at his sentencing, pleaded guilty in October to assaulting law enforcement officers with a dangerous weapon. His plea agreement originally called for a 46 to 57 month sentence, but it was increased to 63 months after he wrote on his fundraising website that he had acted in self-defense, contradicting his earlier comments in court about taking responsibility for his actions. Devlyn Thompson: 46 months in prison

Thompson took part in the rioting for nearly three hours on Jan. 6, during which time he assaulted a police officer with a metal

baton. He also tried to throw a speaker at the police, but missed and ended up injuring another rioter.

Thompson later pleaded guilty to assault with a dangerous weapon. In December, Federal District Court Judge Royce Lamberth sentenced the 28-year-old Thompson to 46 months in prison with credit for time served, along with 36 months of supervised release and a required payment of \$2,000 in restitution. "You didn't just come up and sock a guy in the face," Lamberth said at the sentencing. "You're shoving and pushing...and participating in this riot for hours." Thompson apologized to the officer he hit with the baton in a letter filed in court.

Jacob Anthony Chansley: 41 months in prison

Chansley-a self-described shaman and a follower of the QAnon conspiracy theory-is one of the most recognizable Jan. 6 rioters, thanks to viral photographs of his outlandish getup.

According to court documents, Chansley confessed to federal agents that he was the man photographed in former Vice President Mike Pence's chair on the Senate dais with his face painted, wearing a horned

headdress and no shirt. His imposing image became a symbol of the Jan. 6 attack, though he later expressed regret for storming the Capitol.

"What you did was terrible. You made yourself the epitome of the riot," Lamberth said Nov. 17. "You didn't slug anybody, but what you did here was actually obstruct the functioning of the whole government. It's a serious crime." Chansley, age 34 at his sentencing, pleaded guilty to one charge: obstruction of an official proceeding. He was sentenced to 41 months in prison.

Scott Kevin Fairlamb: 41 months in prison

Videos from the Capitol riot show Fairlamb climbing on inauguration scaffolding, pushing a police officer into a group of people and punching the officer's face shield. Court filings also indicate that Fairlamb briefly entered the Capitol.

In one video he posted to Facebook on Jan. 6, Fairlamb yells: "What patriots do? We f-n' disarm them and then we storm the f-n' Capitol."

Fairlamb, age 44 at his sentencing, pleaded guilty in August to assaulting an officer and obstructing an official proceeding of Congress. He was sentenced to 41 months in

prison, with credit for time served, and ordered to pay \$2,000 in restitution for damages to the building.

Cleveland Meredith, Jr.: 28 months in prison

Meredith traveled from Colorado to attend the "Stop the Steal" rally that led to the attempted insurrection at the Capitol, but later told investigators that he arrived too late in the evening. The day afterward, on Jan. 7, he sent a family member in Georgia a text message threatening to kill House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Meredith's mother contacted the FBI, and members located him at a Holiday Inn a mile from the Capitol.

Meredith gave investigators consent to search his phone, along with his truck and trailer outside. The FBI discovered texts in which he threatened to assassinate Pelosi and District of Columbia Mayor Muriel Bowser. He had sent a text earlier that day that said, "Calm before the STORM," seemingly referring to a cataclysmic event in which QAnon followers believed that Donald Trump would expose a cabal of satanic pedophiles. In the search of Meredith's trailer, the FBI found an assault rifle, a nine millimeter pistol and hundreds of rounds of

ammunition.

Meredith, age 53 at his sentencing, pleaded guilty to communicating a threat across state lines. In December, he received a sentence of 28 months in prison with credit for time served.

Gracy Dawn Courtright: 1 month in prison

While she was inside the Capitol, Courtright, then age 23 and a senior at the University of Kentucky, took a photo of herself in a mirror and afterward posted it to Instagram, along with the words, "INFAMY IS JUST AS GOOD AS FAME." She shared her participation in the riot on Instagram multiple times, and someone took a screenshot and reported her.

Footage from Jan. 6 shows Courtright on the second floor of

the Capitol building, holding up a "Members Only" sign. Authorities arrested her two weeks later and she faced multiple charges, including for theft of the sign.

Courtright pleaded guilty to a charge of entering a restricted building in August, at which point other charges against her were dropped. In December, she was sentenced to one month in prison. In addition, she has a year of supervised release following her sentence, will need to complete 60 hours of community service and must pay \$500 in restitution for damages to the Capitol.

Following her arrest, Courtright withdrew from college.

Richard Barnett: Awaiting sentencing

Barnett was photographed with

his foot on a desk in Pelosi's office during the violence at the Capitol.

He was released in April while he awaits his trial, after spending nearly four months in jail on charges including obstructing an official proceeding, entering the Capitol while armed with a deadly or dangerous weapon (a stun gun), and theft of government property (for stealing a piece of government mail).

Barnett, age 61, will appear in federal court again on Feb. 1 and could face a sentencing of up to 87 months in prison if he is found guilty on all charges.

Matthew Greene: Awaiting sentencing

Greene is the first self-identified member of the Proud Boys—a far-right extremist group—to plead

guilty to obstructing Congress and conspiring to obstruct law enforcement during the Capitol attack.

Court documents indicate Greene, age 34 at the time of his plea, was "among the first wave" to rush up the Capitol steps after the police line was breached. He faces up to 25 years in prison, although prosecutors plan to recommend a sentence of 41 to 50 months because he agreed to cooperate with law enforcement. His hearing is scheduled for March 10.

Robert Chapman: Awaiting sentencing

One week after Jan. 6, Chapman told someone on the dating app Bumble that he took part in the riot. "I did storm the capitol," he wrote in a

message. "I made it all the way to Statuary Hall!" The person Chapman confessed to then replied, "We are not a match." Later that day, the person Chapman communicated with on Bumble contacted the FBI. Federal investigators matched Chapman's Bumble profile to images of him inside the Capitol building. They identified him by working with New York State authorities and matching his likeness to a 2017 mugshot, in which he had the same distinctive sideburns.

In December, Chapman at age 51 pleaded guilty to "parading, demonstrating or picketing" in a Capitol building. His sentencing is set for April 4, where he will face up to six months in prison and a maximum fine of \$5,000.

Trump's lawyer says his speech at Jan. 6 rally is protected by immunity, asks judge to dismiss lawsuits blaming him for Capitol riot

A federal judge Monday questioned a lawyer for Donald Trump about his claim that virtually everything said by a sitting president is protected by absolute immunity, a key component of Trump's bid to dismiss multiple civil lawsuits blaming him for the deadly Capitol riot.

"I cannot come up with an example of something the president says as president" that would not be protected from litigation, attorney Jesse Binnall told Judge Amit Mehta during a hearing in Washington federal court.

The lawsuits were filed by Democratic lawmakers and police officers who were at the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, when hundreds of Trump's supporters stormed the building and temporarily stopped Congress from confirming President Joe



Biden's 2020 election victory.

Two U.S. Capitol police officers are suing for damages for physical and emotional injuries suffered during the riot. The lawsuit from Rep. Eric Swalwell,

D-Calif., also names Donald Trump Jr., ex-Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani and Rep. Mo Brooks, R-Ala., as defendants. Eleven other House Democrats filed their own lawsuit against

Trump, Giuliani and the right-wing groups Oath Keepers and Proud Boys.

The two lawsuits from House Democrats both cite the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871, intended to protect against political violence and intimidation. All three groups of plaintiffs accuse Trump of inciting the invasion.

But the lawsuits "never should have been brought in the first

place," Binnall said in lengthy oral arguments held by teleconference Monday afternoon. He argued that the lawsuits are "chock full of propaganda" and are intended to "score points" against Democrats' political rivals.

Trump's speech at a rally outside the White House on the day of the riot falls squarely within the limits of presidential immunity, Binnall said. In that speech, Trump - who had spent prior weeks spreading the false conspiracy theory that his loss to Biden was the result of widespread fraud - directed his supporters to march to the Capitol to pressure Republican lawmakers to reject the 2020 election results.

Mehta, who was nominated to

the D.C. district court in 2014 by then-President Barack Obama, sounded skeptical of Binnall's extremely broad view of immunity protections for presidential speech.

"You would have me ignore what he said in its entirety?" Mehta asked Binnall, referring to the content of Trump's speech on Jan. 6. Binnall said yes.

When the judge asked if there was anything a president could say or do that would not be immune from liability, Binnall replied, "For say, I can't think of an example."

Lawyers for the plaintiffs argued that Mehta should not dismiss their lawsuits because legal complaints laid out a plausible case that Trump whipped up his followers and then dispatched them to the Capitol, where many of them then invaded the building.

Binnall is also representing the former president in a lawsuit pending before the Supreme Court, which aims to block the production of a tranche of White House records to a House select committee investigating Trump's role in the Capitol riot. The committee is reportedly investigating a range of possible criminal conduct, potentially including possible criminal conduct by Trump.



Jan. 6 Proved the Durability of the Constitution - and the Continuing Need to Defend It



Our system held up against serious threats from the right. So why are so many on the left now trying to undermine it?

