

The South Asian

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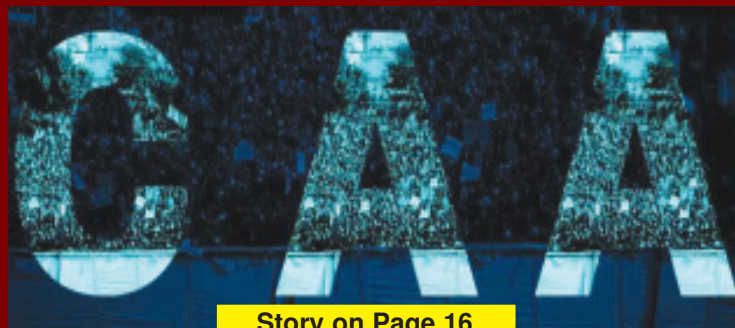
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# Launch of 'Chalo India – Global Diaspora Campaign'



The Consulate General of India, in New York organized a special event on the launch of 'Chalo India - Global Diaspora Campaign' on March 7, 2024.

2. 'Chalo India' is a unique initiative which was launched by Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, on March 7, 2024 at a public event in Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir. It is aimed at encouraging the Indian diaspora around the world to visit

India, and to inspire their friends and families to explore the vast and diverse tourism opportunities India offers.

3. The launch event at the Consulate was attended by many members of the Indian-American community, professionals, travel bloggers and representatives of the travel and tourism industry.

4. Speaking on the occasion, Consul

General Mr. Binaya S. Pradhan acknowledged the United States as the largest source of international tourists to India. He emphasized the significant potential for further growth, given India's rich cultural diversity and the state-of-the-art tourism infrastructure that has been developed in recent years.

5. Referring to the Indian diaspora as India's cultural ambassadors in the United States, Consul General encouraged them to travel more often to India, and invite at least five American friends of theirs to explore the plethora of tourism experiences in India.

6. Soon, a dedicated website on 'Chalo India Global Diaspora' would be The Chalo India website will open to diaspora members for account creation in due course. Visit <https://www.chaloindia.gov.in/> to register and get notified.

7. The Consulate General of India in New York holds regular thematic webinars promoting different facets of Indian tourism, such as wedding, destinations in India, beaches, river, cruises, adventure travel, spiritual tourism, health and well-being, tourism, etc. It also participates in several tourism related expose and shows bringing out the best that India offers to tourists in America.

## Family feud: Indian tycoon in US told to pay Rs 20,000 crore to 4 brothers

A United States jury ordered a hefty multibillion-dollar sum in damages in a legal feud involving five Indian-origin brothers.

The verdict came in a 21-year-old land dispute wherein Haresh Jogani was ordered to pay his four brothers over Rs 20,000 crore in damages and further divide up shares of their property empire in Southern California, as per a Bloomberg report.

The 2003 lawsuit, which finally came to a head with a jury awarding billions and property division, had undergone 18 appeals, generations of attorneys and five judges in the Los Angeles Superior Court. The trial began over allegations that Haresh Jogani had breached a long-standing partnership with his siblings. As per reports, the hearing on punitive damages is listed for Monday, and it



could see an addition to the existing Rs 20,000 crore award.

The case has also drawn parallels from some lawyers to the fictional Victorian-era probate case that the famous Charles

Dickens wrote about in his novel -- Bleak House. Jogani v. Jogani is the new Jarndyce v. Jarndyce, but with a twist, Bloomberg reported.

"At the end of the book (Bleak House),

there was no money, hence the name. That is not the case here. There are billions here that remain to be distributed," the report quoted one of the attorneys representing Chetan and Rajesh Jogani.

The Jogani brothers, natives of Gujarat, erected a fortune in the global diamond trade, with a presence in Europe, Africa, North America and the Middle East. Shashikant Jogani moved to California in 1969 and started his firm in the gem business and property portfolio, as per the complaint he filed in 2003.

In the early 1990s, when properties suffered losses in the recession, Shashikant Jogani brought his brothers on board and made them his firm partners. As per his complaint, Haresh Jogani ended the collaboration and "forcibly removed" his sibling from managing the firm and refused to pay him.



# How Indian students are creating a boom at US universities

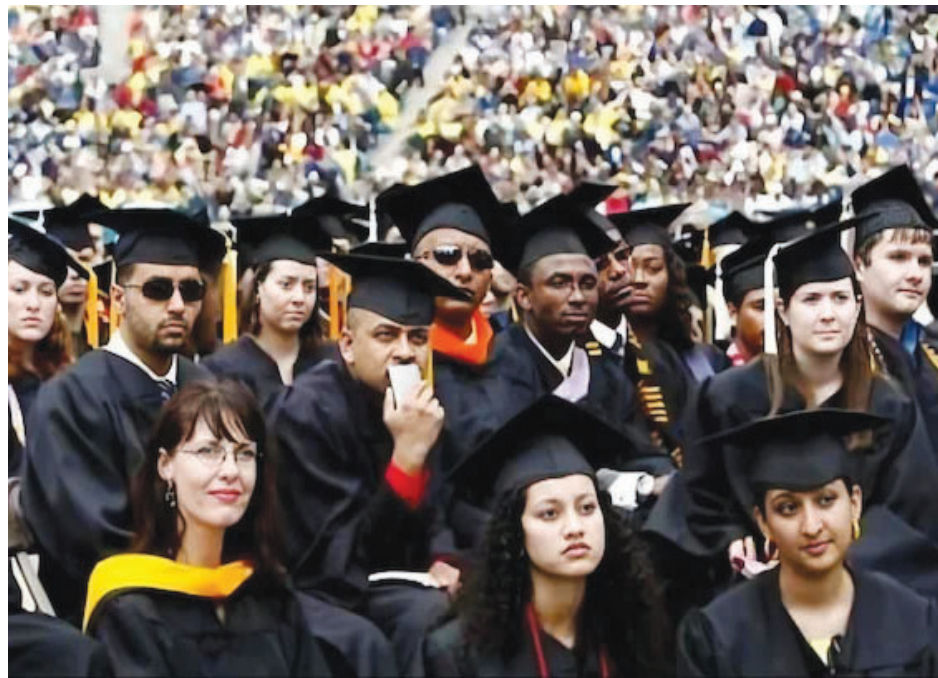
**Indian students showed an impressive increase of about 35% in enrolment for the academic year 2022-23 compared to the previous year. Some prestigious Indian universities accept as few as 0.2% of applicants, whereas Harvard University accepts around 3%, and MIT around 4%.**

Indian students are increasingly choosing to study at US universities, creating a boom for American Universities. The number of Indian students in the US has skyrocketed, with a staggering 35% increase in just one year. Currently, there are over 250,000 students from India at US universities.

A yearning for better career prospects drives this trend. Indian students believe that a US degree unlocks doors to higher-paying jobs and opportunities not readily available at home. It is estimated that 1.5 million students are studying at universities elsewhere — an eightfold increase since 2012 — with no country attracting more than the US, according to the Associated Press. Universities in Australia and the United Kingdom are also seeing surging interest, but none more than the US, where universities enrol nearly 269,000 students from India.

In fact, Canada, which had earlier been a favourite of Indian students because of the North American country's easy permanent residency and citizenship norms, seems to have fallen out of favour recently.

Until August 2023, Canada stood among the top foreign study destinations for Indian students. However, a shift occurred from



October to December 2023, when an 86% decline was seen in the issuance of study permits to Indian students.

However, another North American country has gained.

In 2023, a surge in global student enrolment marked a positive shift in US higher education, with over a million students worldwide choosing to study in the United States, reflecting a 12%

increase from the previous year, according to the Associated Press.

This rise was significantly fuelled by Indian students, who showed an impressive increase of about 35% in 2022-23 in enrolment compared to the previous year, making India a top priority for undergraduate and graduate programmes, with a notable focus on Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities. For India, it's

not good news because many students view universities as a way to find jobs in other countries. But for American Universities, it's a positive thing.

With fewer students from China enrolling, US universities are now looking to India as a new source of income for students paying full tuition fees.

## CHALLENGES FACED BY INDIAN STUDENTS

India's higher education system doesn't have enough space either. With the population growing rapidly, getting into top Indian universities has become extremely competitive.

Some prestigious Indian universities now accept as few as 0.2% of applicants, whereas Harvard University accepts around 3%, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) around 4%, reported the Associated Press.

Lokesh Sangabattula, a student from India pursuing a Ph.D. in materials science at MIT, is one of many aiming to secure employment within the US. He explained to the Associated Press that there's minimal demand for materials scientists in India, and at most, he could potentially become a professor.

## FBI searching for KC-area victims in multimillion-dollar Ponzi scheme

The Federal Bureau of Investigation is looking for potential Kansas City-area victims in a multimillion-dollar Ponzi scheme.

A St. Louis-area grand jury indicted

more than \$35 million from investors, but only spent about \$10 million on investing in companies.

The indictment says Jawahar used money from new investors to repay older investors — but he also used the money to “fuel an extravagant lifestyle that included flights on private planes, stays at luxury hotels and expensive outings at lavish restaurants.”

Prosecutors say, starting in 2015, the 36-year-old began investing majority of client funds into a single investment. Eventually 99% of client funds were consolidated into that investment. But Jawahar didn't tell his clients of the investment's drastic decline in value, the indictment says, instead misleading them about their profits. Texas authorities also revoked Swiftarc Capital's authority to conduct investment activities in 2022, but prosecutors say Jawahar continued

to fraudulently solicit and receive investor funds. At a Feb. 16 detention hearing, federal prosecutors said the FBI has located victims in St. Louis and Kansas City, but also across the country, including Miami, Los Angeles, Cleveland, New York, San Francisco and Austin.



investment advisor Siddharth Jawahar in December on three counts of wire fraud and one count of investment adviser fraud. Jawahar ran a Texas-based investment company called Swiftarc Capital LLC. Prosecutors say from July 2016 to December 2023, Jawahar took

## NYC landlords facing \$10K fines move to evict 75 illegal weed stores: 'Finally opened their eyes'

Under threat of \$10,000 fines — have moved to evict 75 retail tenants who were selling cannabis without a license, city officials said Tuesday.

Mayor Eric Adams' task force on cannabis enforcement in November sent notices to 435 landlords, warning them

Anthony Miranda told The Post Tuesday. “The landlords finally opened their eyes. Some of them didn't know what was going on.”

The letter from the task force — which includes the sheriff's office, NYPD and Mayor's Office of Special Enforcement —

noted that landlords could be fined under the law for aiding and abetting illegal activity. “The unlicensed sale of tobacco or cannabis products by a tenant may result in legal liability for the owner or landlord of the building where it is occurring. If you are the owner or landlord of this building, it is your responsibility to ensure



that the premises are operated in accordance with applicable law,” it said. Landlords were in negotiations with 16 other tenants fingered for operating as unlicensed cannabis stores, officials said Tuesday. But there's a way to go to weed out the illicit marijuana storefronts, authorities said.

they faced stiff fines because it was determined that their retail tenants were illegally peddling pot. Officials said 91 property owners responded that they had evicted or forced out tenants at 15 locations and were proceeding to do so at 60 other buildings. “The letters have been successful. We've gotten a positive response from landlords,” city Sheriff



# The 21st Century India is the India of big vision and big goals: PM Modi

JAG MOHAN THAKEN

Chandigarh (India) Reiterating his government's holistic vision for infrastructure development in the Delhi-NCR region, Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasized the timely completion of major projects such as the Dwarka Expressway, Peripheral Expressways, and the Delhi-Meerut Expressway. These projects, along with the expansion of metro lines and the construction of international airports, are aimed at easing traffic congestion and reducing pollution in the region. "The 21st Century India is India of big vision and big goals", the Prime Minister asserted.

The Prime Minister Modi said while inaugurating and laying the foundation stone of 112 National Highway projects spread across the country worth about Rs. One lakh crore at Gurugram, Haryana on Monday. Lakhs of people connected with the event from all over the country through technology.

Speaking on the occasion, the Prime Minister noted the change from the culture of holding programmes in Delhi to holding big programmes in other parts of the country. He said that today the nation has taken another big and important step towards modern connectivity. Expressing happiness on dedicating the Haryana section of the landmark Dwarka Expressway, PM Modi said that this will change the travel experience between Delhi and Haryana forever and "will shift gear not just in the vehicles but also in the lives of the people of the region".

Emphasizing the change of speed in implementation of projects, the Prime Minister said that in less than three months of 2024, projects worth more than Rs 10 lakh crore have been either dedicated to the nation or foundation stone has been laid for them.



PM Modi emphasized the transformative impact of infrastructure development, highlighting the shift from problems to possibilities. He underscored the significance of converting challenges into opportunities, a hallmark of his governance. Prime Minister cited the example of the Dwarka Expressway as a testament to his government's commitment to transforming obstacles into avenues for growth. He reminisced how, in the past, the area where the expressway is now built was considered unsafe, with people avoiding it even after sunset. However, today, it serves as a hub for major corporations, contributing to the rapid development of the National Capital Region (NCR).

PM Modi highlighted the strategic importance of the Dwarka Expressway, connecting it to the Indira Gandhi International Airport in Delhi. He emphasized that such infrastructure projects enhance connectivity, leading to accelerated economic activities and improved integration of the NCR.

Further, Prime Minister Modi praised the

efforts of the Haryana government, particularly Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, in ensuring the timely completion of infrastructure projects. He commended their dedication to modernizing the state's infrastructure, which is crucial for Viksit Haryana and Viksit Bharat.