The Jan. 6 riot was a disgrace. But, in a certain sense, it was almost beside the point. At the end of the day, the QAnon shaman and Co. were never going to be able to hold the Capitol and take over the U.S. government; they weren't even going to be able to stop, rather than delay for several hours, the counting of the electoral votes in the 2020 election. Even if members of Congress for some reason couldn't have gotten back into the chambers, they would have convened in some other place and finished the count anyway.

The more direct threat to the election was the spurious legal arguments advanced to try to convince Vice President Mike Pence that he had the unilateral power to resolve the counting of electoral votes in President Donald Trump's favor, despite his loss. One point of the riot was to further pressure Pence ("Hang Mike Pence!"), but much of the lobbying took place behind closed doors, among Trump's advisers.

Pence, of course, resisted. Besides the vice president, perhaps the biggest hero of the post-election period was the constitutional system itself - and the reason Pence was so

stalwart was out of an abiding loyalty to that system. One year later, we should appreciate the fact that the Constitution proved a durable vehicle of representative government, and a frustration to anyone hoping to seize and wield illegitimate power.

The genius of the document is how it distributes power through federalism and the separation of powers, and explicitly prevents inflamed majorities from trampling core liberties in the Bill of Rights. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia once noted how, in other countries, such assurances are merely "words on paper" because the governing documents do not "prevent the centralization of power in one person or in one party."

The post-2020 election drama should bring home the importance of this design and the need to defend it. Yet, today the same people on the left who are most alarmed by Trump tend, perversely, to be most disenchanted with the Constitution.

The fact is that it's much harder to steal an election when there are 50 different power centers, all with their own rules, political cultures and officeholders, rather than a centralized system in

which one or two people can potentially be influenced to change the outcome. The Trump forces after the 2020 election hoped to transform Pence into this kind of one-person fulcrum that they could use to distort the constitutional system to their liking. This was the point of the notorious memos authored by conservative lawyer John Eastman. The so-called Green Bay Sweep that Trump adviser Peter Navarro brags was "a perfect plan" to try to keep Trump in office centered, too, around Pence - extensive objections to the counting of the electoral votes in Congress would, the thinking went, eventually force the vice president to suspend the proceedings altogether.

The Eastman memos are wish-casting masquerading as legal analysis. The 12th Amendment says the vice president opens the certificates from the Electoral College, and that "the votes shall be counted," which the memos implausibly interpret to mean the votes are counted by the vice president himself, rather than by Congress. No vice president had ever claimed such powers under the 12th Amendment before. Further, as my National Review colleague Dan McLaughlin points out, it is preposterous to believe

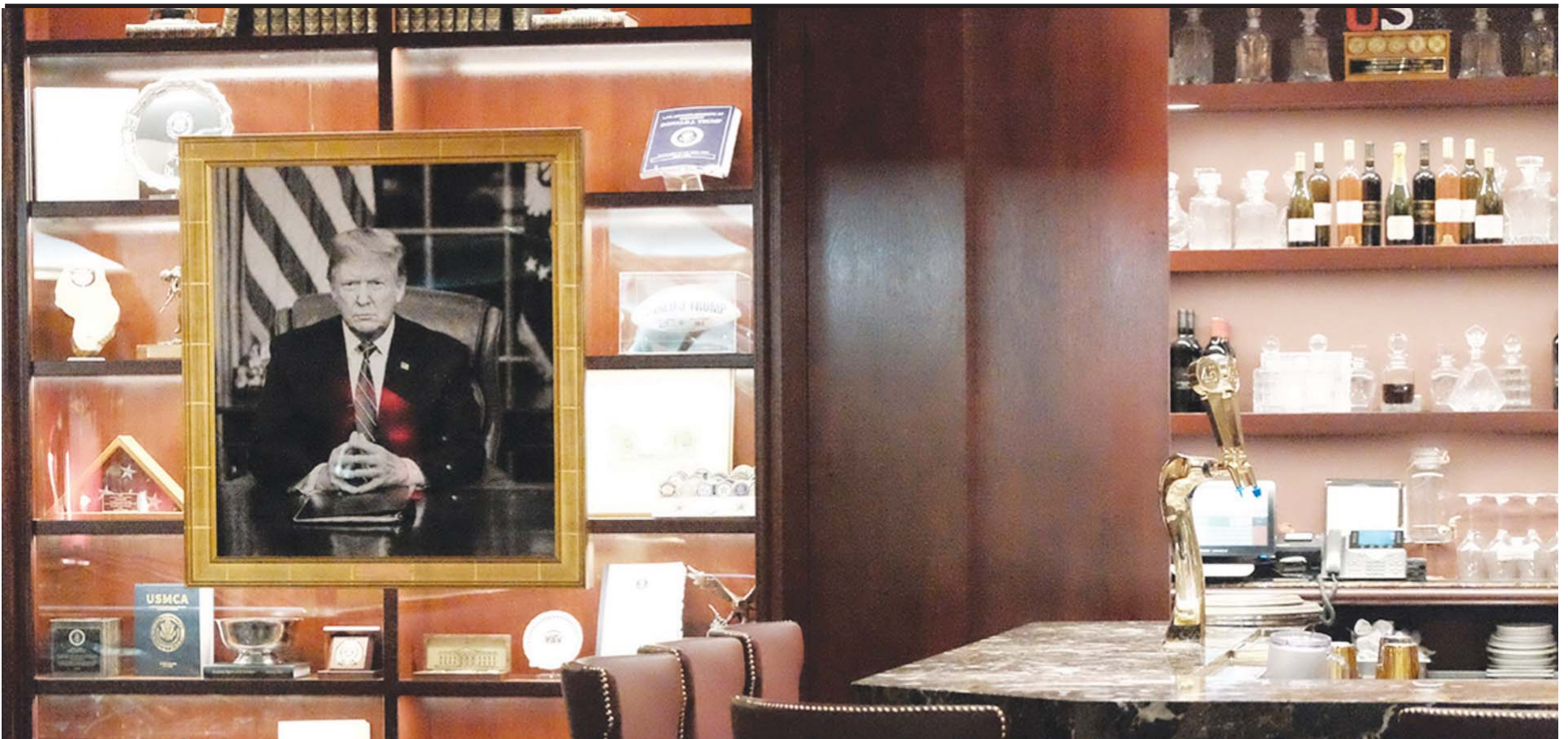
that a Jeffersonian Congress intended this when it proposed the amendment prior to the 1804 election. The vice president at the time was none other than Aaron Burr, who had tried to rob the 1800 presidential election from Thomas Jefferson - catalyzing the push for the 12th Amendment in the first place.

If federalism didn't help Trump's cause, neither did the separation of powers. The United States doesn't have a British-style parliamentary system in which the head of government is also the head of his or her party in the legislature, which obviously would have given Trump much more leverage. Nor does America have a unicameral legislature; power is inherently less concentrated in the design of our Congress, with its upper and lower chambers.

In 2020, Democrats controlled the House, and Republicans controlled the Senate, complicating any plan to rely on Congress to hand the election to Trump. One route was to throw the election to the House, which would vote by state delegation for president. Republicans controlled 26 of those delegations. Our federal system, though, made even this more complicated than it seemed.

Rep. Liz Cheney (R-Wyo.) constituted the entirety of the Wyoming delegation, and obviously she would not have gone along with Green Bay Sweep or any other similar plan. It is quite possible that, should Trump run again, Republicans would have unified control of Congress in 2024. This would be an advantage for him if he tried to nullify a loss again. Still, bicameralism wouldn't be his friend. Judging by the current dynamic in the House Republican Conference, Trump might be able to muster a House majority for whatever he wanted. But in the Senate? Because it's a different body, with a different institutional culture and different types of people serving, it's hard to see Trump ever getting a majority of his own party for some hugely consequential, infamous scheme.

The Constitution provides another layer of protection in the courts. Whether the judges were appointed by Republicans or Democrats, the courts almost uniformly ruled against Trump's legal claims. The Supreme Court threw out an absurd suit from the state of Texas contesting the outcomes in various swing states. Our system, in other words, held.



We Are In a New Civil War ... About What Exactly?

Grievous conflicts have been about big things - war, slavery, Depression - but this time we just don't like each other

For most of my reporting career, to refer to some dispute or another - over a judicial nomination, perhaps, or an uproar over a proposed shopping mall near a battlefield - as "a new Civil War" was to reach for a metaphor.

On the anniversary of the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol, we mark the evolution of journalistic cliché: Serious people now invoke "Civil War" not as metaphor but as literal precedent.

The Trump years, which it is now evident did not end with his presidency, have awakened a conflict so profound that, as in the 1860s, democracy, constitutional order and union itself are in peril. A big deal, indeed. But also a puzzle: If this is a 21st century version of 19th century disunion, shouldn't it be more obvious what the war, at bottom, is all about?

The Jan. 6 anniversary is a reminder that the chaos of the Trump years in one important respect - and perhaps only in one - is a historical anomaly. The country many times over has

witnessed dissent and disruption far more violent than anything seen in recent years. But earlier episodes featured profound ideological and moral questions - easily visible to the naked eye, in the present and to historians afterward - that lay at the heart of the matter.

The real Civil War was about slavery - at the start, to restrict its territorial expansion, by war's end to eliminate it entirely. Capitalists opposed to the New Deal knew why they loathed FDR - he was fundamentally shifting the balance of power between public and private sectors - and FDR knew, too: "They are unanimous in their hate for me, and I welcome their hatred." The unrest of the 1960s was about ending segregation and stopping the Vietnam War.

Only in recent years have we seen foundation-shaking political conflict - both sides believing the other would turn the United States into something unrecognizable - with no obvious and easily summarized root cause. What is the fundamental question that hangs in the

balance between the people who hate Trump and what he stands for and the people who love Trump and hate those who hate him? This is less an ideological conflict than a psychological one. On the surface, of course, everyone knows what the Capitol mayhem and its acrid aftermath are about. One side unreasonably believes that President Joe Biden's 2020 presidential victory was stolen, and the other side reasonably fears that former president Donald Trump's followers are so slavishly under his spell that they are willing to hijack the legal apparatus guaranteeing free and honest elections in order to facilitate his return to power in 2024. But the violent conflict spurred by the 2020 election flowed from years of conflict over every aspect of Trump's rise to the presidency and his performance in it. In the nearly seven years since his presidential ambitions took flight in 2015, there has been a daily deluge of outrages and provocations, and a corresponding flood of

explanations of what's really going on here - why his partisans are so aggrieved, why they are so drawn to the most garish personality ever to occupy the presidency.

Efforts to explain Trump often rely on complex sociological or economic theories. He was a backlash to globalization and selfish elites. He exploited resentment of trade and the decline in real wages. He was the representative of people who disliked the cultural ascension of women and African-Americans and the diminution of working class white males. And so on. All semi-plausible. All inadequate in the face of Trump's zigs on one day and zags the next, and the obvious truth that most of his partisans are attracted to him less for any programmatic reason than for the sheer bombast of his performance - and especially that he offends his opposition.

The more the vitriol has risen the less consensus there is about the origins of anger. To the contrary, there is something closer to an establishment consensus that the search for root cause is folly

- the Trump phenomenon defies explanation, and the threat posed by his demagoguery makes speculation about its origins an irrelevant distraction.

Violence at the Capitol is hardly unprecedented. At least the Puerto Rican terrorists who shot five representatives from the House gallery in 1954 had a clear agenda: "Viva Puerto Rico libre!" (Long live free Puerto Rico) shouted one of them. Sen. Charles Sumner of Massachusetts in 1856 was the superior of Donald Trump when it comes to vivid insult. Of South Carolina Sen. Andrew Butler, he said, he "touches nothing which he does not disfigure with error, sometimes of principle, sometimes of fact. He cannot open his mouth, but out there flies a blunder." Butler's nephew, Rep. Preston Brooks, was clear on why he caned Sumner on the Senate floor, and Sumner was, too. It was because he accused Butler of being in love with a mistress, "I mean the harlot, slavery." They were arguing over the transcendent issue of their time.

'Why Is Child Marriage Still Legal?': A Young Lawmaker Tackles a Hidden Problem



Cassie Levesque wants to abolish a centuries-old practice. Even in free-thinking New Hampshire, her campaign is proving a hard sell

- she wondered whether that testimony had made any impact on her colleagues. The fact that none of the Republican members wore masks was a sign that bipartisanship would be scarce. As soon as the chair gavelled the meeting to order, a Republican lawmaker moved to declare Levesque's bill "inexpedient to legislate," New Hampshire jargon for recommending that the full House reject the bill. He didn't offer a reason.

"I would definitely like to see this put through," Levesque responded, quietly but firmly, "because even though the [age] 16 bill is helping, still we're seeing a lot of marriages still happening. And this can lead to further problems down the road."

Kim Rice, the Republican committee chair, responded. "Just so everyone knows, I did ask the committee researcher to send me data, and in 2019, there were five 17-year-olds who got married. In 2020, there was a total of zero." It's the only explanation for what happened next: The committee voted down the bill, 8-7, on party lines.

After the committee vote, Levesque was disappointed but undaunted. Her bill would have one more chance: a vote by the entire New Hampshire House. "I presented them with numerous facts, and they still didn't change their minds," she said of the committee's Republicans. The child-marriage numbers Rice cited didn't faze her. "It's happening, whether we like it or not," Levesque said, "and five is way too many."

Levesque was 15 and imagining a career in photography when she first heard about child marriage. A lot of women in her family had married young, so her mother had raised her to be independent and self-supporting instead. "I was the person outside of politics who was just like, 'Down with the patriarchy,'" she recalls. "I was taught there's not always going to be someone to advocate for me, so I have to advocate for myself."

One day in the middle of September, Cassie Levesque walked up a carpeted hallway toward a committee room in New Hampshire's capitol complex. Wearing a navy-blue dress and matching mask, with her thick glasses pushed up atop her head, the 22-year-old state lawmaker was prepared for perhaps the most consequential vote of her young career. The Children and Family Law Committee, which she sits on, was about to consider her bill to ban child marriage.

Levesque was hopeful but still unsure of her bill's chances. All the Democrats on the committee had pledged their support for her bill. But the majority of Republicans hadn't shown their hand.

Levesque had worked for this day for a long time. In 2017, as a part of a Girl Scout project, she lobbied the New Hampshire legislature to act against child marriage. She was 17, old enough to marry in her state, but not old enough to vote. A year later, Levesque, by then a college freshman, stood next to Gov. Chris Sununu as he signed a law raising New Hampshire's minimum marriage age to 16 - up from 13 for girls and 14 for boys. "Cassie... really enlightened, I think, the entire state," the governor said. But to Levesque, the new law was a disappointing compromise. She wanted New Hampshire to become the first state to raise its minimum marriage age to 18, with

no exceptions. With unfinished business, Levesque won a seat in the state legislature later that same year, becoming the youngest lawmaker in the Capitol - and also a burgeoning national voice in a movement that was just getting traction.

In 2017, all 50 states allowed minors to marry in some cases. Since 2018, six states have banned all marriages before 18: Delaware and New Jersey in 2018, Pennsylvania and Minnesota in 2020, Rhode Island and New York in 2021. Other states have recently tightened permissive child marriage laws, raising ages and adding some safeguards. But most states still allow teens to marry at 16 or 17 if parents and a judge consent. Some allow 14- or 15-year-olds to marry. Nine states still have no minimum marriage age at all, including liberal states such as California - where opponents of ending child marriage include civil libertarians on the left as well as family-first conservatives.

Though fewer minors marry in the U.S. than in the past, child marriage still happens here. The U.S. Census' American Community Survey estimated that there were nearly 88,000 married teens ages 15 to 17 nationwide in 2019. An April 2021 study by the activist group Unchained At Last, funded by the Gates Foundation, estimated that 297,000 minors were married in the U.S. between 2000 and 2018, and that 60,000 of them

were under their state's age of sexual consent.

"A hundred years ago, women were still getting married young," said Levesque. "Now we understand that kids need to be kids. They need to be able to grow up, because if they're thrown right into adulthood, they tend to sink versus swim."

Levesque and other anti-child-marriage activists argue that too many parents and grooms coerce girls into marriage, for reasons ranging from patriarchal cultural traditions to exploitation. The typical American child marriage isn't a Romeo-and-Juliet story of teenagers in love, they say; more than 80 percent involve a girl under 18 marrying an adult, often someone several years older. Child marriage, they warn, undermines rape laws. Once child brides are trapped in a coercive marriage, it's hard for them to escape; minors often find it hard to obtain a divorce, advocates say, and often can't get into women's shelters.

"It's not just the 16-, 17-year-old-puppy love," said Levesque. "It's the 16-year-old marrying the 20-something-plus-year-old who is a family friend from a different country, who's going to take them, and then they'll be gone."

Throughout her three years in the legislature, Levesque has advanced arguments like this from her seat on the Children and Family Law Committee. In February 2021, she rallied 13 child-marriage opponents to

testify via Zoom, including five child-marriage survivors from states including California, Texas and Maryland (though not New Hampshire), who described their marriages as forced or coercive.

"I was 16 when I was forced to marry while living in a cult in California," testified one witness.

"I was forced to marry a 28-year-old after an engagement of three days. ... And then I was taken to the South Pacific for 2 1/2 years. They took my passport." One advocate for banning child marriage argued that judicial review of marriage petitions is often ineffective at stopping forced weddings, because teens fearful of familial violence "have to choose between telling the truth and facing repercussion back home or lying to the court." Another witness noted that a 2020 U.N. report found linkages between forced marriage and human trafficking.

Levesque and activists who testified in February offered statistics showing that the likelihood of divorce approaches 80 percent for those who marry before 18. Married teen mothers are less likely to return to school than unmarried teen mothers, which often means increased poverty later in life. And women who married as girls are much more likely to end up with mental-health struggles.

But as she walked into the committee room - the first time since the pandemic began that the group had convened in person

He Was the West's Most Important Undercover Spy. An Affair Brought It All Down.

How a Polish double agent defected and became an even more valuable asset to the West

On April 18, 1961, the case of Polish People's Republic v. Michał Goleniewski opened in the Warsaw District Military Court.

The defendant was accused of two offenses: stealing substantial quantities of state funds, most of it in hard foreign currency, and the more serious charge of "betrayal of the Homeland" - treason - under Article 83 of the Army's penal code. If convicted, the latter carried an inexorable sentence: death.