Modi emphasized the link between infrastructure development and poverty alleviation, highlighting how improved roads and digital connectivity in rural areas create new opportunities for villagers. He noted the emergence of new possibilities in rural India, driven by digital infrastructure and access to essential services like healthcare and education. "Initiatives like this have helped in pulling 25 crore Indians out of poverty in the last 10 years and India has become the 5th largest global economy" he further added "This rapid infrastructure construction work in the country will make India the third largest economic power in the world." Prime Minister reiterated the government's commitment to accelerating infrastructure

development across India. He emphasized that such initiatives not only strengthen the country's economy but also create numerous employment opportunities, particularly for the youth. PM Modi mentioned many long pending projects completed by the present government such as Eastern Peripheral Expressway (announced in 2008 completed in 2018), Dwarka Expressway too was stuck for the last 20 years. "Today, whatever work our government lays the foundation stone of, it works equally hard to complete it on time. And then we do not see whether there are elections or not", he said. Projects like lakhs of kilometres of optic fibers in the villages, airports in small cities, ruler roads, are completed irrespective of the election time, he said.

The Prime Minister said "earlier there were delays, now there are deliveries. Earlier there was delay, now there is development." He said that focus is on to create a 9 thousand KM high speed corridor out of which 4 thousand KM is already constructed. Metro reached 21 cities as compared to 5 cities in 2014. "This work is done with the vision of development. These things happen when the intentions are right. This pace of development will increase manifold in the next 5 years", the Prime Minister concluded.

Speaking on the occasion, the Union Minister for Road, Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari said that today's inauguration of the Dwarka Expressway is a state-of-the-art project. He appreciated Haryana Chief Minister, for giving full cooperation in the development plan, saying that his contribution has been significant in completing this project.

## "Key Issues" That Citizenship Law CAA May Solve: Sources

The Government implemented the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Act or CAA on Monday, four years after the controversial law was passed. The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, seeks to grant Indian citizenship to refugees who had sought shelter in India before December 31, 2014, due to religious persecution in three neighbouring countries -- Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

The Government has now spelt out the "key issues" that the implementation of CAA might be able to solve.

The CAA would help to remove "legal barriers to rehabilitation and citizenship" and "give a dignified life to refugees who have suffered for decades", the government sources explained. They asserted that citizenship rights will protect the cultural, linguistic, and social identity of the refugees while ensuring



economic, commercial, free movement, and property purchase rights.

Amid sharp criticism from the opposition rank, the Centre categorically said that CAA "will not take away citizenship of any

Indian citizen, irrespective of religion".

"This Act is only for those who have suffered persecution for years and have no other shelter in the world except India," they said.

The Congress and other Opposition parties have slammed the move, alleging the new law that was implemented just days before the announcement of the election schedule was designed to polarise the Lok Sabha polls, especially in West Bengal and Assam. The Constitution of India grants the government the right to provide citizenship from a humanitarian perspective to refugees who faced religious persecution in their countries. Listen to the latest songs, only on JioSaavn.com The Government also clarified that the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act was delayed due to the Covid pandemic. In its 2019 manifesto, the ruling BJP said it was committed to enacting the Citizenship Amendment Bill for the protection of persecuted religious minorities from neighbouring countries.



# Prez Murmu departs for Mauritius to attend National Day celebrations

In a further fillip to India-Mauritius ties, President Droupadi Murmu on Monday embarked on a state visit to the island nation from March 11-13 to attend the National Day celebrations as a chief guest. A contingent of the Indian Navy will also participate in the March 12 celebrations along with two Ships of the Indian Navy's First Training Squadron — INS Tir and CGS Sarathi.

"A new milestone in India-Mauritius ties. President Droupadi Murmu embarks on a state visit to Mauritius. President will attend the Mauritius National Day celebrations as the Chief Guest tomorrow," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a post on X. During the visit, President Murmu and Mauritius Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth will jointly inaugurate 14 India-assisted projects, showcasing



the growing expanse and multifaceted nature of India's development partnership.

Her visit comes days after Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Jugnauth jointly inaugurated a new airstrip and a jetty along with six other community development projects in Agalega Island.

"As the sixth Indian President to grace the Mauritian National Day as the Chief Guest since 2000, President Droupadi Murmu's state visit underscores the longstanding and enduring ties between India and Mauritius," Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson, Randhir Jaiswal, had said in an announcement last

week. President Murmu will also hold bilateral meetings with her Mauritius counterpart Prithvirajsing Roopun and PM Jugnauth.

In addition, she will meet the Speaker of the Mauritius National Assembly, the Chief Justice of the Mauritian Supreme Court, and other

important Mauritian leaders.

According to an MEA release, the President will also witness the exchange of the key bilateral agreements that seek to strengthen the robust bilateral institutional collaboration and capacity-building cooperation between the two countries.

She will pay homage to Mauritian leaders at the Pamplemousses Botanical Garden and also visit historical and cultural sites.

This includes visits to the Apravasi Ghat, where Indian indentured labourers first arrived in Mauritius, the Intercontinental Slavery Museum, and the sacred Ganga Talao.

Additionally, she will address Mauritian youth at the University of Mauritius and socio-cultural organisations, members of the Indian diaspora, and the Indian community at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute.

## EAM Jaishankar calls FTA with four European nations 'a bold achievement'

New Delhi—Calling the signing of the India-EFTA Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) a "bold achievement", External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said on Sunday that the move reflects a new way of furthering international economic collaboration. India inked the landmark agreement with the four-nation European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in New Delhi to usher in increased trade and investment flows, job creation, and economic growth in the country.

"A great day for India's partnership with Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland," EAM Jaishankar wrote on X as he congratulated his colleague and Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal for the pact that had been under negotiations for the last 16 years. "The India-EFTA Trade & Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) signed today is a bold achievement. It reflects a new way of furthering international economic



collaboration," the minister added.

On the sidelines of the India-EFTA meeting, S. Jaishankar also met Bjarni Benediktsson, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Iceland.

"Good meeting with FM @Bjarni\_Ben of Iceland on India-EFTA meeting sidelines. Discussed new areas of collaboration, investment and trade," the minister said on X. Speaking at the inaugural session

of the 2nd CII India Europe Business and Sustainability Conclave last month, S. Jaishankar underlined that "Europe is truly a priority for India".

Earlier Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailed the pact — which was formalised three days after the cabinet approved it on March 7 — as a "watershed moment" for India, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein.

The EFTA-India TEPA was signed by Piyush Goyal; Guy Parmelin, Swiss Federal Councillor and Head of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research; Bjarni Benediktsson, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Iceland; Dominique Hasler, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Liechtenstein and Jan Christian Vestre, Minister of Trade and Industry, Norway. Addressing the event,

Goyal called TEPA a binding agreement for the EFTA nations to invest \$100 billion over 15 years in India, the world's fastest-growing economy.

An official readout by the European Free Trade Association said that the agreement enhances market access and simplifies customs procedures, making it easier for Indian and EFTA businesses to expand their operations in the respective markets.

"The signature of this agreement marks a significant milestone in the relationships between the EFTA States and India. It reflects the culmination of dedicated efforts to foster a deeper economic partnership, underscoring the importance of dialogue, cooperation, and mutual understanding," the readout said.

Since 2014, India has signed three such agreements with Mauritius, the UAE, and Australia, and it is also negotiating trade pacts with countries like the UK, Oman, Peru, and Israel.



## Bhutan premier to arrive in India for bilateral talks with PM Modi



(News Agency)-Bhutan Prime Minister Dasho Tshering Tobgay will arrive in India on Thursday to expand the enduring ties of friendship and cooperation between the two nations. In his first overseas visit from March 14-18 after assuming office in January, 2024, PM Tobgay will hold bilateral talks with PM Modi and call on President Droupadi Murmu.

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and several other Indian dignitaries will also be meeting PM Tobgay who will also be travelling to Mumbai during his visit.

"The visit of the Prime Minister of Bhutan will provide an opportunity to the two sides to review the progress in our unique

partnership and to discuss ways and means to expand the enduring ties of friendship and cooperation between India and Bhutan," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a release on Wednesday. PM Tobgay will be accompanied by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Minister for Industry, Commerce and Employment, and other senior officials from the Royal Government of Bhutan.

India and Bhutan enjoy exemplary ties of friendship and cooperation, based on trust, goodwill, and mutual understanding at all levels.

## New vehicles in Telangana will now use 'TG' prefix

(News Agency)-New vehicles in Telangana will now use 'TG' prefix in registration numbers as the new Congress government has changed the state's abbreviation. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has issued a gazette notification in this regard.

He had said: "TG was replaced by 'TS' only to suit the TRS party. No other state in the country has 'state' in the alphabet component in the vehicle registration number."

Following the new gazette notification, the state will now have vehicles with three abbreviations.



The state government had last month decided to change the state's abbreviation.

After formation of Telangana state in 2014, then TRS government had opted 'TS' as the state abbreviation.

The Congress government said "the previous government did not follow any rule and rhyme and decided to go with 'TS' as per its whims."

During the election campaign, Congress leader Revanth Reddy had announced that if his party is voted to power, it will change the abbreviation.

While the new vehicles to be registered in the state will have 'TG' prefix, the vehicles registered earlier with 'TS' will retain the same prefix. The state also has a large number of vehicles with abbreviation 'AP' as Telangana was part of united Andhra Pradesh before becoming a separate state in 2014.

While opting for 'TS' abbreviation earlier, the government did not make it compulsory for owners of 'AP' vehicles to change the number plates. Similarly, the present government has decided to apply 'TG' prefix only for new vehicles.

## BJP slams Shiv Sena's unilateral declaration of Nashik LS candidate

(News Agency)-Senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Pravin Darekar has slammed ruling ally Shiv Sena after the latter 'unilaterally' announced sitting two-time MP Hemant Godse as its candidate for the prestigious Nashik Lok Sabha seat, here on Wednesday.

Another BJP leader from Nashik, Dinkar Patil, said that Shinde's announcement has no worth, and several other functionaries also flayed the development that suggest cracks in the MahaYuti.

The BJP's response came after Shiv Sena MP Shrikant E. Shinde – son of party President and Chief Minister Eknath Shinde – rattled the ruling MahaYuti alliance by 'declaring' Godse as its nominee from Nashik Lok Sabha constituency.

"Shrikant Shinde has no authority to decide on this. The three allies will jointly discuss this and then select the appropriate candidate. People keep

demanding any seat they want, but only those who are suitable will be allotted the particular constituency," said Pravin Darekar.

He added that if the CM had made such an announcement, he would have done it after discussing with the MahaYuti allies – the Shiv Sena-Bharatiya Janata Party-Nationalist Congress Party.

On March 12, Shinde shook the MahaYuti by making the statement amid a thunderous applause at a Karyakarta Samvad of the party which was attended by District Guardian Minister Dada Bhuse and others. Shinde said that he has witnessed Godse's hard work in the parliament and the Nashik-kars' love for him, and "let me assure that the Nashik seat will be contested by the Shiv Sena and the candidate will be none other than Godse." The surprise announcement came barely 48 hours after another strong contender Swami Shantigiri Maharaj met

CM Shinde on Sunday to stake his claim, which also has support from a section of the BJP.

Taken aback by the sudden twist on Tuesday, Swami Shantigiri Maharaj on Wednesday indicated that if he was not given a ticket by the MahaYuti, then he would contest as an independent.

On his part, Godse took a potshot at other strong contenders for the Nashik seat within the MahaYuti, asking them "not to get upset" by his candidature as the senior leaders are taking the decisions, besides referring to his good work as MP for the past two terms.

To a question whether he would give a 'hat-trick' performance, Godse guardedly said that "it will be decided by the electorate of Nashik" who are seeing the development work and party building that I have done in the past 10 years.

A Lok Sabha MP from Kalyan, Shinde said that Nashik is a Shiv Sena bastion

and as important as Thane (the CM's home district) for the party.

"The Nashik people have always stood behind Shiv Sena and Balasaheb Thackeray. Little wonder that Godse was elected twice from here. This (2024) is an important election for PM Narendra Modi and CM Shinde, so we have decided that our candidate (Godse) should be someone who has a good track record in the constituency," asserted Shinde.

Godse also lauded the PM and CM for their people-oriented policies keeping the common man as the centre, strong leadership and taking bold decision in the national interest which would ensure that a MahaYuti candidate will be re-elected by the masses in Nashik. Even as his party workers were told "to get down to work", Godse said that he has already covered 90 per cent of the pre-election tour of his constituency and complete the remaining in the next couple of days.



# What Hunter Biden and Donald Trump have in common

## Congress is right to want to curtail TikTok's power and influence

Hunter Biden won't be returning to the spotlight next week as the House Oversight Committee had hoped. He declined Chairman James Comer's invitation to publicly testify following a February closed-door Capitol Hill deposition before congressional Republicans as part of their impeachment inquiry into Hunter's father, President Joe Biden. Hunter Biden's refusal to take part in the committee's "circus act," in the words of his attorney, comes after former FBI informant Alexander Smirnov was charged with lying about the Biden family's overseas dealings and told investigators he was feeding the FBI information about the Biden family that had been provided by Russian intelligence officials. If you've served as a federal prosecutor long enough, then you've had confidential informants lie to you. That's why you never bring charges based solely on their word; you corroborate them through and through, and you develop independent sources of evidence.

Smirnov had been touted as a cornerstone of the Republicans' impeachment case, and observers are questioning whether there's anything left in the Republican attacks given the demise of this key source. The problem with the Hunter Biden investigation, though, is not its potential reliance on the word of a compromised informant. We don't know how much – if any – of the prosecution's evidence came from Smirnov. And, to their credit, prosecutors did not hesitate to arrest him. Smirnov has pleaded not guilty.