Despite the gravity of the indictments, the trial was scheduled to last just one day. Only two witnesses were summoned to give evidence; they, like the prosecutor and the three judges, were both senior officers in the army or the intelligence service. Yet this was no Soviet-style show trial. The defendant was not present in the dock, to be photographed and filmed making a damning confession of his crimes; even had he not, by April that year, been beyond the immediate reach of Poland's government or military, there was never any likelihood that he would have been publicly arraigned.

For almost three years, Goleniewski had been the West's most important spy, working undercover inside Communist intelligence services in Poland and the Soviet Union. Using the codename "Sniper," he had sent hundreds of pages of Moscow's military and espionage secrets to the West. Polish intelligence and the KGB in Moscow had harbored suspicions that Goleniewski had been working covertly for the U.S. for several weeks, which might have been a factor in his defection.

After he dropped his cover and defected to the United States in January 1961, he went on to provide yet more vital



intelligence secrets - ultimately identifying more than 1,600 Soviet bloc agents spying in the West. Among the most important spies he exposed were George Blake, Moscow's man inside Britain's MI6; West Germany's head of counter-intelligence; and a Swedish Air Force colonel who had sold U.S. and NATO secrets to Moscow for decades.

The court proceedings that day were terse and to the point - the entire hearing was concluded well before the day's end - and took place entirely behind closed doors. No report was published in Poland's state-controlled media, and there is no evidence that the CIA, or any other Western intelligence service, was even aware it had taken place.

There was a reason for this deliberate and strict secrecy: The embarrassment Goleniewski's defection caused to the intelligence operations of the Urząd Bezpieczeństwa (UB), Poland's secret police agency, as well as to those of Soviet Bloc espionage agencies with which it worked, was devastating. Publicizing his defection, and the secrets he betrayed, would have only deepened the wounds and highlighted the dramatically enfeebled position of the Soviet bloc spy networks to their counterparts in the West.

Hidden from public scrutiny at home, and out of the sight of its international enemies, the Polish Intelligence Service was remarkably frank. The evidence it presented to the Warsaw Court set out the details of Goleniewski's career as a spy, the chronology of his defection, and desperate efforts by the UB

to limit the damage it caused. But the trial also revealed his full personal history - a history of love affairs that had made him increasingly unhappy with his life in the Soviet bloc, and which was significantly at odds with the selectively edited biography he had given to the CIA. Michał Goleniewski was born on Aug. 16, 1922, in Nieśwież, a city in the northeast corner of Poland, close to its border with the Soviet Union. His father, also named Michał, was an accountant; his mother, Janina Turynska, a housewife. During the interwar years, the family moved to Wolsztyn, 800 kilometers to the west and close to the border with Germany. Michał, Sr., worked for a brewery, a job that could not have helped his incipient alcoholism, while his wife ran the home and brought up their son.

Michał attended the local high school, before gimnazjum, or preparatory school, graduating just before the outbreak of war in 1939. By his own account, given to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, he spent the years in which Poland was occupied by Hitler's troops studying law at the University of Poznań - although subsequently he also claimed to have been arrested and imprisoned by the Nazi authorities on suspicion of belonging to an illegal organization.

The truth, as presented to the Warsaw District Military Court, was somewhat less respectable than either of these alternative histories: "In the years 1940-1944 he worked as an accountant in agricultural properties at Tłoka and Wroniawa in the Poznań

Province," the prosecutor reported, adding that at all times this employment "was under German administration." He had, in short, been a collaborator.

When World War II ended Goleniewski applied for membership in the Polish Workers' Party and started work - initially as a sentry, then as a clerk - at the new Communist government's Ministry of Public Security, the MBP, which, under the umbrella of the UB, oversaw the state's domestic and foreign intelligence services.

Over the next 12 years he would rise steadily through the ranks of the MBP/UB. In 1946 he was awarded one of Poland's highest honors - the Cross of Merit - later to be supplemented by the Knight's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta, cementing his status as a reliable apparatchik in the new Communist state's labyrinthine bureaucracy.

He also evidently had powerful patrons within the intelligence service. In 1948 he was promoted to chief of the Counter-Intelligence Division for the district of Poznań, a post he would hold until 1950. Throughout those two years, fellow officers made a succession of formal requests that Goleniewski should be investigated for "cooperating with the Nazi occupier and acting to the detriment of Polish citizens."

Each attempt was quickly snuffed out: "cancelled in Warsaw," according to notes on an internal Polish security service report. By 1955 he was a division head within the MBP's Department 1, which controlled civilian counterintelligence; at least part of his duties involved monitoring members of the fragmented anti-communist resistance - a task which he pursued under the cover identity of "Dr. Roman Tarnowski," an official of the General Prosecutor's Office, and one which earned him a reputation as a relentless and unforgiving interrogator of dissidents.

On February 1, 1955, he was appointed deputy head of the scientific and intelligence branch of Department 1. It would be his final role and, like the

positions which preceded it, brought Goleniewski into close contact with all of Poland's military and civilian espionage services.

According to the indictment against him:

As the Head of the Department VI Dep. 1 of the Ministry of the Interior, the suspect had access to materials constituting a state secret of special significance. In particular, he was thoroughly oriented in the organization of the work of the intelligence service of the Interior Ministry on the technical and scientific section, and knew the network of secret collaborators of Department VI ... conducted by the Department as well as the structure, tasks, forms and methods of work of Department 1 and cooperating units.

But Goleniewski's responsibilities extended far beyond Poland's borders. During the 1950s he became the KGB's "point man" in Warsaw, combining an official role as the UB's liaison to the Soviet intelligence service chiefs with a covert remit to brief Moscow on the activities of his colleagues. Both jobs required him to travel throughout the Soviet bloc states and, frequently, into the West.

It was clear from the prosecutors' evidence that they did not, then, realise, Goleniewski had been working with Western intelligence since 1958.

Despite the extra demands caused by this dual role, the UB found Goleniewski to be a competent and efficient worker on behalf of the Polish secret state. An internal performance review, written by his immediate boss, Colonel Witold Sienkiewicz, on August 25, 1960, reported that:

The work of the department headed by Comrade Goleniewski is very diverse and besides operational qualifications requires knowledge of technical and economic problems. Despite this specific work, Comrade Goleniewski, having organizational skills and self-denial at work, fulfills it.



NATALIA KOLESNIKOVA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Thirty years after the Soviet Union collapsed, Putin exploits nostalgia for the old regime

When the Soviet Union finally fell, it was in a mundane way, as if it had clocked off from a normal day's work

On December 25, 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev addressed the Soviet citizens and announced his resignation as president. A little after 7:30 p.m. that same day, the Soviet flag, waving in the wind, was lowered from the flagpole above the presidential residence in the Kremlin.

For five minutes the flagpole stood bare, as if to symbolize the transition of power. By 7:45 p.m. the Russian tricolor was hoisted on it. The following day, the Soviet Union was officially dissolved. And with that, the empire in which I'd been born and spent the first 26 years of my life came to an end. The backdrop for my family's story - which included losses during World War II and Stalin's repressive dictatorship -- had come down. But I must admit that when that flagpole stood naked, I felt nothing.

For me, the Soviet Union became a thing of the past after

the attempted coup of August 1991. Gorbachev pulled strings, believing he was running the country, but the strings were cut. Ministers and regional leaders wrote alarmist letters to one another -- food supplies were thinning and the country was facing starvation. Russia was creating a reform government.

As a budding journalist, I was enthusiastic about the change. I worked at a newspaper, eagerly reporting every day what the reformers were doing. My older brother meanwhile became an adviser to the chief reformer and later Prime Minister, Yegor Gaidar.

But amid the difficulties of the transition, peoples' inspiration started fading over the following years and the bulk of the population discovered that capitalism did not bring immediate happiness.

Despite that, in the spring of 1993, people voted in a referendum to continue reforms, and in the autumn of that year

the reformist party Vybor Rossii managed to form one of the largest factions in the new parliament. It was the last time when liberals were successful. In 1994, less than three years after the Soviet Union collapsed, sociologists led by Yuri Levada recorded a change in attitudes. People began to say that they preferred quiet work for hire rather than their own businesses and the risks associated with them.

As more time passed, a substantial number of Russians began to feel pangs of nostalgia -- Soviet songs were sung in New Year's programs on television, post-modern Soviet-like menus became popular in restaurants.

But no one seriously thought of going back until 2000 when the new President -- Vladimir Putin -- quite literally changed their tune. Putin restored a revived version of the Soviet anthem, still used today.

The President's resurrection of

Soviet ghosts didn't stop there. Putin famously called the breakup of the Union the "greatest political catastrophe" of the 20th century, during an address in 2005. Two years later, he gave another speech in Munich about the humiliation of Russia by the West.

And it sounded like a plan: to "Make Russia Great Again." The domestic audience at the time didn't take it too seriously -- the average citizen wasn't thinking about politics then, enjoying the recovery of economic growth and the high oil economy of the 2000s.

Putin's popularity gradually declined and Russia's modernization seemed inevitable. Though the short war with Georgia in 2008 did give his approval ratings a temporary boost.

In 2012, Putin faced unprecedented protests by the urban classes, and began a very sharp U-turn towards ultra-conservative policies. And one

of the main components of his propaganda was the glorification of Russia's so-called victorious Soviet history.

Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 was portrayed as an act of "restoring the empire." Imperial feelings were slumbering in the hearts of most Russians, and Putin played on this, reviving their pride in being part of a great power. As the Crimean effect wore off, Putin stepped on the pedal for Soviet nostalgia, presenting the Stalin era -- particularly the Great Patriotic War -- as one of victory and order.

Fast forward to 2021, and almost half (49%) of Russian respondents would prefer the Soviet political system, according to a study published in September by the independent Levada Center. The survey, which included 1,603 adult respondents across 50 regions of Russia, said it was a record figure of Soviet support for this century.



'Historic': US surgeons successfully implant pig heart in human

US surgeons successfully implant genetically modified pig heart in human. It represents a major milestone for animal to human transplantation.

US surgeons have successfully implanted a heart from a genetically modified pig in a 57-year-old man, a medical first that could one day help solve the chronic shortage of organ donations.

The "historic" procedure took place Friday, the University of Maryland Medical School said in a statement on Monday. While the patient's prognosis is far from certain, it represents a major milestone for animal to human transplantation.

The patient, David Bennett, had been deemed ineligible for human transplant -- a decision that is often taken when the recipient has very poor underlying health.

He is now recovering and being carefully monitored to determine how the new organ performs.

"It was either die or do this transplant. I want to live. I know it's a shot in the dark, but it's my last choice," the Maryland resident said a day before the surgery.

Bennett, who has spent the last several months bedridden on a

heart-lung bypass machine, added: "I look forward to getting out of bed after I recover."

The Food and Drug Administration granted

transplanted the pig heart.

"We are proceeding cautiously, but we are also optimistic that this first-in-the-world surgery will provide an important new option

provided valuable information to help the medical community improve this potentially life-saving method in future patients," he said.

Six human genes responsible for human acceptance were inserted into the genome, for a total of 10 unique gene edits.

The editing was performed by Virginia-based biotech firm Revivicor, which also supplied the pig used in a breakthrough kidney transplant on a brain dead patient in New York in October.

But while that surgery was purely a proof-of-concept experiment, and the kidney was connected outside the patient's body, the new surgery is intended to save a person's life. The donated organ was kept in an organ-preservation machine ahead of the surgery, and the team also used an experimental new drug made by Kiniksa Pharmaceuticals along with conventional anti-rejection drugs to suppress the immune system.

About 110,000 Americans are currently waiting for an organ transplant, and more than 6,000 patients die each year before getting one, according to official figures.

To meet demand, doctors have long been interested in so-called xenotransplantation, or cross-species organ donation, with experiments tracing back to the 17th century.



emergency authorization for the surgery on New Year's Eve, as a last ditch effort for a patient who was unsuitable for conventional transplant.

"This was a breakthrough surgery and brings us one step closer to solving the organ shortage crisis," said Bartley Griffith, who surgically

for patients in the future."

Muhammad Mohiuddin, who co-founded the university's cardiac xenotransplantation program, added the surgery was the culmination of years of research, involving pig-to-baboon transplants, with survival times that exceeded nine months.

"The successful procedure

- 10 unique gene edits -

Bennett's donor pig belonged to a herd that had undergone genetic editing procedures.

Three genes that would have led to rejection of pig organs by humans were "knocked out," as was a gene that would have led to excessive growth of pig heart tissue.

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

Gloomy outlook for global recovery, World Economic Forum survey finds

Climate change was seen as the number one danger by respondents in the WEF's annual risks report on Tuesday

Only one in 10 World Economic Forum members surveyed expects the global recovery to accelerate over the next three years, a poll of nearly 1,000 business, government and academic leaders found, with only one in six optimistic about the world outlook.

Climate change was seen as the number one danger by respondents in the WEF's annual risks report on Tuesday, while erosion of social cohesion, livelihood crises and mental health deterioration were identified as risks which had increased the most since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Global leaders must come together and adopt a coordinated multi-stakeholder approach to tackle unrelenting global challenges and build resilience ahead of the next crisis," Saadia Zahidi, WEF managing director, said.

Extreme weather was considered the world's biggest risk in the short term and a failure of climate action in the medium and long term - two to 10 years, the survey showed.

Agreement at the UN COP26 climate conference in November last year was widely applauded for keeping alive prospects of capping global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius, but many of the nearly 200 nations had wanted to leave the conference in Glasgow with more. Climate change is already seen contributing to

more extreme weather patterns. "Failure to act on climate change could shrink global GDP by one-sixth and the commitments taken at COP26 are still not enough to achieve the 1.5 (degrees Celsius) goal," Peter Giger, group chief risk officer at Zurich Insurance, which helped to compile the report, said.

The WEF's report also highlights four areas of emerging risk - cybersecurity, a disorderly climate transition, migration pressures and competition in space.

The prospect of 70,000 satellite launches in coming decades, in addition to space tourism, raises risks of collisions and increasing debris in space, amid a lack of regulation.

"Who governs space?" said Carolina Klint, risk management leader for continental Europe at insurance broker Marsh which also helped produce the report.

The report is published each year ahead of the annual WEF meeting in Davos. However, the Geneva-based WEF last month postponed the January event until mid-2022 due to the spread of the Omicron coronavirus variant.

The report was produced together with Zurich, Marsh McLennan and South Korea's SK Group, the universities of Oxford and Pennsylvania and the National University of Singapore.

Biden enlists meteorologists to predict Russia's Ukraine invasion plan: Report



According to reports, US President Joe Biden has asked his team of meteorologists to look at the Ukraine weather with Russia reportedly planning an invasion.

Reports claim President Putin has pushed back plans to invade Ukraine due to the mild winter conditions in the area.

The United States has been warning for the past two months that Russia is set to launch an attack on Ukraine as President Putin massed thousands of troops at the border.

The Russian president has rejected reports while asserting that his defence forces have the right to move soldiers anywhere inside its territory.

Reports claim Russia was set to launch military action in January however the warm weather has reportedly "delayed" plans.

Amid tensions at the border, talks have been underway between the United States and Russia in Geneva to de-

escalate tensions. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the talks were held in an "open, substantive and direct manner".

However, the Russian side added that there were "no clear deadlines" while adding that it won't be "satisfied with the endless dragging out of this process".

Kremlin had earlier sent a security document to the US and NATO listing its concerns. Russia had demanded that the European military alliance should not extend to its eastern border, a claim often reiterated by Putin.

US deputy secretary of state Wendy Sherman while rejecting Russia's proposals had said it was "non-starters to the United States". Russia has declared Ukraine's NATO membership is a "red line".

Tensions continue to simmer at the border as Russia conducted live-fire exercises with tanks along the Ukrainian border on Tuesday even as the US urged Russia to pull back troops.

This ex-McDonald's cook is now the 11th richest person in the world

Changpeng Zhao, the CEO of cryptocurrency exchange Binance, is the world's biggest crypto millionaire, with a fortune comparable to that of tech billionaires Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates, and Mark Zuckerberg.

Zhao's net worth was estimated to be \$96 billion by Bloomberg on Monday, making him the world's 11th richest

person.

Zhao, who is known in crypto circles as "CZ," is now sandwiched between No. 12 Mukesh Ambani, CEO of Indian giant Reliance Industries, and No. 10, Larry Ellison, cofounder of Oracle, who is worth an estimated \$107 billion on the Bloomberg Billionaires Index.

Zhao's personal crypto assets are not included in the \$96



billion number, so it could be significantly understated.

According to Bloomberg's index, the 44-year-old's closest competitors are FTX founder Sam Bankman-Fried (\$15.4 billion) and Coinbase CEO Brian Armstrong (\$8.9 billion).

According to CoinGecko, Binance is the world's largest cryptocurrency exchange, with a 24-hour trading volume of \$106 billion as of January 6.

According to Bloomberg, it made

at least \$20 billion in sales last year. Bloomberg projected Binance's revenue from spot and derivatives trading volumes, as well as stated fees, assuming Zhao owns 90% of the company.

It assigned a value to the company based on its publicly traded competitors.

Binance disputed the accuracy of the projections, and Zhao declined to respond to Bloomberg.

India successfully test fires sea-to-sea variant of BrahMos Cruise Missile

The sea to sea variant of the missile was testfired at the maximum range & hit the target ship with pinpoint accuracy.



The Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO) on Tuesday successfully test-fired the BrahMos supersonic cruise. The missile was launched from the Indian Navy destroyer INS Vishakhapatnam off the Western coast.

The sea to sea variant of the missile was testfired at the maximum range and hit the target ship with pinpoint accuracy. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said the successful launch of the

missile reconfirmed the robustness of the Indian Navy's "mission readiness".

"The robustness of @indiannavy mission readiness is reconfirmed today after a successful launch of the advanced version of BrahMos Missile from INS Vishakhapatnam today. I congratulate the wonderful teamwork of @indiannavy @DRDO_India & @BrahMosMissile," Singh tweeted.

The supersonic cruise missile

is part of the BrahMos Aerospace, an India-Russian joint venture. It can be from submarines, ships, aircraft, or land platforms.

The BrahMos missile flies at a speed of 2.8 Mach or almost three times the speed of sound. India, in November 2020, tested a land-attack version of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The BrahMos supersonic cruise missile is the world's fastest operational system in its class. Recently

the DRDO had extended the range of the missile system from the existing 298 km to around 450 km.