Questions about Smirnov will be important to resolve, but they raise broader concerns about how prosecutors have treated Hunter Biden, especially in his most significant federal case involving tax charges. In December, he was charged in a nine-count indictment consisting of three felony and six misdemeanor tax offenses for alleged failures to pay and file taxes, tax evasion and filing false tax returns. According to the government, he faces a maximum sentence of 17 years, though the indictment correctly acknowledges that his practical exposure is less significant. He has pleaded not guilty.

The issue with that case was evident long before the latest developments. (Indeed, on its face, the tax indictment doesn't appear to be tainted by Smirnov-provided information, and the closed-door deposition last month purported to focus on efforts to impeach Hunter Biden's father instead of focusing on any charges pending against the younger Biden.) But it brings into focus the undue resources and attention that Hunter has received from prosecutors. While the tax prosecution may be legally sound and constitutional, it is still deeply unfair. The investigation into the president's son – much like those into former President Donald Trump – has become so politicized and polarizing that

most people cannot seem to process any shades of gray or nuance. It has become a binary choice for most: witch hunt or crime of the century, a righteous prosecution or a political hit job, right or wrong.

The truth is, if Hunter Biden had a different father, he likely would not have been charged at all, and certainly not through the overkill of a sensationalized 56-page tax indictment. That doesn't mean he didn't commit the alleged crimes. It does mean that he is most likely being treated differently simply because of his last name. Having worked with the Department of Justice Tax Division and prosecuted tax offenses, I know that for first-time offenders, the IRS would usually just impose financial penalties for late payments. In rarer cases, particularly where the conduct is egregious or involves tax returns of many individuals (like in cases of crooked tax preparers), an ambitious prosecutor might open a criminal investigation. More often than not, that investigation would be resolved with a non-prosecution agreement or deferred prosecution agreement – a promise not to pursue charges if the person behaves – or the type of misdemeanor plea to which Hunter and the government agreed last year before the deal fell apart.

But that's not how this case was handled. And in that sense, Hunter Biden shares something in common with an unlikely person: Trump, at least with respect to his criminal case in New York.

Yes, if the allegations are true, then much of Hunter Biden's recent life appears to have been filled with debauchery and crimes. Yes, at least some of those crimes are chargeable. And yes, if there was evidence that his father participated in any of those crimes, a deep and wide-ranging investigation would be worthwhile. But that is not this case. Much like the gun charge against Hunter Biden, the tax indictment has left many former federal white-collar prosecutors like me scratching their heads. Tax charges, unlike their sexier wire fraud and money laundering cousins, are not prosecutors' favorites.

In addition to the bureaucratic hurdles that must be cleared – the DOJ's Tax Division must be consulted just to take routine investigatory steps – tax crimes generally require an elevated level of knowledge and intent by the perpetrator, the most difficult element to prove for any white-collar offense. It is not enough, for example, that a defendant simply failed to file tax returns, or that he did so knowingly; prosecutors must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the failure was "willful." If Hunter Biden fights this case through trial, a jury would have to find that he intentionally and voluntarily violated his duty to file taxes, and that his failure did not stem from a misunderstanding (however unreasonable) of the law.

**By Andrey Spektor**

Imagine a world where America's foreign adversaries don't need spies or hackers to infiltrate our society or meddle with our democracy. Instead, they can deploy a far more insidious tool: a digital platform, addictive by design, that captivates its users and then mobilizes them to influence our democratic institutions.

The scenario may sound farfetched, but something like that recently happened. Earlier this month, while the US Congress was considering a bill that would curtail TikTok's operations in the United States, the popular, Chinese-owned social media platform confronted its users with a kind of digital ransom note calling for political action. As the New York Times reported, TikTok's campaign sparked a deluge of calls to Capitol Hill, overwhelming some congressional offices and demonstrating the platform's political influence.

TikTok, whose parent company is the Beijing-based ByteDance, is alarmingly addictive and has a young and intensely loyal user base. It's so addictive, in fact, that the Chinese version of the app, Douyin, limits Chinese users under the age of 14 to 40 minutes of usage a day, and only between the hours of 6am and 10pm. TikTok introduced a similar measure in the US last year, restricting users under 18 to a default limit of 60 minutes a day, though the feature is optional; certain high-usage users are asked to accept a limit, according to ABC News, but are allowed to decide their own maximum.

TikTok's recommender algorithm, which barrages users with an endless feed of viral, short-form video clips, has effectively exploited human psychology to ensnare a generation of users. Research, including studies funded by China's own National Natural Science Foundation, have shown that the app undermines human

self-control and encourages compulsive consumption. Its algorithms, which automatically curate content to users' tastes and preferences, have perfected what many other companies have tried: fostering addiction through a feedback loop that continually refines content suggestions based on user interactions and profiling.

Researchers have suggested that excessive TikTok usage among young people correlates to mental health problems and poor academic performance that further drives depression. With nearly one in five teens reporting that they're on YouTube or TikTok "almost constantly", the draw to the platform seems less like a choice and more like a compulsion.

The FBI director Christopher Wray's recent testimony to the Senate intelligence committee also underscored the national security risks posed by the Chinese government's control of software on millions of American devices. Those risks, as well as TikTok's generally addictive nature, are part of what led to growing momentum for a US legislative response. On Wednesday, the US House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly in favor of a bill that would compel ByteDance to either sell TikTok to a US company or face a ban on distribution through major platforms and app stores. President Joe Biden has expressed support for the bill, which enjoys strong bipartisan backing, and indicated he is ready to sign it into law after it is passed by the Senate.

By contrast, Donald Trump, whose administration sought to ban TikTok due to the risk of Chinese government surveillance, has reversed his stance in what seems like a strategically motivated pivot to court younger voters and perhaps China.

**By Nita Farahany**



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# Perils of Freebie Politics:

## A Deep Dive into Haiti's Descent into Chaos

**Written By: Group Capt MJ Augustine Vinod VSM (Retd) & Squadron Leader Varsha Kukreti (Retd)**

In the heart of the Caribbean, Haiti's tumultuous journey has been marked by a series of catastrophic events and political mismanagement, pushing the nation into a state of civil unrest unparalleled in its history. The country's current plight, characterised by extreme poverty, violence, and even reports of cannibalism, is a testament to the destructive power of freebie politics and the failure of its leadership to steer the nation toward stability and prosperity. This article explores the multifaceted crisis in Haiti, examining the root causes of its collapse and the dire consequences that have followed.

**THE COLLAPSE OF HAITI: A MOSAIC OF MISFORTUNE**  
Haiti's descent into chaos is not a result of a single event but rather a confluence of several



factors that have compounded over time. The term "freebie politics" refers to the practice of political leaders using short-term handouts or benefits to win support from the populace, often at the expense of long-term development and governance. In Haiti, this approach has been rampant, with leaders offering immediate gratifications to secure loyalty while neglecting the fundamental aspects of

nation-building, such as infrastructure, education, and healthcare.

The repercussions of such politics are evident in the nation's economic stagnation and lack of public services, making it increasingly vulnerable to crises. When disasters strike, be it natural or man-made, the fragility of Haiti's institutions becomes starkly apparent, leaving the population to bear the

brunt of the fallout. **CANNIBALISM AND THE EXODUS OF DIPLOMATS: A NEW LOW**

Recent reports from Haiti have been alarming, with instances of cannibalism emerging as a stark indicator of the dire humanitarian crisis. Such extreme acts of desperation highlight the severe food scarcity and breakdown of social order in the country. The international community has been shaken by these developments, leading to the evacuation of embassies, including that of the United States, signalling a loss of faith in Haiti's ability to safeguard foreign nationals and maintain diplomatic relations.

The vacuum created by the departure of international diplomats has exacerbated the sense of abandonment among Haitians, further destabilising the already volatile situation. The international community's response, or lack thereof, will play a crucial role in determining

Haiti's future trajectory.

**THE IMPACT OF COVID-19**

The pandemic has been a global disruptor, but its effects on already vulnerable nations like Haiti have been particularly devastating. The health crisis has overwhelmed the country's fragile healthcare system, leading to widespread suffering and further economic decline. The pandemic has also interrupted the already limited foreign aid and investment, deepening the nation's isolation and compounding its challenges.

**MILITARY AND POLITICAL MISMANAGEMENT: A LEGACY OF DYSFUNCTION**

Haiti's history is marred by a succession of military coups and unstable governments, with leaders often prioritising personal gain or political survival over the well-being of the nation. This pattern of mismanagement has eroded trust in public institutions and fostered a climate of impunity and corruption.

## My feeling about this presidential election? Nauseous optimism

By Robert Reich

I feel a nauseous optimism about the presidential election.

I chose the word nauseous over cautious because my stomach is churning at the very possibility Trump could get a second term. But I don't believe that will happen. The progressive forces in America are overtaking the regressive.

I'm not paying attention to polls. It's way too early to worry about them. Most of the public hasn't even focused on the upcoming election. Biden gave a powerful State of the Union address — feisty, bold, energetic and upbeat. He was combative — taking on Trump with gusto, even besting Republican hecklers like Marjorie Taylor Greene. I'm convinced he's equipped to win re-election.

The broad American public is starting to see just how weird Maga Republicans really are. Republicans comprise only 28% of voting Americans. More than 40% of voters consider themselves independent, unaffiliated with either party. Most

of these independents don't want the unhinged running the government.

During the State of the Union, Americans saw Republicans heckle and boo Biden and then sit on their hands when Biden declared that "No child should go hungry in this country." Hello?

And the official Republican response to Biden's speech by the Alabama senator Katie Britt was, to say the least, bizarre. Delivered from her kitchen, her rebuttal vacillated from wholesome to horrific. The centerpiece of her attack on

Biden's border policies was a story about a 12-year-old Mexican girl who was sexually trafficked and raped multiple times a day at the hands of cartels before escaping. But the girl was not, in fact, trafficked across the US border; she never sought asylum in America; and her terrifying experience occurred when George W Bush was in the White House. Britt's oddball performance baffled

even fellow rightwingers. "What the hell am I watching right now?" a Trump adviser asked Rolling Stone. "One of our biggest disasters ever," a Republican strategist told the Daily Beast. The Republican party is so out of touch with American values that



it's putting up outspoken bigots for major offices.

Case in point: Mark Robinson, who won the Republican nomination for governor of North Carolina last Tuesday night, has hurled hateful remarks at everyone from Michelle Obama to the survivors of the Parkland school shooting. He's called homosexuality and transgenderism "filth" and formerly

said he wants to outlaw all abortions. He's also ridiculed the #MeToo movement, women generally and the climate crisis. Oh, and he has a history of Holocaust denialism and antisemitic remarks. He's suggested that 9/11 was an "inside job", that Hollywood and the music industry are run by Satan, and that the billionaire Democratic donor George Soros orchestrated the Boko Haram kidnappings of schoolgirls in 2014. (Robinson denies he is antisemitic, and has said that some of his claims were "poorly phrased".)

Robinson is hardly the only rather out-there Republican nominee, but he typifies the grotesque values of Maga leaders, including those of the Republican party's likely presidential candidate. Of course, the reason these bigots and haters are fighting so hard to defeat us is they know progressives are the future of America.

Neither their filibusters, nor their gerrymanders, nor their attempts at voter suppression can stop our rise — nor can their absurd "great replacement theory" or their supreme court majority.

I've been at this game for almost three-quarters of a century. It's a long game, and America still has a long way to go. But apart from Trump fanatics, the nation is in many ways better and stronger now than it has ever been — more inclusive, tolerant, diverse, accepting, dynamic. And it will be far better and stronger years from now, because we are rising. Sure, we must do better at organizing, mobilizing and energizing. We need elected lawmakers, along with judges and supreme court justices, who reflect our beliefs and values. The Democratic party must be bolder at countering the power of big corporations and big money, and more aggressive in recruiting and supporting a new generation of progressive leaders in electoral politics.



# "The Biden-Trump Rematch and the Historical Context of Presidential Rematches"

By Dave Makkar

A YouGov-University of Massachusetts Amherst poll conducted in January found that 45% of Americans believe a Biden-Trump rematch is bad for the country. Another 26% say the rematch is neither good nor bad, while just 29% view it as good for the nation.

Following the primaries on March 12th, 2024, Trump and Biden emerged as the presumptive presidential candidates for their respective parties, setting the stage for an inevitable rematch between them.

Based on FiveThirtyEight's most recent polling averages, Biden's approval rating is currently at 38.1%, while Trump's stands slightly higher at 42.6%. This indicates that both individuals are not favored by a majority of Americans.

While the upcoming Trump-Biden rematch in November 2024 bears some similarity to a singular rematch from the 19th century, there exist several other instances of presidential rematches that transpired much earlier in United States history. Seventy-two years ago, in 1952, Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower secured a landslide victory by winning 39 out of 48 states over Illinois Democratic Governor Adlai Stevenson II, thus becoming the first Republican president in 20 years. In 1956,



as the incumbent president, Eisenhower won reelection by an even larger margin, defeating Democrat Governor Adlai Stevenson II once again. This time, Eisenhower won 41 states out of 48, clinching 57% of the popular vote. Stevenson managed to carry only six Southern states and the border state of Missouri, making him the first losing candidate since William Jennings Bryan in 1900 to secure Missouri.