Meanwhile, in December last year, the air version of the BrahMos missile was tested when it was fired by supersonic fighter aircraft Sukhoi 30 MK-I. The test was carried out from the Integrated Test Range, Chandipur, off the coast of Odisha. The successful test-fire from the fighter jet was a major milestone as it cleared the stage for the serial production

of the air version of the BrahMos missiles within the country.

BrahMos is capable of carrying a warhead of 300 kilograms (both conventional as well as nuclear) and has a top supersonic speed of Mach 2.8 to 3 (roughly three times the speed of sound). The missile is highly versatile and its unmatched speed, precision and power makes it the ultimate modern weapon. Developers say that the missile has a strike accuracy rate of 99.99 per cent.

Largest 'Sea Dragon' ever to swim in British waters discovered

Ichthyosaurs first appeared around 250 million years ago and went extinct 90 million years ago. Palaeontologists have discovered one of the greatest finds of the 21st century in the UK - a giant sea dragon. It is the biggest and most complete skeleton of its kind found to date in the UK, and is believed to be the first ichthyosaur of its species. The remains were discovered by Joe Davis, Rutland Water Conservation Team Leader, during the routine draining of a lagoon island for re-landscaping in February last year. According to Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, Joe Davis and Reserves Officer Paul Trevor set

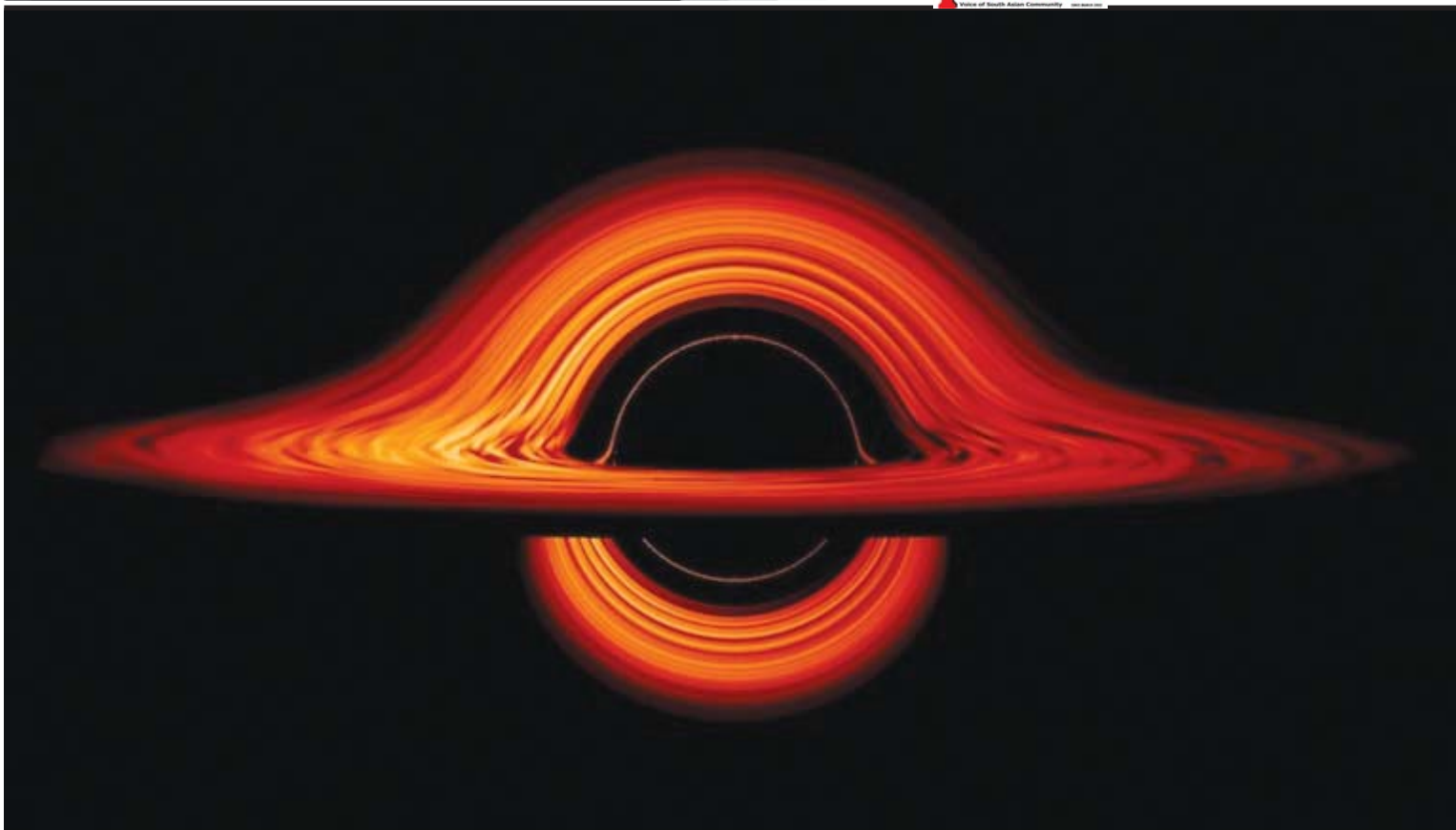


off across the lagoon when Joe noticed what looked like clay pipes sticking up out of the mud.

"They looked organic. I worked out on the Hebrides, so I've found whale and dolphin skeletons

before. This appeared similar and I remarked to Paul that they looked like vertebrae. We followed what

indisputably looked like a spine and Paul discovered something further along that could have been a jawbone. We couldn't quite believe it," Joe Davis said. Dated to be at least 180 million years old, the skeleton is around 10 meters in length with a skull weighing approximately one ton, paleontologists have dubbed it the most complete large ichthyosaur ever found in Britain. Ichthyosaurs first appeared around 250 million years ago and went extinct 90 million years ago. An extraordinary group of marine reptiles, these animals varied in size from 1 to more than 25 meters in length and resembled dolphins in general body shape.



Black hole equal to 2,00,000 suns could shed light on how these supermassive objects grow

Astronomers have detected a supermassive black hole hiding in a dwarf galaxy 2,00,000 times the mass of the Sun

When the James Webb Space Telescope begins observing the universe in infrared light in the coming six months, astronomers will be eager for it to peek at distant black holes. However, before scientists are allowed time on it, a supermassive black hole spotted in a relatively small galaxy could help astronomers understand the evolution of these massive objects.

Astronomers have detected a supermassive black hole hiding in a dwarf galaxy 2,00,000 times the mass of the Sun. It is the smallest of the supermassive black holes. The biggest villains of the universe that don't even

allow light to pass through them have remained the most difficult to understand.

"This black hole in Mrk 462 is among the smallest of the supermassive, or monster, black holes. Black holes like this are notoriously hard to find," Jack Parker of Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, who led the study said.

Researchers found this black hole buried in gas and dust in the galaxy Mrk 462, which has only several hundred million stars, making it a dwarf galaxy. Researchers are hopeful that this hidden black hole will shed light on the evolution of these massive

objects in our universe.

"Because buried black holes are even harder to detect than exposed ones, finding this example might mean there are a lot more dwarf galaxies out there with similar black holes. This is important because it could help address a major question in astrophysics: How did black holes get so big so early in the universe?" Ryan Hickox, who was part of the study told Nasa. **WHAT ARE BLACK HOLES?**

A black hole is formed from the death of a star with such a high gravitational field that the matter gets squeezed into the small space under it, trapping the light

of the dead star. The gravity is so strong due to the matter being squeezed into a tiny space. Since no light can get out, people can't see black holes. They are invisible.

EVOLUTION OF BLACK HOLES Previous research in the field has shown that black holes can grow to a billion solar masses by the time the universe is less than a billion years old, a small fraction of its current age. Researchers suggest that these huge objects were created when massive stars collapsed to form black holes that weighed only about 100 times the mass of the Sun.

First ever on-site detection of water on Moon points to many future possibilities



We already have evidence of water on Moon. But it was collected mainly by lunar orbiters focussing their equipments at the Earth's only natural satellite as they revolved around. Now, information about the first on-site proof of presence of water has come to light.

The on-site observation was made by China's Chang'E-5 probe on Moon. When the probe visited the Moon in December 2020, it not only collected samples for analysis back on Earth but also made some in situ (on-site) analysis of its own.

Measurements made by Chang'E in its surroundings on Moon revealed that water was present in a boulder in a concentration of 180 ppm (parts per million).

This is drier by Earth standards but obviously it is easy to understand its significance as the water is on the Moon..

The particular boulder that was analyzed by the probe was light and had many cavities. This suggests that this rock was a result of underground volcanic activity. This in turn, suggests that more water may be present in Moon's interior.

This on-site detection has further boosted the idea of relative abundance of water on the lunar surface. It may be fused with the minerals in the regolith, the surface dust.

Does this mean that human settlements on Moon may have easy access to water? No, since it is very hard to extract water present in such concentrations. But the observation and analysis on the on-site findings may help us understand Moon and how water is retained on planets and satellites in space.

Scientists discover new type of nebulae around binary stars

Astronomers have discovered a new type of nebulae around binary stars called galactic emission nebulae.