The election of 1888 and its subsequent rematch in 1892 serve as a more fitting parallel to the upcoming Biden-Trump rematch in November 2024. In 1888, former Republican Senator from Indiana, Benjamin Harrison, triumphed over the incumbent Democratic President, Grover Cleveland. However, in the 1892 election, Cleveland

staged a comeback and reclaimed victory over Harrison. Notably, Grover Cleveland held the presidency as both the 22nd and 24th president, winning elections in 1884 and 1892. His tenure marks a unique distinction as he remains the only president to serve two non-consecutive terms.

## THE OTHER REMATCHES:

Former Ohio Republican congressman and governor William McKinley defeated Democrat William Jennings Bryan in both the 1896 and 1900 presidential elections. Bryan ran for president in 1896, 1900, and 1908 as a Democrat.

In 1836, Martin Van Buren, who served as Vice President under Andrew Jackson, secured victory for the Democrats by defeating William Henry Harrison of the Whig Party.



However, in a rematch four years later in 1841, Harrison emerged triumphant and assumed the presidency.

John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson competed twice for the presidency. Initially, in 1824, Adams emerged victorious, while in 1828, Jackson unseated the incumbent Adams to assume the presidency.

Then there was John Adams, a Federalist who served as the nation's second president, and Thomas Jefferson, its third, representing the Democratic-Republican party. They competed for the presidency during the first contested presidential election to succeed George Washington in 1796. Adams emerged victorious, with Jefferson elected as vice president. Four years later, Jefferson ran against and defeated the

incumbent Adams.

In reflecting on the Biden-Trump rematch and its place within the historical context of presidential rematches, it becomes evident that electoral dynamics and political rivalries have long shaped the American political landscape. From the early contests between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson to the more recent battles between William McKinley and William Jennings Bryan, these rematches underscore the enduring nature of democracy and the ever-evolving nature of political competition. As we anticipate the outcome of the Biden-Trump rematch in November 2024, history continues to provide valuable insights into the intricacies of presidential elections and the resilience of the American electoral process.

## Straight Talk | CAA, Ram Mandir, Article 370: Modi Delivers on BJP's Big Civilisational Promises

By: Sanbeer Singh Ranhotra

CAA rules have been notified, effectively making the Citizenship Amendment Act a law of the land. The Ram Mandir in Ayodhya has been built after decades of struggle. Article 370 has been revoked in Jammu and Kashmir. All of this has happened in the five years since 2019, in what will go down in the annals of history as a historic tenure for the BJP in which the party, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, delivered on some of its biggest ideological commitments. The implementation of CAA right ahead of the Lok Sabha elections is particularly significant, as it brings the curtains down on a very eventful second tenure for Prime Minister Modi and sets the stage for an even more eventful third term, which all opinion polls suggest is imminent. Remember, CAA has been the victim of some of the worst misinformation



campaigns over the past five years. While CAA has nothing to do with depriving people of citizenship or disenfranchising Indian citizens, that is exactly what the BJP was accused of trying to do with the law. What is essentially a tool to correct historical injustices was spun as a political tool that would be used alongside NRC to specifically target Indian Muslims. That was why mass protests broke out against

CAA in 2019 and 2020.

Indian Muslims were specifically targeted with misinformation campaigns that sought to inflame their sentiments, triggering violent agitations across the country and even leading to riots in North East Delhi. The fact that the Modi-Shah duo have taken a gamble right before the Lok Sabha elections is worth noting. Not only does it signal a commitment on the part of the

Modi government to fulfil the BJP's core ideological promises, it also sends out a strong statement to those who need it – that Narendra Modi, Amit Shah and the BJP of today cannot be bullied into backtracking from matters of national and civilisational importance. Laws to that effect may be put on hold, even taken back in order to give the people more time to process the change and get the government's own messaging right, however, they should never be taken to be in permanent cold storage. Eventually, what is right and needs to be done, will be done. The implementation of the CAA also required political courage. With several Opposition-ruled states taking a hostile stance against the law, ordinary political wisdom would dictate that the BJP not touch an issue as sensitive as CAA

weeks before the country heads to polls to choose its next prime minister and national government. However, both PM Modi and Amit Shah have displayed an appetite for taking risky and decisive decisions over the past five years, which other leaders would have shied at the mere mention of. The abrogation of Article 370 specifically comes to mind. For years, there was a genuine fear in India's political class that tinkering with Kashmir's special status would trigger unparalleled bloodshed in the Valley. What was once increasingly resembling the Palestinian intifada-like culture of stone pelting has today vanished from Kashmir. Tourism is booming, investments are rushing in and developmental work is being undertaken at a scale not seen before.



# How China is Introducing New Measures for Repression in Tibet

By: Arun Anand

The People's Republic of China (PRC), at the UN's Universal Periodic Review session, presented its report on the progress on the country's human rights situation. The report maintained that Beijing upholds "the equality of all ethnicities, respect the religions, beliefs of the masses and guarantee the lawful rights and interests of all ethnic groups".

The report received criticism from the US, the UK and other countries that pointed at the country's poor human rights record, especially of its minorities, which China refuted as "misunderstanding" and "misinformation". The chief of United Nations Human Rights, Volker Turk, recently urged China to implement the recommendations to amend its laws, which violate fundamental rights within China, including the Tibetan region. The human rights record shows that in reality Tibet continues to face systemic oppression by Chinese authorities, which in fact, intensified under Xi Jinping's rule.

The Tibetan question has its roots in China's annexation of the region in 1951, claimed wrongfully as "peaceful liberation". However, the region soon started grappling with



systemic repression of a new China under the CCP rule that received widespread global attention following the 2008 Tibetan uprising. Under Xi Jinping's rule, which aims for "great Chinese rejuvenation", attention was paid to implement the Sinicisation policy, that is, transformation into a socialist society compatible with Chinese characteristics. In the case of Tibet, Beijing's aim of cultural assimilation was targeted at Tibetan's religion, language, culture and environment, all which are vital to keep alive the ethnic minority identity that Tibetans hold. The series of new legislative measures and policies have perpetuated Beijing's vicious project in name of "Tibet's liberation". Heavy restrictions on

freedom of movement and communication in Tibet along with mass relocation, environmental degradation and phasing out of Tibetan language in primary education are mentioned as the human rights violations on the ethnic minority population in Tibet in the latest Human Rights Watch (HRW) report.

The infamous state surveillance has further seemed to alleviate when a recent report revealed evidence of a Chinese app claimed to be an anti-fraud app, that is believed to monitor Tibetans through digital surveillance and gets control over device facilities, by getting access to their data. Tibetans also complained of being forced to download the app by the police. Just a year back, new cyber security rules in Tibet to

punish those found guilty of creating public disorder by engaging in separatist acts, or acts threatening the country's national security. The communication clampdown on Tibetans, whereby they are targeted and arbitrarily detained on charges of possessing and spreading "banned contents" or "rumours", is yet another strategic move to instil fear and restrict movements among Tibetans. Other restrictions such as periodic internet blackouts, prohibition of using Tibetan language on social media apps and censorship on news covering Tibetan issues are found to be strictly applied in the Tibetan region.

The exploitation of natural resources in Tibet, witnessed since the 1951 annexation, reached new heights lately as found in a latest report which said that China is damaging the Tibetan plateau's fragile ecology via its ambitious lithium exploration to boost its electric vehicle industry, further aggravating human rights violations. Moreover, China came under fire last month for detaining more than 1,000 Tibetan monks and villagers who travelled to Dege county in China's Sichuan province to peacefully protest against the building of a

hydropower dam construction project that is believed to submerge Tibet's historic monasteries and villages. Freedom of association and movements already under strict control in the Tibetan region, the latest development attracted global attention with the Human Rights Watch asking the Chinese authorities for immediate release. To fulfil its mega infrastructure projects, China has for years eyed Tibet and exploited its resources. This was obviously done without taking into account the environmental impact of its projects. The latest Tibetan protest also was about resettlement of residents of at least two villages and six monasteries that would be forced to relocate for hydropower dam construction. There are already reports of Chinese authorities subjecting millions of Tibetans to its policy of involuntary mass relocation and housing that has gravely altered their life and detached them from not only their land but also their cultural identity, a practice that seems to continue despite international community's criticism.

## From Emily Dickinson to Joe Alwyn, Taylor Swift is a master of misleading messaging

By Laura Snapes

As you can't have failed to notice, last week it was reported that Taylor Swift and Emily Dickinson are sixth cousins three times removed. Ancestry.com shared the blessed news – in no way, I am simply certain of it, prompted by team Swift as promo for her forthcoming album, *The Tortured Poets Department*. Call it the Tortured Promo Department – fans who crunched the numbers worked out that Swift probably has 3.3 million sixth cousins thrice removed. She is just as likely related to Ayn Rand, enslavers or any number of unsavoury people – as millions of people are – but naturally there's no Today Show exclusive on any such tenuous links. "How's this for a coincidence?" the broadcaster asked. Telling, and not in the way the Swift operation would doubtless like you to think: less indicative of a handy lineage of literary greatness than a taste for plausible deniability in a well-maintained void of information.



The Dickinson link is mostly harmless fun, if over-egging an already considerably egged pudding. (And hardcore Swift fans already knew: it was discovered in 2020 when she released the folksy *Evermore* album on Dickinson's birthday, because she does nothing by accident.) But there are riskier ways that Swift plays fast and loose with inference, especially given the fact that she has previously said she's "trained" fans to look for clues and connections in her work. What started as a cute treasure trail

that revealed genuine information about the subjects of her songs and approaching release dates – what do the highlighted letters in these liner notes spell out? How many holes in this fence? – caught on like wildfire, turning her admirers into sleuths and Swift's every knowingly constructed outfit, nail polish colour and Instagram caption into grist for their conspiracy mill. Given her relative retreat from traditional media in the past five years, it's a smart way of having fans carry out promo for her – but at this point fans can't be

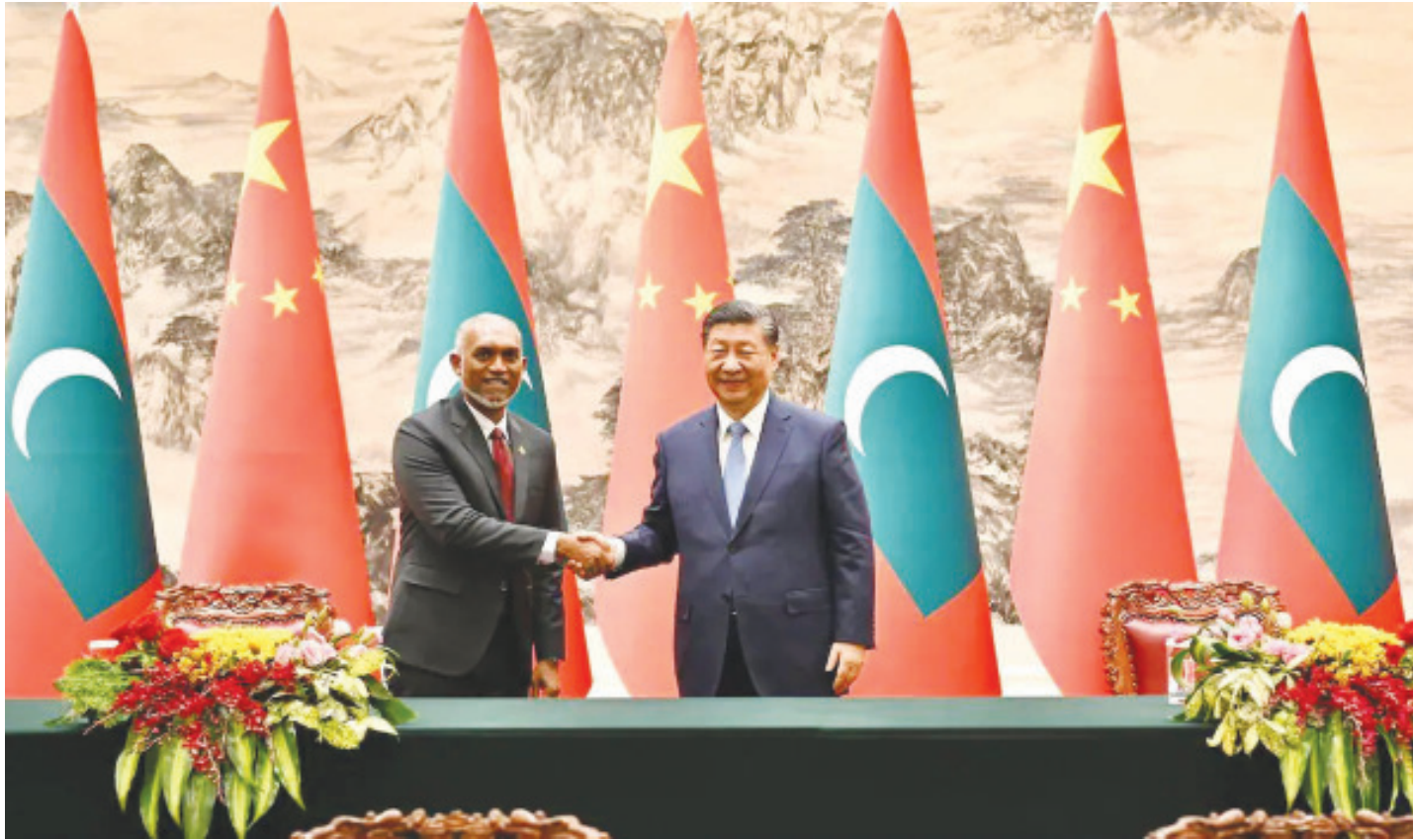
expected to tell the difference between genuine clues and promo hints, and this level of interactivity has created entitlement among some factions, who assume responsibility to carry out attacks and smear campaigns on her behalf.

Two months prior to its release, would-be doyens of Swift's *Tortured Poets Department* have taken its barbed track listing very literally, leading to intense, often nefarious speculation regarding Swift's six-year relationship with the British actor Joe Alwyn, which seemingly ended in early 2023. The album's title, revealed onstage at the Grammy awards, was quickly linked to a December, 2022 interview with Alwyn and Paul Mescal in which they revealed that Andrew Scott started their group chat, the *Tortured Man Club*. ("It hasn't had much use recently," Alwyn said: you wonder if it's undergone a recent revival.) Swift revealed the leading track list a day later: *My Boy Only Breaks His Favorite Toys*, *So Long, London*, I

*Can Do It With a Broken Heart*, *The Smallest Man Who Ever Lived*, to name a few, sending fans wild with speculation. Swift, obviously, has every right to sing about her relationships however she wants to (no apologies to Eamonn Holmes). But in the absence of any music, some fans have spread baseless, dangerous and even libellous allegations about Alwyn's conduct (which, for obvious reasons, I can't repeat). Last month, a brief fan-shot video of them dining in a New Orleans restaurant in December, 2022 was recirculated online with AI-doctored audio that made it sound as though Alwyn is saying "you don't get to tell me about sad," a line printed on the back of one of the new album's four physical editions. When Swift recently told a crowd that she was "lonely" when writing her 2020 album *Folklore* – some of which was co-written with Alwyn during the pandemic, a lonely time for most – fans took that as further confirmation of their theories.



# Muizzu's China Tilt Hurts Maldives Far More Than India



By Harsh V. Pant

Last week, the Maldives and China signed a defence pact "on China's provision of military assistance gratis to the Republic of Maldives", underlining Male's continued shift away from India under the government of President Mohamed Muizzu. This not only marks a notable shift in geopolitical alignment for the Maldives, but it also provides China another opportunity to extend its military presence in the Indian Ocean region. This agreement is another indication that the Muizzu government remains keener than its predecessors

to tilt towards China, but, coupled with its public ultimatum to India that its minuscule military presence should be terminated immediately, it also underscores a new strategic reality in the Indian Ocean region, one that could alter regional dynamics, prompting New Delhi and other global powers to reassess their policy options in the strategically vital maritime space.

## An Opaque Agreement

The Maldives-China defence agreement itself remains shrouded in secrecy. The only known aspect is that the Chinese military would be providing free "non-

lethal" military equipment and training to the island nation. Beyond that, no specific details about this pact are in the public domain. For a government that has often talked of the presence of 77 Indian soldiers and 12 medical personnel from the Indian armed forces in the Maldives in conspiratorial terms, it is indeed strange that it would be entering into a defence pact with a country like China, which is known for opaque arrangements.

For Muizzu, Male's sovereignty gets strangely affected when dealing with a transparent democratic India but not with

a Communist authoritarian China. The long-term implications of Male's China pact, of course, will be borne by the people of the Maldives.

That Muizzu would reconfigure his nation's foreign policy was evident from the very beginning when he made India the centrepiece of his election campaign. His 'India Out' pitch made him the darling of Islamist forces as well as Beijing, whose designs on Male were effectively foiled by Ibrahim Solih. Yet, New Delhi made a conscientious outreach to Muizzu once he assumed the presidency, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself taking the lead. It did not work as was expected, though what was not expected was the kind of malevolence that the Muizzu administration has been showing towards India. It is natural among close neighbours to have disagreements, but to convert them into public disrespect is neither desirable nor prudent.

## Risk Of More Turbulence

The consequences of this behaviour will be far-reaching not only for New Delhi-Male bilateral ties but also for regional geopolitics. The defence pact itself will be viewed seriously by India as China's growing foothold in the Indian Ocean region has long been a matter of concern for Indian policymakers. That China's maritime presence will grow in the Indian Ocean region has long been a given. But for regional nations to have a one-sided approach when it comes to Indian concerns is an entirely different matter and one that is likely to only lead to more regional turbulence.

# Haryana: The Era of Manohar Lal Khattar Comes to a Close

By: Arjun Singh Kadian

Member of Parliament from Kurukshetra, Nayab Singh Saini, who was only recently elevated as the state president of the Bharatiya Janata Party, was made the Chief Minister of Haryana on Tuesday, March 12, 2024. Only 24 hours earlier, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was in Gurugram inaugurating the Dwarka Expressway where he spoke highly of the bond that he shared with Manohar Lal Khattar, the outgoing and now ex-CM of Haryana. It was perhaps, thereby, a big shock for political pundits in the state.

For about the last ten years; it was this Modi-Manohar 'double-engine' government which made a compelling sell for the electorate. Even more, it was perhaps in the last nine months that CM Manohar Lal looked like he had finally come on his own. Since 2014, Manohar Lal was faced with challenges from bureaucracy, political blocs in the state and an undercurrent of Opposition within the system. In his second term, beginning November 2019, he ran a government in alliance with

Dushyant Chautala-led Jannayak Janata Party. This naturally had some challenges. Chautala was given some powerful portfolios and many would argue that he milked that cow to the hilt. But even then, Manohar Lal led a strong-willed government. Everyone



may not have been happy but it is tough to discount the work he did over the last 9+ years. Around 9 am on Tuesday, a friend messaged that CM Manohar Lal is resigning. I was rushing for a meeting and paused to make two calls and one message to understand if this was true. Turned out,

it was unfolding. However, I was told that he would be resigning around 12 and take oath again as the chief minister at around 4 PM with a new council of ministers. This, as I understood, was being done to sideline the Chautala-led party from the government and the alliance wherein Chautala was staking claim to two Parliamentary seats which the BJP was not particularly keen on. Do note that Manohar Lal Khattar was now the most powerful BJP politician in the state. Although the organisation has its way of working and functioning. But, Manohar Lal had his trusted team in place which was ready to take and stand by any bold decisions. Thence, it seemed fine

and possible for him to take oath again. However, an hour later, news of a new chief ministerial face began making rounds. I had to step out of my meeting and make a few calls to get a sense of what was happening. In those few intervening minutes, CM Manohar Lal

Khattar's flashback happened in front of my eyes. Apart from the time, I have had the fortune of interacting and working for him; in split seconds his impact on Haryana came rushing. Non-Haryanvis might not be able to relate but know that Haryana was notorious for favouritism and corruption in government jobs. While this may be true for other states; in Haryana, this phenomenon had taken a different level altogether. About 10 years ago, young people who had no political backing or enough reach would prefer not to sit for interviews because to them, every job was on sale and the quoted price was too high. Many staked in their lands, others would offer 'Pagdi'. It is this change that Manohar Lal Khattar brought into a crippled system. While there are many other changes that the ex-CM could be credited with; including mahila police stations, improved law and order, transparency in transfers, cleaner and better road connectivity, power and water supply in Haryana's hinterlands; it is the hiring process that departs from everything done by previous chief ministers.



# Why India Testing Agni-5 is a Milestone Moment

**By: Air Marshal Anil Chopra**

Indigenously-developed Agni-5 missile with a Multiple Independently Targetable Re-Entry Vehicle (MIRV) technology was successfully tested by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) as part of "Mission Divyastra" on 11 March. Launched from Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Island in Odisha, the flight was monitored using telemetry and many radar stations, and it accomplished all the designed parameters. MIRV technology allows the single intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) to carry and deliver multiple warheads at different locations. The test pushes India into the higher levels of nuclear deterrence capability, and building redundancy.

Countries like Indonesia and Australia as well as international air and maritime traffic in the test zone had to be alerted 7-10 days before the test. Moreover, Indian Navy warships, with DRDO scientists and tracking and monitoring systems, were positioned midway and near the impact point in the southern Indian Ocean.

AGNI-5 MISSILE



Agni-5 launch tests had begun in April 2012 at the Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Abdul Kalam Island. The first launch flight time lasted 20 minutes and the third stage fired the re-entry vehicle into the atmosphere at an altitude of 100 kilometres. With the seventh test was in December 2018 Agni-V pre-induction trials were over. As part of user trial, Agni-V was successfully launched on 27 October 2021. On 15 December 2022, first night trial of Agni-V was successfully carried out by Strategic Forces Command (SFC). The launch also proved striking capability beyond 7000-plus kilometres. On

11 March 2024, the maiden flight test of the Agni-5 missile using MIRV technology was declared successful. Agni 5 — 50 tonne in weight, 17.5-metre tall, and 2-metre diameter — is designed by DRDO and manufactured by Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL) at around a unit cost of Rs 50 crore (\$6 million). It can carry 10-12 warheads weighing total of up to around 4,000 Kg as part of MIRV. The missile is powered by a three-stage solid propellant rocket. Its canister-launch missile system is distinct from those of the earlier Agni missiles. It took its first stage from Agni-III, with a modified second stage

and a miniaturised third stage enabling it higher operational range is 7,000–8,000 kilometres. The range has also increased because the missile weight has reduced due to use of composite materials. The maximum terminal phase speed is close to Mach 25 (30,600 km/h). As the name signifies, it can spew 'fire'. The missile uses ring laser gyroscope inertial navigation system, which may be augmented by GPS/NavIC satellite guidance. Its accuracy is below 10 metre circular error probability (CEP). The, presently, land-based missile has launcher which is rail or road mobile. The canister design reduces the reaction time drastically to just a few minutes from 'stop-to-launch'. Agni-5, even if launched from Central India will be able to cover farthest points in China. Being similar in design to missiles with 10,000 km range, the transition to the next variants will be easier.

"The state-of-the-art technology developed indigenously is a firm step in the direction of India becoming *aatmanirbhar*," said President Droupadi Murmu. This system is equipped with indigenous avionics systems

and high accuracy sensor packages. PM Narendra Modi tweeted, "Proud of our DRDO scientists for Mission Divyastra, the first flight test of indigenously developed Agni-5 missile with Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV) technology." The capability is an enunciator of India's growing technological prowess. The project director is a woman and there are sizeable number of women contributors.

## WHAT IS MIRV?

The Multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles (MIRV) allow each missile to carry between 2 and 14 or more separate nuclear warheads. Each warhead can be assigned to a different target, separated by hundreds of kilometres; alternatively, two or more warheads can be assigned to one target. MIRVs ensure a credible second strike capability even with few missiles. ANTI-SATELLITE VERSION OF AGNI-5

India carried out its anti-satellite test (ASAT) on 27 March 2019, using the designated Prithvi Defence Vehicle Mark-II, a part of the Indian Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) program. The interceptor struck a test satellite at a 283 km altitude in low Earth orbit (LEO), thus making Mission Shakti a successful ASAT missile test. Former DRDO head, Dr VK Saraswat later said that an ASAT version of Agni-5 is technically possible. ASAT weapon would require reaching about 800 km altitude. Agni V offers the boosting capability and the 'kill vehicle', with advanced seekers, will be able to home into the target satellite.

## GLOBAL NUCLEAR POWERS AND MIRV

Nine countries possess nuclear weapons: the United States, Russia, France, China, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, India, Israel, and North Korea. In total, the global nuclear stockpile is close to 13,000 weapons. Nearly 90% of the weapons are with Russia and the US. China currently has 400 but is improving its arsenal with technology upgrade and has plans to go up to 1,500 warheads by 2035. Agni-5 will support India's deterrence and it will not have to get into an

# CAA: Modi's Biggest Challenge to Garrulous Opposition

**By: Sudesh Verma**

The BJP has thrown the gauntlet before a garrulous Opposition that has been trying to thwart the electoral process and undermine democracy by fuelling protests and spreading wrong information. 'You may have won a mandate but we would not allow you to implement the agenda and bring people on the streets,' the Opposition seemed to be saying.

The Modi government has challenged them to use all their might, create protests wherever they want and bring the government down if they have the guts. The Opposition was apparently lulled that the government would not notify the CAA rules. The government has put them on the mat. 'Do what you can. Election is the time to oppose us and defeat us. Show us your strength now rather than trying to subvert the mandate later,' the government seemed to be saying. Whether it was the issue of scrapping Article 370 or the issue of banning instant triple talaq or the issue of CAA implementation, the government has not done anything stealthily. Backed by a decisive mandate and guided by the ideology to strengthen the country, the Prime Minister has taken bold decisions. Let the Opposition make an issue of these

and accept the challenge.

Misguiding people, giving support to vested interests and creating a Shaheen Bagh-like protest is much easier than organising people all across the country and channelising the protests into votes. The divided, discordant and ideology bereft



Opposition is now facing the biggest challenge. Whether you will try to misguide the Muslim community or think of India First.

What is the brouhaha all about on the issue of notification of rules for implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)? The law was enacted in December 2019 and the government had to frame rules to implement the new legislation. There were

protests, Covid-19 pandemic and various state elections due to which the process got delayed. Necessary permission was taken by the government to ensure that the six-month period needed to frame rules did not lapse. It is good that the rules have been notified before the Lok Sabha elections whereby the government has fulfilled its promises. People now have a clear choice: To ratify the decisions taken as per last year's mandate by voting the government massively, or they have a choice to reject this government for taking these decisions. For those who were trying to subvert the mandate by opposing the CAA, they need to recall the promises the BJP made in its manifesto for the 2019 Lok Sabha elections: "We are committed to the enactment of the Citizenship

Amendment Bill for the protection of individuals of religious minority communities from neighbouring countries escaping persecution". Within months of coming to power, it enacted the legislation. Instead of bowing to the mandate, the Opposition, guided by sectarian interests, decided to oppose the government using the shoulders of innocent people who did not even know what the CAA was all about.