The research, published in *Astrophysics and Astronomy*, shows that binary star YY Hya has a strong UV excess. This suggests the existence of a hot and compact binary companion. "Toward the end of their lives, normal stars inflate into red giant stars. Since a very large fraction of stars is in binary pairs, this affects the evolution at the end of their lives," said the study's

lead author Stefan Kimeswenger from the Department of Astro and Particle Physics at Innsbruck University, Austria.

"In close binary systems, the inflating outer part of a star merges as a common envelope around both stars. However, inside this gas envelope, the cores of the two stars are practically undisturbed and follow their evolution like independent single stars," he added.

The space between stars is dotted with twisting towers studded with stars, unblinking

eyes, ethereal ribbons, and floating bubbles.

These fantastical shapes, some of the universe's most visually stunning constructions, are nebulae, clouds of gas and dust that can be the birthplace of stars, the scene of their demise, and sometimes both.

Nebulae are made up of gas, primarily hydrogen and helium, and fine cosmic dust. These clouds are part of the interstellar medium of extremely low-density gas and dust that exists between stars in the void of

space.

"The diameter of the main cloud is 15.6 light-years across, almost 1 million times larger than the distance of the earth to the sun and much larger than the distance of our sun to its nearest neighboring star," Kimeswenger said.

"Moreover, fragments as large as 39 light-years apart have also been found. Since the object lies slightly above the Milky Way, the nebula was able to develop largely undisturbed by other clouds in the surrounding gas."



What Is 'Flurona,' and How Serious Can It Be?

This month, a pregnant woman in Israel was diagnosed with both influenza and COVID-19, making hers the first documented case of what's being called "flurona."

Last year, experts worried about the possibility of people developing both COVID-19 and influenza at the same time, but they're even more concerned this year.

"Last year, there wasn't very much influenza at all, so there wasn't much opportunity last year to learn about these simultaneous infections," Dr. William Schaffner, professor of preventive medicine and infectious diseases at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, Tennessee, told Healthline.

Current Centers for Disease Controls and Prevention (CDC) data Trusted Source indicates that the country is on track for an influenza season of at least average severity. This severity can be "substantial" on its own, says Schaffner, but could be detrimental when combined with COVID-19.

With more businesses opening up, less physical distancing, and more children attending in-person school, the flu virus can now circulate more easily. Schaffner says that children are the greatest spreaders of influenza because when children contract the flu virus, they produce more virus than adults do and shed the virus for longer periods of time. "They are back in school, so it will be spread there and then they bring it home and give it to their parents, Aunt Susie, grandparents, neighbors," he said.

With COVID-19 cases high, the entire healthcare system is under stress, and

if flu takes off, it could put an even greater stress on the healthcare system.

"When we have a big flu season all by itself, absent COVID, you can fill hospitals with flu patients, so you can imagine if we even have a middling influenza season during the pandemic, that could really stress hospitals and outpatient settings," said Schaffner.

Dr. Laura Boyd, a primary care physician at Elmhurst-Edward Health Center in Addison, Illinois, said her health system is bogged down with COVID-19, and a surge of the flu will tax it further.

"We are already short-staffed due to illness within our own staff, and our call loads have doubled along with the need for office visits," Boyd told Healthline. Should you be concerned about flurona?

Scientists know that it's possible to get two infections at the same time. Boyd explains that when the immune system is weakened from one infection, it allows easy access for another infection.

"We have seen a lot of coinfections of COVID-19 and strep throat lately," she said.

While scientists know it's possible to develop COVID-19 and influenza at the same time, it's too early to determine exactly how sick flurona could make people.

"We don't know if getting both the flu and COVID will make you really sick, but I'd worry if I was predisposed to pneumonia, or if I were more likely to be hospitalized because I have the two infections," said Schaffner.

However, he points out that both

influenza and COVID-19 strike the same groups most seriously, including older people, those with obesity, compromised immune systems, and underlying conditions, such as diabetes, lung disease, heart disease, and more.

Because COVID-19 is rampant across the United States, looking into how much influenza is in your community can help determine your risk for flurona. "Although in general, flu is picking up now across the country, it hits areas at different times, so we would expect to see some more reports about [flurona] as influenza spreads across the country," said Schaffner.

Vaccination provides protection. While uncertainty surrounds flurona, Schaffner says that wearing masks and physical distancing can help decrease the spread of both viruses. However, he emphasizes that your best defense is getting vaccinated for both influenza and COVID-19.

"As I've been out promoting the flu shot, there is a general finding of people forgetting about flu because they're so concentrated on COVID, and there is also real vaccine fatigue, which is understandable," he explained.

Because the coronavirus and the flu are different viruses and aren't related in any way, it's important to get vaccinated against both for protection against both. One doesn't protect against the other.

While you can still get COVID-19 and the flu if you're vaccinated for both, Boyd says that the flu and COVID vaccines will significantly decrease your likelihood of having severe symptoms.

Cognitive Decline Isn't Always a Sign of Alzheimer's Disease: How Exercise Can Help



If you're of a certain age and have taken to searching "symptoms of dementia" when things slip your mind, two recent studies show potential good news.

One study finds that impaired cognition can be part of the range of normal aging and is not always an early sign of Alzheimer's disease. The second study finds that we may all have access to a "medicine" to help ward it off: exercise.

Both studies move the world closer to something that experts say has been long missing: a more detailed understanding of how brain health works.

"Think about all the things we know about the workings of the heart," Kaitlin Casaletto, PhD, a neuropsychologist and assistant professor at the UCSF Memory and Aging Center, told Healthline. "Now we're getting that kind of input for the brain."

Her team's study Trusted Source looked at how physical activity in later life relates to brain health.

Researchers looked at the brain health of more than 400 participants in the Memory and Aging Project at Rush University in Chicago, including information from those who have died and donated their brains to science.

Casaletto and her team found that activity, even in the oldest participants, helped the brain build "protective behaviors," something long suspected but not proven before.

"Our work is the first that uses human data to show that synaptic protein regulation is related to physical activity and may drive the beneficial cognitive outcomes we see," she said.

And while "synaptic protein regulation" - which is the function of cells, neurons, and receptor cells communicating - may sound complicated, spurring it in the body and brain is not.

Exercise of all kinds helps it work well.

"Physical activity - a readily available tool - may help boost this synaptic functioning," Casaletto said.

What it means for you

While more research is needed, Casaletto said her observational study indicates a positive link between exercise and cognitive health is getting clearer. "The golden question is how much activity is (a good choice) and what passes for enough?" she said. "We don't exactly know yet."

But there is much they do know.

"We know the more movement we have, the better," Casaletto said. And while researchers are hoping to refine suggested activity goals, she said that about 150 minutes of movement a week seems to be a good start.



Kangana Ranaut remembers Swami Vivekananda on his birthday: 'We accept all religions as true'

On Wednesday, actor Kangana Ranaut shared a picture of Swami Vivekananda on his birth anniversary. Kangana also wrote a heartfelt note in his honour. Sharing a picture of Vivekananda, Kangana wrote, "Warm Regards on Swami Vivekananda's birthday." She further added Vivekananda's quote that read, "I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal

acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true." Kangana Ranaut shares post on Swami Vivekananda Jayanti. (Instagram) Kangana had posted a tribute to him last year as well. Sharing a picture of Swami Vivekananda, she wrote on Twitter, "When I was lost you found me, when I had nowhere to go you held my hand when I was disillusioned by the world had no hope you gave me purpose. There is no being no God higher than you my Guru, you own every bit of my being...."

#NationalYouthDay

#SwamiVivekanandJayanti."

Kangana has received four National Film Awards in her career. One for the Best Supporting Actress for Fashion (2008) and three Best Actress awards, for Queen (2014), Tanu Weds Manu Returns (2015) and the third one for her performances in Manikarnika, the Queen of Jhansi (2019) and Panga (2020).

Kangana was last seen

in Thalaivii as J Jayalalithaa with Arvind Swami. Now, she will be seen next in Dhaakad with actors Arjun Rampal and Divya Dutta. In the film, Kangana will be seen in the role of Agent Agni. Besides this, Kangana also has Tejas in the pipeline.

In Tejas, she will be seen as an Indian Air Force fighter pilot. The film is directed by Sarvesh Mewara and is backed by Ronni Screwvala. Apart from this, she is currently producing Tiku Weds Sheru starring Nawazuddin Siddiqui and Avneet Kaur.

On Wednesday, actor Kangana Ranaut posted a picture of Swami Vivekananda along with a note, marking his birth anniversary

Karenvir Bohra 'really happy' about Mouni Roy's wedding news: 'I don't think she ever worried and she just waited'

Mouni Roy is reportedly all set to tie the knot with her rumoured boyfriend Suraj Nambiar in just a couple of weeks. Now, her colleague Karenvir Bohra has reacted to the news. As per reports, Mouni and Suraj will have a beach wedding on January 27 in Goa. The couple has booked a five-star hotel for the ceremony and invites are also being sent out. Karenvir, who worked with Mouni in Naagin, says that he is happy for her. "I got to know this amazing news and I am so happy for Mouni. I don't think she ever worried and she just waited. They say that the love that you always seek will come to you at the right time and right place and with the right person. What's meant to be will be, and it will be the love you always wanted. And it came true," he told India Today. He added, "She is happy and that's the most important part. And once again, I am really happy about it."