# Women in Bollywood: More Central Roles, But Rarely in Big-Budget Films

By: Biswadeep Ghosh

News and Bollywood are never far apart. One such headline confirmed a development in Yash Raj Films. Akshaye Widhani, YRF's CEO, said at FIICI Frames, "I'll share the worst-kept secret in the industry, which is that Alia Bhatt is headlining a Spy Universe film and that the schedule starts later this year." He added, "I think the YRF Spy Universe is a financial and cultural juggernaut.... We're going to see more and more films getting made under it.... But for now, I can just say that Alia Bhatt is headlining a Spy Universe film." Until now, films in the Spy Universe franchise have been headlined by male stars. The fact that YRF has decided to cast Bhatt as a super agent shows that the production house believes that an actioner with a female star in the central role can be a success story, too. If Bhatt's masala entertainer becomes a blockbuster like its predecessors, other female stars will also get the opportunity to headline big-budget actioners in future. While big-budget cinema in Bollywood is dominated by men, there has been an increase in the



number of opportunities for women in central roles in Hindi cinema in general. That is a development in the right direction since cinema is ultimately a mass-friendly medium for telling stories. And, more stories in cinema can have female characters in central roles, if emerging producers and directors also make a conscious effort to contribute to the process of change.

Theatrical releases usually produced with a 'controlled' budget—in other words, a mid-size or an even smaller film—are being made with women at the centre. Their release on OTT

platforms later is an additional source of revenue. Direct-to-digital films allow a greater possibility of making films with woman-centric subjects. Such films are widely watched by subscribers, who get and seek variety in cinematic content. Just as gifted male actors, who cannot get central roles in big-budget films, are getting such roles in OTT films these days, women, too, are getting more opportunities to explore interesting ideas in the present era. There is a widespread belief among producers that making a female star headline a big-budget film is

a huge financial risk, but the fact is: female stars have delivered commercial successes with mass-friendly big-budget projects. Even when Bollywood was struggling to attract audiences in 2022, Alia Bhatt played the title role in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's absorbing drama Gangubai Kathiawadi produced with a reported budget of Rs 100 crore. The film became a critically acclaimed commercial success. Gangubai Kathiawadi worked for several reasons, such as Bhansali's direction and music, cinematography, and, of course, Bhatt's performance. Making more big-budget woman-centric films is possible, mainly because many viewers prioritize content in today's times. They are ready to pay for movie tickets if the subject appeals to them.

Aditya Suhas Jambhale's political action thriller Article 370's narrative revolves around events preceding the much-needed abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir. The modestly budgeted film stars Yami Gautam as a field agent, while Priyamani plays a bureaucrat in a well-written supporting role. Gautam's

performance is a major reason why the film, whose subject has been debated for a long time, is a box-office success. Writing a woman's character for the central role of such a film is an uncommon creative decision. It is vastly different from casting Katrina Kaif as an action star in a biggie in which the film's hero is Salman Khan, or having Deepika Padukone in a significant supporting role in an action drama headlined by Shah Rukh Khan or Hrithik Roshan. The last couple of years have witnessed the release of several films whose stories revolve around their female protagonists. What is common between the past and the present is that producers have shown a clear preference for making such films with controlled budgets, which is also because their subjects target urban audiences. Because of the sheer dominance of the big-budget action drama genre in recent times, most woman-centric theatrical releases have not fared well at the box office. Ashima Chhibber's legal drama Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway, a Rani Mukherji starrer, was modestly successful in 2023.

## What That Flubbed Photo Reveals About the British Royals

By: Reshmi Dasgupta

There is a little-talked-about disease called VIPitis, and it particularly affects those who come into contact with the vector. Close and prolonged exposure renders such people unable to function properly. Judgement is impaired as is the ability to speak up, even if there is overwhelming need to do so. The affected person tends to react in inverse proportion to need—excessive when unnecessary and vice versa. And no country or region is immune to this malaise.

The embarrassment about the photograph of the Princess of Wales with her three children, released by her husband and by Kensington Palace was probably caused by this ailment. The British heir apparent's wife has made quite a name for herself as an amateur photographer, personally clicking family photos and releasing them to the media. However, the latest photo was taken by the Prince of Wales, clearly intent on following his wife's cue—with disastrous



consequences.

He does not seem to have the same eye for detail as his spouse: the glitches in his debut photo were promptly sighted and cited by thousands of people on social media. These included a strangle anomaly in his daughter Charlotte's left arm, hair and skirt, his younger son Louis' curiously positioned right hand and even the zipper on his wife's jacket. The missing wedding and sapphire engagement rings on her left hand,

however, may not have been his fault. But more embarrassment was to follow. It emerged that while Prince William clicked the photo, the editing errors were made by his wife and she owned up to it as soon as the flaws were pointed out. While her talent as a shutterbug have been hailed for years now, evidently the finishing touches to her photographs were done by a keener eye. Her own editing prowess clearly leaves much to be desired. So, blue-

blooded and otherwise, there are red faces all round.

Normally the aides and courtiers surrounding the royals are supposed to vet and handle everything they do, including image management. As the British public was already increasingly restive about their future queen's health because she has not been seen in public since January, the last thing the royals needed was a problem in an initiative that was supposed to allay fears and stanch speculation. A possible debilitating case of VIPitis among the staff did not help. That their aides should have spotted the glaring shortcomings in the photo before it was released and pointed them out goes without saying. The royal couple should have also had the forethought—and the humility—to realise that fresh eyes and practiced hands can only be beneficial, especially when it comes to anything that will find its way into social media with its millions of eagle-eyed and sharp-tongued interlocutors. Neither

parties did what they should have.

"Speaking truth to power" need not mean only instances of the media loftily holding the political class up to scrutiny, it also encompasses staff members frankly telling VIPs of all stripes that their actions are not up to the mark. But unlike the antagonistic media-politician equation, the latter cannot happen without mutual trust; but it is far harder, and thankless. Unfortunately, VIPitis can skew this delicate balance by impeding crucial communication.

Whether this affliction rendered officials unable to tell their principals about the glitches, or these younger royals no longer consult experienced staff on crucial matters, either way things do not look good for palace professionals. In fact another variant of VIPitis may have infected the Wales, impairing their ability to realise they are not infallible and cannot ever bypass their staff. They appear to have forgotten that a single misstep can be very damaging to The Firm.



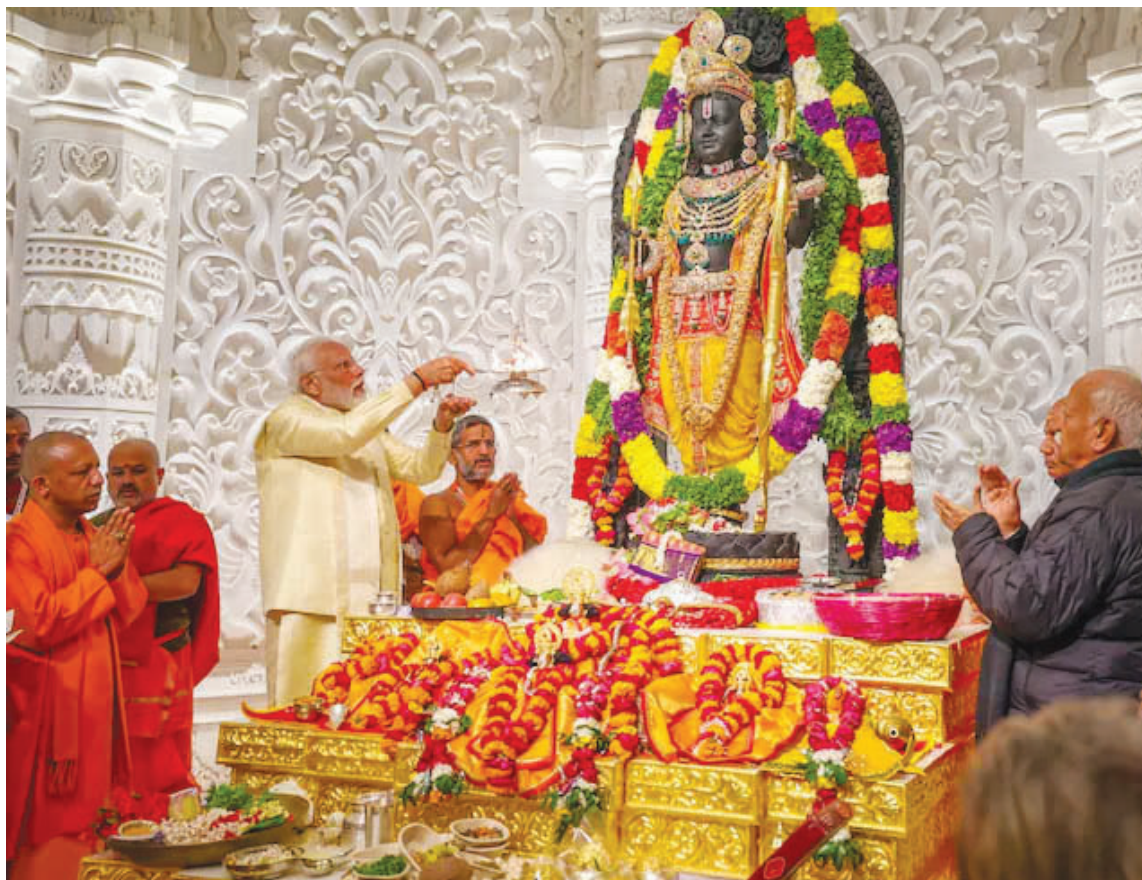
# Enter The Second Republic: Bharat That Is India

By: Sandipan Deb

I rarely use a highlighter while reading a book to mark passages that strike me as particularly perceptive or ones that I could reference later or quietly plagiarise. Utpal Kumar's *Bharat Rising: Dharma, Democracy, Diplomacy* is such a book. It is about how the last 10 years have changed India in many subtle ways to create a confident nation rooted in its magnificent heritage that was deliberately hidden from its people.

The book examines how Bharat that is India has changed since Narendra Modi came to power in 2014, going back into history and recounting our historical follies. Utpal boldly claims that Bharat had a "false start in 1947" and that "while the contours of the transformation since 2014 are still being drawn, it is obvious that Bharat under Modi has truly and categorically entered the Second Republic, saying a final goodbye to the Nehruvian ethos". Much of what he writes may have been known or guessed at by a few of us, but never before have all the facets been strung together so cogently, supported by sturdy facts. Governments may have come and gone, Congress or non-Congress, but the power elite of India—often referred to as Lutyens' Delhi—remained cozy in their privilege and entitlement, most of it drawn from the British Raj and their closeness to the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. They spoke perfect English, dined at the India International Centre, went for morning walks in the Lodhi Gardens, lived lives of luxury—not due to any merit but through pedigree and patronage—and publicly proclaimed to be socialist. Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh may have appeared to be outsiders, but in reality, they were not. Modi is the first prime minister who would have no truck with this class and systematically marginalised it.

Beyond all the numbers of economic growth and effective welfare schemes, Utpal writes, Modi's main contribution has been to awaken the spirit of Bharat as a civilisational state,



not just another map on a world atlas. But there's a long way to go, he warns. On temple restorations, he writes: "Prime Minister Modi's battle is two-pronged: physical and psychological... (He) has been doing a good job on the physical aspect of the battle, bringing some of the most sacred Hindu shrines out of the area of darkness. These temples have been an obvious sign of a wounded civilisation waking up to its glorious past. But the psychological battle is yet to resume in the true sense of the term." This is because the Hindu mind has been colonised for many generations now, not least by those whom Arun Shourie sarcastically called "eminent historians", who portrayed the victims as the culprits and whitewashed brutal invaders and rulers, even though they themselves had their courtiers write about the delight of desecrations and mass slaughter. We need a complete re-narration of our history to replace the lies that leftists have foisted over the decades, carrying on from exactly what the British Raj left off, from the Aryan Invasion Theory to the benevolence of Aurangzeb. Utpal provides many examples—some of them little-known—of how Jawaharlal Nehru, in the name of secularism, went out of his way to subvert Hindu rights ("Hindu" includes, Buddhists, Sikhs and Jains) while allowing

free rein to every medieval practice of another faith. There was much controversy a year ago when the Sengol was placed next to the Speaker's chair in our new Parliament. But Nehru himself was "coronated" with the Sengol by high priests who rubbed holy ash on his forehead right before his "tryst with destiny" speech.

"The free nation that was born on 15 August 1947 was unapologetically Hindu," writes Utpal. "And Nehru went with the Hindu mood of the nation, but later, when he became all-powerful, he conspired with his progressive and leftist minions to steal the innate 'Hindu-ness' of the country." The 'secular state' took over Hindu temples, while other religions were allowed to use their places of worship in any way they pleased.

But temples in India had never been just places of worship. Traditionally, they had provided succour to the needy, been a check on government excess and were also intellectual, educational and cultural hubs. Could many of our great art forms—for example, Bharat Natyam—have ever emerged without the freedom, liberal kindness and status of our temples? With this one move, Nehru sucked out the traditional dynamism of Hindu society and made it dependent on the mai-baap sarkar. Let me not bore you any more about

how Nehru turned a civilisational opportunity into a loser nation with empty rhetoric that the developed world laughed at. In spite of Nehru's adoration of the Soviet Union, Stalin refused to meet Indian ambassador Vijayalakshmi Pandit, who just happened to be Nehru's sister, for months. Then Chinese premier Zhou Enlai told Henry Kissinger that India has "an inferiority complex", and mentioned that at a tea party organised for him in Delhi by Nehru, his daughter Indira turned up in a Tibetan costume. Zhou found it hilarious. And it added to Mao Zedong's contempt for Nehru and India. We know what happened subsequently. That sort of stuff certainly won't happen in New India or what Utpal calls the Second Republic. We don't, as a nation, have an inferiority complex any more. We don't call snake charmers to entertain visiting foreign dignitaries. Which Nehru did, in fact, when John F Kennedy came to Delhi.