Karenvir Bohra has reacted to the news of Mouni Roy's wedding to Suraj Nambiar. The couple will reportedly tie the knot on January 27.

The rumours about Mouni and Suraj's alleged relationship started doing rounds in 2019 after Mouni's friend Roopali Kadyan (wife of Contiloe Films' Abhimanyu Singh) shared a picture of the couple from their holiday and deleted it later. Mouni told SpotBoye, "Not true. We are all a bunch of friends and we went together to celebrate my birthday. I am very much single and concentrating only on my work. I am sick of rumours and speculations." Mouni had her bachelorette party in Goa as well. Aashka Goradia and a bunch of other friends joined Mouni for the trip.

Mouni was earlier in a relationship with actor Gaurav Chopra but the two broke up in 2012. She later started dating actor Mohit Raina and the couple broke up in 2018. They never confirmed being in a relationship. In December, Mohit Raina also tied the knot with Aditi.



When Aamir Khan revealed why he was 'removed' from Yash Chopra's Darr: 'Mera ek principle hai...'

Actor Aamir Khan is known for being quite selective about the roles he picks. In an old interview, Aamir explained why he didn't star in Yash Chopra's hit film Darr, which released in 1993. Aamir, who supposed to be the part of the film, was replaced by Shah Rukh Khan. In an old interview, Aamir revealed why he was 'removed' from the project. Aamir said, "Story mujhe behad pasand thi or role bhi mujhe pasand tha (I really liked the story and the role).

ki woh humein sath bitha ke kahani sunayein. Which I am not sure is right or wrong but mein yeh policy follow karta hun (I have a principle that whenever I do a film with more than one hero, I request the director to do a joint narration. I am not sure if this is wrong or right but I follow this policy)."

He added, "Jaise jab Andaz Apna Apna jab bann rahi thi tabb Raj ne mujhe aur Salman ko sath mein bitha kar kahani sunai thi, dono ke

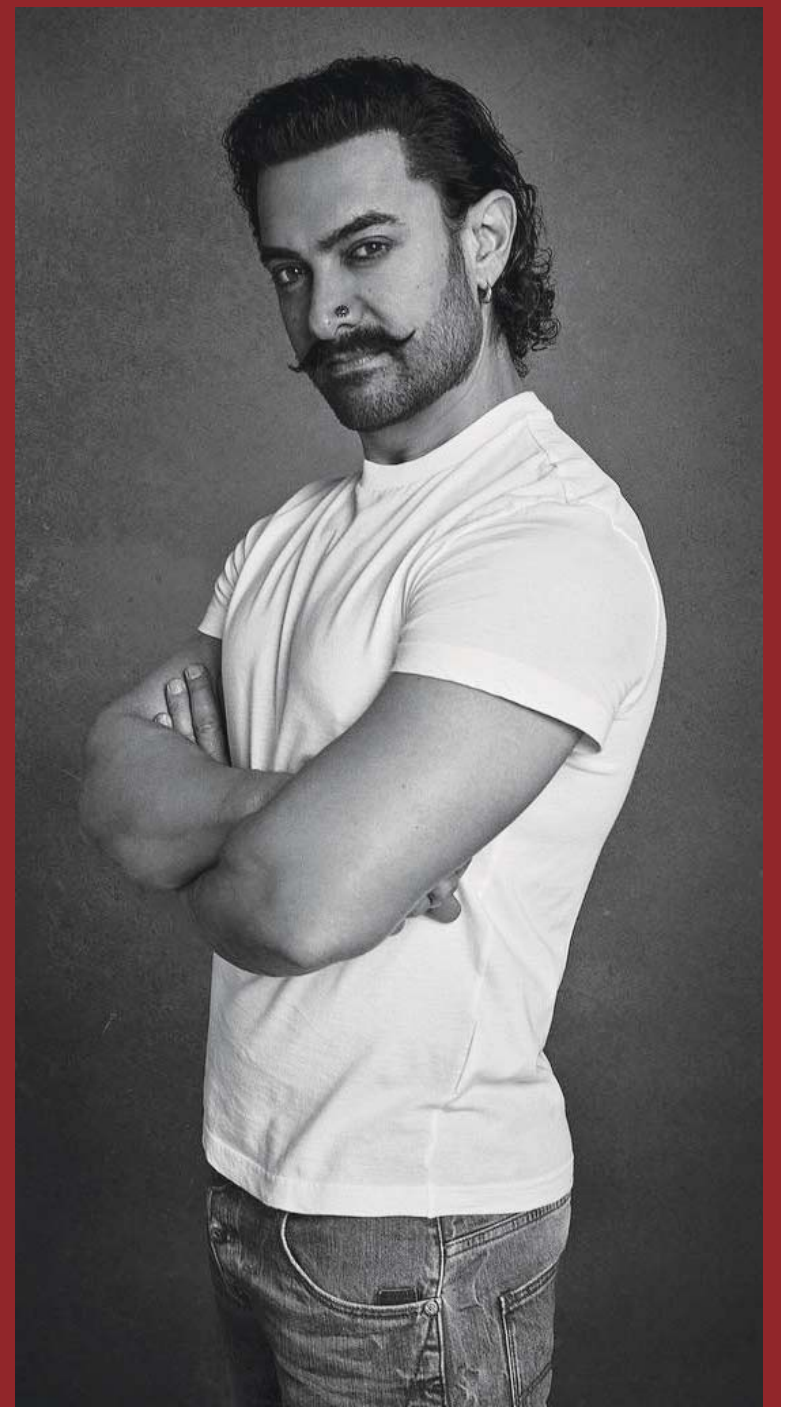
roles sunaye they, taaki hum dono satisfied ho humare roles ke sath jisse aage ja ke kuch problem na ho (Like in Andaz Apna Apna, Rajkumar Santoshi narrated the story to me and Salman, so that both of us do not have any issues with our roles). This is how I like to work." Aamir then explained how Yash Chopra was not ready to do a joint narration and said,

"Toh iss case mein that was not possible (In this case, the joint narration was not possible), Yash ji did not feel that he should give a joint narration toh on that basis I was removed from the project." After Aamir was out of the project, Shah Rukh Khan took up the role of Rahul Mehra in the film. The film also starred actors Sunny Deol and Juhi Chawla. Darr grossed ₹21.31 crore worldwide at that time.



Yash ji is definitely a very good director. I have done Parampara with him and I was also very keen to work with him."

He explained that he lost out on the project because of one of his work principles: "Lekin mera ek principle hai, aap ye principle kahein ya policy kahein, jab mein koi bhi film karta hun jismein two heroes ho, ya ek se zyada hero ho, toh mein director se request karta hun



Akshay Kumar turns up his Selfiee game with Emraan Hashmi, fan asks why he's wearing 'Ranveer Singh ka jacket'

Akshay Kumar and Emraan Hashmi are all geared up for their new film Selfiee, glimpses of which they shared on social media on Wednesday. On Instagram, fans drew out a Ranveer Singh connection to one of Akshay's posts. Akshay checked into Instagram with a few selfies, in tune with the film's name, and roped in co-star Emraan in one of them. While Marine Drive forms the backdrop of one photo, the second one shows Akshay and Emraan on a road trip.

"Kick-starting my day with a selfie! Because why not?" the 54-year-old actor captioned his post. For his photo-op, Akshay opted for a metallic jacket in gold and added aviator sunglasses to finish his look.

The comments section of Akshay's post was flooded with remarks on his golden jacket,

Akshay Kumar and Emraan Hashmi are all set for their new film Selfiee, glimpses of which they shared on social media on Wednesday



with one fan hilariously asking "Ye Ranveer ka jacket pehen ke pose maar rahe ho sir ji (Why are you posing in Ranveer's flamboyant sense of fashion. reference to Ranveer's jacket)?" The fan made a

Another fan wrote: "Bhai jacket sone ka pahena hai (He's wearing a gold jacket)," while one more added: "Ranveer baba ki jai ho, aap bhi sir. Gold barfi lag rahe ho (All hail Ranveer and you too. Looking like a gold barfi)".

In a separate post, Akshay wrote: "Found myself the perfect Selfiee partner! Hey Karan Johar, have we slayed this selfie game or what?". On his Instagram, Emraan added: "Joining the Selfiee club with Akshay", sharing similar posts. The film is said to be directed by Raj Mehta and produced by Karan Johar, whom Akshay has tagged in his post. Akshay's line-up of films also includes Prithviraj, Bachchan Pandey, Raksha Bandhan and Ram Setu. Emraan, last seen in Dybbuk, will also feature in Tiger 3.



The South Asian

INSIDER

Voice of South Asian Community

Since March 2002



The Home of
Solid Games
www.greystonegames.com

Vol. 20 Issue 47 Friday 14 January to 21 January 2022\$1

www.thesouthasianinsider.com

Jan. 6 Anniversary Exposes Two Opposing Truths

The rioters who stormed the U.S. Capitol building one year ago exposed a widening, terrifying, ugly rift between the far right and far left political factions in this country leaving our beloved Republic in peril



Story on
Pages
31-40

PASRICHA & PATEL LLC
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

See our full page advt. on page 35