Utpal has very clear views on how India should act in the current volatile geopolitical situation. Much of what he says should be obvious to any fool, except that not many people dare to say it out loud. Anti-Indianism is Pakistan's *raison d'être*. All those "peace talks" over the decades achieved nothing. Uri and Balakot changed the conversation. We

should stay mum and let Pakistan become a "poor, weak and crawling" country.

One must understand how China thinks. The Chinese way of thinking is unique and derives from several millennia of beliefs and treatises and war stories. It is not very difficult to grasp, at least to the Indian mind, the principles from which the whole Chinese personal, societal, moral and strategic infrastructure grows. These principles may seem weird to our Anglicised minds, but given the infinite four-dimensional space that Indic philosophy offers us, we should be able to strategise and respond to the threat adequately. The boundaries of our thoughts are much wider than theirs.

In the last 10 years, the mentality of a nation of 1.5 billion people has changed or is definitely changing. There is no inferiority complex, except for the bitterness of the ousted Lutyens' elite moaning on international TV channels, and Western think tanks (Pakistan, a failed state by every parameter, is higher on the "Happiness Index" than India) or hiring a hall in a Western university to blabber about artificial intelligence and caste census (You or I can also pay the standard fee, hire the same hall and have a discussion on why the sea is boiling hot and whether pigs have wings).

That is what Utpal's deeply-researched and deeply thoughtful book is about—how India is changing and why. We all go along with the tides of time, without thinking much about causation, events or why our environment feels fresh and new. We are not even halfway through the story, but *Bharat Rising* tells us where we are, where we could have been but did not, and where we can be and how we can get there. Read this book to get a lucidly written view of a huge and complex nation rejecting the path it had been forced to tread for decades and embracing modernity while rediscovering the ancient values that defined it. And read the endnotes too. *Bharat Rising* is that rare book where the endnotes are very interesting—they provide a lot of anecdotes that tell you how things were till 10 years ago and how far we have come since then.



## FBI Director Wray says he IS concerned border crossers could launch another 9/11 terror attack in the U.S.

FBI Director Chris Wray is concerned that illegal migrants coming across the southern border could potentially launch another 9/11 terrorist attack on U.S. soil. The intelligence chief's disclosure came during a Senate Intelligence Committee hearing on the greatest worldwide threats facing the U.S. today. The hearing was interrupted several times by pro-Palestine protestors shouting 'ceasefire now!' during remarks by the nation's top spy chiefs. According to the latest annual report put out Monday by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the U.S. is 'facing a fragile world order' due to 'accelerating strategic competition with major authoritarian powers' working to undermine order. That includes Russia's growing desire for an arsenal of nuclear space weapons and China and Iran's efforts to meddle in the upcoming 2024 election through TikTok and other malign influence operations. One top concern is the ongoing migrant crisis at the porous southern border that has seen over 7.2 million individuals enter since President Biden took office. Top Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, questioned Wray about the issue of the southern border being used by adversaries of the U.S., and terrorists in particular. When pressed by Cornyn about whether terrorists may be among the over

1.8 million 'gotaways' who have evaded capture by border officials, Wray said it's possible. He cited former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld saying 'we don't know what we don't know.' 'And I think there are many ways the national security ramifications of the issues at the border are better reflected in some ways more by what we don't know about the people who snuck in, provided fake documents or in some other way, got in when there wasn't sufficient information about the time they came in to connect the dots,' said Wray. 'It is almost more significant in our view,' he continued 'because those people, for the most part, are stopped detained and processed.' The Texas senator brought up the fact that there were just 26 co-conspirators in the 9/11 attacks, killing over 3,000 people. 'I worry that among the people that are coming across the border that are evading law enforcement, that there are some people among those that mean to do us harm. Do you share that concern?' asked Cornyn. Wray replied 'I do.' Another top issue of concern to the FBI director is the report from over the summer that exposed that individuals from Uzbekistan were smuggled by an ISIS terrorist into the U.S.



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# 4 Years After Bill Passed, Citizenship Law CAA Becomes Reality

A spokesperson for the Home Ministry said eligible individuals could submit applications in "a completely online mode". No other documentation will be sought from the applicants, one official said.

The government on Monday evening issued a notification for the Citizenship Amendment Act, or CAA, which comes into effect today weeks before the 2024 Lok Sabha election.

The CAA was cleared by Parliament in December 2019 amid protests by activists and opposition politicians.

Now that the notification has been issued, the central government can grant citizenship to persons belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Parsi, Jain, or Christian communities - from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan - who came to India on or before December 31, 2014 to flee from religious persecution.

A spokesperson for the Home Ministry said eligible individuals could submit applications in "a completely online mode". No other documentation will be sought from the applicants, one official said. Implementation of the CAA was a major campaign platform for the BJP before the 2019 election.

Less than a month ago Home Minister Amit Shah called the CAA "an act of the country" and said, "it will definitely be notified. CAA will come into effect before the election..."

The Home Minister - who led the government's charge on this topic in both houses of Parliament - also played down fears the CAA, and the NRC, or National Register of Citizens, will be used to target Muslims. He accused Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee - who has long been one of the CAA's fiercest and most vocal critics - of deliberately misleading the people of her state on this topic. Bengal

- with 42 Lok Sabha seats - is shaping to be a key battleground for the BJP as it bids to reach its target of 370.

Meanwhile, Ms Banerjee hit out almost immediately, telling reporters at a hastily-convened press conference that her government would steadfastly oppose "anything that discriminates (against) people". "If there is any discrimination, we won't accept it. Be it religion, caste, or linguistic. They won't be able to give citizenship to anyone in two days. This is just lollipop and show-off," she declared. "After multiple extensions in four years, its implementation two to three days before the election announcement shows that it is being done for political reasons," she slammed the BJP. The Trinamool boss also pointed out the CAA, the NRC, and the NPR, or National Population Register, were sensitive topics in Bengal and the northeast, and that she does not want unrest before the election. Significantly,

parts of the northeast have been exempted from the CAA.

She also accused the BJP of raking up the CAA issue with an eye on votes. "With elections approaching, BJP has again raked up CAA to reap political benefits. But as long as I am alive, I will not allow it...". In the northeast - which saw violent clashes between anti-CAA protesters and the police - the Assam Students Union, which led protests in the state four years ago, has sounded the call for another agitation. Ms Banerjee isn't the only opposition politician to fight against the CAA. The Bengal leader's Tamil Nadu counterpart, MK Stalin, was similarly emphatic. Accusing the BJP government of going "against communal harmony", the DMK boss too vowed he would not implement the law. Other states - like Kerala and Punjab - and others then ruled by the Congress (and now by the BJP) - such as Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh - also

opposed the CAA and passed resolutions. In fact, the Bengal and Kerala governments also stopped all NPR, or National Population Register, and NRC work.

In Telangana, the then-ruling Bharat Rashtra Samithi of ex-Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao also passed resolutions against all three and urged the government to "remove all references to any religion, or to any foreign country" in view of fears expressed by lakhs across the country. The Madhya Pradesh government - then also ruled by the Congress - also passed a resolution, and, significantly, several BJP leaders and lawmakers from the state also criticised the law. The government has said the Citizenship Amendment Act will help minorities from Muslim-dominated countries get citizenship if they fled due to religious persecution. However, critics say it discriminates against Muslims and violates the Constitution.

## Where is Kate? Missing British royal and conspiracy theories

An image should have quelled the rumours surrounding the health of Catherine, the Princess of Wales, instead, it fed the frenzy. Where is Kate is the one big question being asked about the member of the British royal family who has been missing from the public eye for months now.

The hashtag 'WhereIsKate' is trending.

"Literally everyone on Twitter is trying to figure out what is happening with #Kate Middleton and questioning #WhereIsKate???" posted Kinza Tariq, a social media influencer. The curiosity over Kate Middleton's whereabouts and health come after the release of a photo on Mother's Day. The photo was later found digitally manufactured.

This came after two months of Kate's absence from the public eye after her abdominal surgery due to an unspecified condition. There is a lot of curiosity and distrust over information from the British royal family. The life and death of Princess Diana is still the stuff of intense public curiosity even after 27 years after the former royal's fatal car crash. Princess Diana's life faced intense scrutiny. It seems it is the turn of Kate Middleton

now.

KATE'S ABSENCE MADE PEOPLE TAKE A CLOSER LOOK An image of Kate and her children — Prince George, Princess Charlotte and Prince Louis — that the palace said was taken by Prince William was released on Sunday to mark Mother's Day in Britain.

Intended to calm speculation regarding Kate's health after her surgery, the photo was withdrawn by leading news agencies over it being digitally altered.

Kate apologised a day later, saying that "like many amateur photographers, I do occasionally experiment with editing".

It was in fact people on social media who spotted issues with the photo. "I don't think it's any surprise that the discrepancies in the photograph were first identified by ordinary social media users," Ed Owens, a royal historian and author, told The Time. "It [the image] was always going to be pored over and carefully analyzed given the rumours and speculation that's been circulating and mounting regarding Kate's illness and her absence," Owens said.

## Michelle Obama isn't planning to run for president anytime soon.

Despite rumors suggesting the former first lady, 60, would be the perfect candidate to run for office, her team says otherwise, insisting she'll be backing Joe Biden's campaign ahead of the Nov. 5 election as she did in 2020.

"As former First Lady Michelle Obama has expressed several times over the years, she will not be running for president," Crystal Carson, director of communications for her office, said in a statement to PEOPLE.

"Mrs. Obama supports President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris' re-election campaign," Carson added.

Despite supporting Biden and Harris' campaign, insiders said that Obama's engagement would be limited due to her other commitments and "reluctance to re-enter the political fray full time," NBC News reported. "President and Michelle Obama were enormously helpful in the fight to beat

Donald Trump and elect President Biden outlet.



and Vice President Harris the first time and we are grateful to have their voice and their support in the fight for the fate of our democracy this November," Biden campaign spokesperson Kevin Munoz added in a statement, according to the

In 2018, Mrs. Obama and some other famous friends including Lin-Manuel Miranda, Tom Hanks and Janelle Monáe launched their voter registration nonprofit called When We All Vote. Through extensive social media and digital

outreach, the national organization aims to increase the number of eligible citizens who register to vote and then show up to the polls on election day. A senior Biden adviser said there had been early conversations with Obama's team about the upcoming campaign and how her national nonpartisan organization could play a part in it, NBC News stated. Obama, who was in the White House with husband Barack, 62, from 2009-2017, wrote about her anxiety regarding her significant other running for president in her book *The Light We Carry*. She told BBC Breakfast while promoting the release that it was "absolutely worth taking that leap of faith" and supporting the politician in his run for office. "I lived through the legacy of too many people, particularly African American people, my grandfathers included, whose lives were constricted by their fear of something different," she said in 2022.



# AI poses 'extinction-level' threat and US government must be given new 'emergency powers' to control technology, warns State Department report

A new US State Department-funded study calls for a temporary ban on the creation of advanced AI passed a certain threshold of computational power.

The tech, its authors claim, poses an 'extinction-level threat to the human species.'

The study, commissioned as part of a \$250,000 federal contract, also calls for 'defining emergency powers' for the American government's executive branch 'to respond to dangerous and fast-moving AI-related incidents' — like 'swarm robotics.' Treating high-end computer chips as international contraband, and even monitoring how hardware is used, are just some of the drastic measures the new study calls for. The report joins of a chorus of industry, governmental and academic voices calling for

aggressive regulatory attention on the hotly pursued and game-changing, but socially disruptive, potential of artificial intelligence.

Last July, the United Nation's agency for science and culture (UNESCO), for example paired its AI concerns with equally futuristic worries over brain chip tech, a la Elon Musk's Neuralink, warning of 'neurosurveillance' violating 'mental privacy.' While the new report notes upfront, on its first page, that its recommendations 'do not reflect the views of the United States Department of State or the United States Government,' its authors have been briefing the government on AI since 2021.

The study authors, a four-person AI consultancy called firm Gladstone AI run by brothers Jérémie and Edouard

Harris, told TIME that their earlier presentations on AI risks frequently were heard by government officials with no authority to act.

That's changed with the US State Department, they told the magazine, because its Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation is specifically tasked with curbing the spread of cataclysmic new weapons.

And the Gladstone AI report devotes considerable attention to 'weaponization risk.' An offensive, advanced AI, they write, 'could potentially be used to design and even execute catastrophic biological, chemical, or cyber attacks, or enable unprecedented weaponized applications in swarm robotics.'

But the report floats a second, even more dystopian scenario, which they describe as a 'loss of control' AI risk.

There is, they rite, 'reason to believe that they [weaponized AI] may be uncontrollable if they are developed using current techniques, and could behave adversarially to human beings by default.'

In other words, the machines may decide for themselves that humanity (or some subset of humanity) is simply an enemy to be eradicated for good.

Gladstone AI's CEO, Jérémie Harris, also presented similarly grave scenarios before hearings held by the Standing Committee on Industry and Technology within Canada's House of Commons last year, on December 5, 2023.

'It's no exaggeration to say the water-cooler conversations in the frontier AI safety community frames near-future AI as a weapon of mass destruction,' Harris told Canadian legislators.

'Publicly and privately, frontier AI labs are telling us to expect AI systems to be capable of carrying out catastrophic malware attacks and supporting bioweapon design, among many other alarming capabilities, in the next few years,' according to IT World Canada's coverage of his remarks.

## It's Trump v Biden again. Why were there no better options for voters?

You would hardly know from the 2024 cycle that primaries are supposed to be political contests. Each party's primaries, if they can be called that, were long exercises in foregone conclusions. And so the primary process, which for nearly 60 years has been a popular contest in which each party's internal factions jockeyed for position, worked to shape the party identity, and ultimately made their case to voters did not come to pass this year. Functionally, there were two incumbents. And functionally, neither party's primary offered a meaningful opportunity for the expression of internal dissent.

This did not change on Super Tuesday. Biden and Trump racked up delegates; the votes that were cast in the presidential contest were cast mostly in full awareness of their futility, the result already decided. There is one option labeled "R", and one option labeled "D". More than once throughout the campaign, I've imagined America's political party leaders as cruel lunch ladies, slopping greyish gruel on to trays for an unappetized America. "You'll eat it and you'll like it." Except nobody does like it. Poll after poll showed that voters did not want a rematch

between Donald Trump and Joe Biden. In a healthier political system, this discontent with the two incumbents would be an opportunity for other ideas to emerge, for other candidates to make a case to the public. In ours, this dissatisfaction did nothing to affect the slow march to the inevitable. In leaks to the press, representatives from both campaigns have long been speaking of a pivot to the general, and of waiting for voters to let it sink in that the general election would in fact be between Trump and Biden. Like doctors giving a patient a bad prognosis, they seemed eager to skip over the formality of having to deal with how little they had satisfied their constituents, ready to get back to the part where they accrued more power for themselves.

But the fact that both parties are sclerotic, slow-moving, captured by cynical necessity and immune from dissent should not suggest that there is any symmetry between them. Functionally, ours is now a unipolar national politics: Trump is the sole author of its controversies and the sole definer of its terms. The Republican party has remade itself in his image, and the Democratic party has struggled to represent all of those who reject him.

# The extravagant Ambani pre-wedding party was an affront to the millions of Indians in poverty, critics say

The lavish pre-wedding festivities for Anant Ambani, the son of Asia's richest person, and Radhika Merchant, also the child of a billionaire, made headlines worldwide for their extravagance.

But critics say it showed a telling disregard for the struggles of the many millions of Indians living in poverty.

Spanning three days, the pre-nuptial event included a private performance by Rihanna, which estimates suggest cost up to \$9 million. There was a trail featuring live animals and a nine-page dress code.

The mother of the groom-to-be, Nita Ambani, wore a necklace worth valued at some \$60 million, which Business Insider noted was perhaps one of the biggest shows of wealth.

Almost half of the 1.4 billion people in India live below the median poverty line of \$3.65 a day, per the World Bank, and activists say the ostentatious displays of wealth are an affront to the country's poor. 'It feels unfair'

"There is so much poverty all around," said

Shyam Bihari, a Delhi fruit seller and social worker, in a conversation with BI.

"It feels unfair to see this amount of money being spent on a wedding when so many people are still unable to access basic necessities like food and water," he said. Large swathes of India's population have long grappled with food insecurity and water scarcity.

According to the World Food Programme, a quarter of the world's undernourished people live in India. WaterAid says that around 35 million Indians lack access to safe water.

Rajni Haldia, a Delhi-based cleaner who earns \$25 a month, told BI that she felt "very bad" watching the coverage of the lavish pre-wedding festivities while knowing the extent of poverty in India.

Haldia said: "I hope all the rich people who came to India for the wedding are seeing the difference between the rich and poor, and I hope the government can do more to tackle this."

Rakhi Tripathi, a peace activist and

associate professor at New Delhi's FORE School of Management, told BI that the extravagant celebrations show a "disconnect" between India's elite and the rest of the population.

Tripathi pointed out that 800 million of India's 1.4 billion population receive monthly food rations of wheat or rice.

She said: "In a country like this, when we have such a huge event, spending crores of rupees, yeah, lack of empathy is the correct word."

(Crore is an Indian term for 10 million; 1 crore rupees is around \$120,000.)

Sohini Kar, an associate professor at the London School of Economics, whose work focuses on urban India, told BI she agrees. "I certainly think there's a lack of empathy, awareness," she said.

(A representative for the Ambanis did not immediately respond to a request for comment from BI.)

Kar also said the festivities were emblematic of the troubling levels of wealth disparity in India. According to Oxfam

International, the top 10% of the Indian population holds 77% of the total national wealth. In the US, the St Louis Fed says the figure is 66.6%. The groom-to-be's father, Mukesh Ambani, has an estimated net worth of \$113 billion, making him the richest person in Asia and the 11th richest person globally, per the Bloomberg Billionaires Index. Kar noted that the family is known in India for its extravagance, and lives in a skyscraper. She said: "Their house itself in Mumbai is a stark reminder of the kind of disparity of wealth, where you can sort of visually see this massive house for one family over the slums around their area."

According to Architectural Digest India, the 27-story property cost an estimated \$1 billion to build. It towers over Mumbai's Golibar slum. In 2011, Ratan Tata, another of India's richest men, told The Times of India: "It's sad because this country needs people to allocate some of their enormous wealth to finding ways of mitigating the hardship that people have."



# China reacts after PM visits Arunachal and opens world's longest bi-lane tunnel

China, which claims Arunachal Pradesh as South Tibet, said India's move would 'only complicate' the boundary issue.



China has lodged a diplomatic protest with India over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Arunachal Pradesh, where he inaugurated the strategically important Sela tunnel. China,

which claims Arunachal Pradesh as South Tibet, said India's move would "only complicate" the boundary issue. "China never recognised the so-called Arunachal Pradesh illegally set up by

India and firmly opposes it," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said at a media briefing, PTI reported.

Wenbin said India had no right to

arbitrarily develop the area of Zangnan in China. China has named Arunachal Pradesh as Zangnan. "Relevant moves by India only complicate the boundary question. China is strongly dissatisfied with and firmly opposed to the leader's visit to the eastern section of the China-India boundary," the Chinese official further said.

China has several times in the past objected to visits by Indian politicians to Arunachal Pradesh. However, India has asserted that the state is an integral part of the country and assigning "invented" names won't alter reality.

On March 9, PM Modi inaugurated the Sela tunnel, the world's longest bi-lane tunnel, which will connect Tezpur in Assam to Tawang in Arunachal. Built at a cost of Rs 825 crore, the tunnel has been built at an altitude of 13,000 feet. The tunnel will provide all-weather connectivity to Tawang, which shares a boundary with China in the north, and is expected to ensure better movement of troops and arms to forward locations along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China.

The tunnel will also reduce more than one hour of travelling time from Tezpur to Tawang.

## At Ramadan start, Guterres calls for Gaza ceasefire, hostage release



UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres on Monday called for a ceasefire in Gaza and the release of hostages to end the "civilian killing and destruction at a level that is unprecedented in all my years" in office. In a statement at the beginning of the Muslim religious observance, he said: "My strongest appeal today is to honour the spirit of Ramadan by silencing the guns – and removing all obstacles to ensure the delivery of lifesaving aid at the speed and

massive scale required."

And in a message to Hamas, he added: "At the same time – and in the Ramadan spirit of compassion – I call for the immediate release of all hostages."

Appealing to "political, religious and community leaders everywhere to do everything in their power to make this holy period a time for empathy, action and peace", Guterres added: "Let's not forget that beyond Ramadan, Christians will soon celebrate Easter and Jews will

celebrate Passover in April."

Efforts for a ceasefire through diplomacy by Qatar, the US, and Egypt have been futile so far over the conditions imposed by Hamas and Israel.

Guterres also pointedly drew attention to Sudan where UN officials have reported mass killings, but which, unlike Gaza, has been generally ignored.

"Today, I also renew my appeal for a Ramadan cessation of hostilities in Sudan," he said.

## Reflecting on Canada's Withdrawal from Afghanistan: 10 Years Later

Canada quietly commemorated the 10th anniversary of its troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, a conflict that deeply impacted soldiers, diplomats, aid workers, and journalists. Despite the rain-soaked ceremony in Ottawa, the occasion served as a poignant reminder of the lasting effects of Canada's involvement in the war-torn nation. Gen. Wayne Eyre, Canada's chief of the defence staff, acknowledged the profound personal and collective scars left by the Afghanistan experience. The abrupt resurgence of the Taliban in 2021 underscored the complex legacy of Canada's mission, prompting reflection on its significance and impact. The collapse of the Afghan National Army following the withdrawal dealt a significant blow to Canada and its allies, raising questions about the efficacy and outcomes of the mission. While the Afghan war remains a sensitive topic, with little public appetite for discussion, there is a growing recognition of the need for a national conversation on Canada's role in conflicts abroad. Despite the challenges and controversies surrounding the Afghan war, there are stories of individual resilience and hope, such as that of Afghan-Canadian journalist Frozan Rahmani, whose life was transformed by Canada's intervention.



# Overseas care workers can no longer bring dependants to UK

(News Agency)- As part of the UK government's plan to bring down unsustainable levels of legal migration and tackle visa abuse, overseas care workers coming to the country will now be restricted from bringing dependants, starting from Monday itself. The implementation of the move means a total of 300,000 people eligible to come to the UK last year, will not be able to do so now, a Home Office statement said on Monday.

In addition, care providers in England acting as sponsors for migrants will also be required to register with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) — the industry regulator for Health and Social Care — to crack down on worker exploitation and abuse within the sector.

As 120,000 dependants accompanied 100,000 workers on this visa route last year, British Home Secretary James Cleverly said: "...we cannot justify inaction



in the face of clear abuse, manipulation of our immigration system and unsustainable migration numbers".

"Our plan is robust but fair — protecting British workers while ensuring the very best international talent can work and study here, to add value to our society and grow the economy," he said.

According to the Home Office, there is "clear evidence" that care workers have been offered visas under false pretences. This includes travelling thousands of miles for jobs that simply don't exist or exploiting them by paying far below the minimum wage required for their work while undercutting British workers.

These changes came into effect with the government set to lay rules in Parliament on March 14 to prevent the "undercutting of British workers".

Further, Cleverly will also commission a review of the graduate route for international students to prevent abuse and protect the integrity and quality of higher education in the country.

"He will ask the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) to ensure that demand for the graduate route, through which a total of 175,872 visas have been granted since it was established, is fit for purpose and focused on attracting the best and brightest to the UK," the Home Office said. The move comes after an analysis by the MAC showed that the number of foreign postgraduate students attending institutions with the lowest UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) entry requirements has increased by over 250 per cent between 2018 and 2022.

# SpaceX aces double launch of 46 Starlink satellites under 6 hours



(News Agency)-Elon Musk's aerospace company SpaceX on Monday aces double launches of 46 Starlink internet satellites in low-Earth orbit — all under

just six hours. The satellites lifted onboard the company's reusable, two-stage Falcon 9 rocket from Space Launch Complex 40 (SLC-40) at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Florida, the company said, in a statement.

The first set of 23 satellites lifted off at 4:35 am on Monday (India time).

"This was the 11th flight for the first stage booster supporting this mission, which previously launched Crew-5, GPS III Space Vehicle 06, Inmarsat I6-F2, CRS-28, Intelsat G-37, NG-20, and now five Starlink missions," it added.

About 8.5 minutes after liftoff, the Falcon 9's first stage came back to Earth and made a vertical landing on the SpaceX drone ship "Just Read the Instructions," which was stationed in the Atlantic Ocean.

"Deployment of 23 @Starlink satellites confirmed," SpaceX said in a tweet, an hour after the launch.

The second set of 23 Starlink satellites to low-Earth orbit liftoff at 9:39 am (India time).

"This is the 17th flight for the first stage booster supporting this mission, which previously launched Sentinel-6 Michael Freilich, DART, Transporter-7, Iridium OneWeb, SDA-0B, and 11 Starlink missions," the company said.

Following stage separation, the first stage will land on the 'Of Course I Still Love You' dronship, which will be stationed in the Pacific Ocean.

Last week, SpaceX launched 23 Starlink internet satellites.

The company currently has over 5,000 working Starlink satellites in orbit, and it has approval to launch up to 12,000.

SpaceX has launched 22 orbital missions already this year, but several more are in the offing: The company intends to launch 144 times in 2024.

# Commonwealth nations celebrate 75-year milestone

(News Agency)-Today, 56 of the world's largest countries and smallest islands, across six oceans, continue to stand united and celebrate the shared values for Commonwealth Day. Commonwealth Day is traditionally celebrated on the second Monday in March. The theme for this year's Commonwealth Day and the forthcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) is 'One Resilient Common Future: Transforming our Common Wealth'.

More than 56 nations will celebrate the occasion throughout this week, with representatives attending an event at the Commonwealth Secretariat's headquarters in London.

This year's staging is especially significant as the modern Commonwealth will celebrate its 75th anniversary in April.



At a Commonwealth Prime Ministers' meeting in London on April 26, 1949, the London Declaration said that republics and

other independent countries could be equal members of the Commonwealth.

Thus, the modern Commonwealth of Nations was born.

King Charles III said in his Commonwealth Day video message: "The Commonwealth family is strongest when we are connected through friendship. As I have said before, the Commonwealth is like the wiring of a house, and its people, our energy and our ideas are the current that runs through those wires.

"Together and individually, we are strengthened by sharing perspectives and

experiences, and by offering and borrowing the myriad ways we have each tackled the challenges of our time."

Commonwealth Secretary-General, Patricia Scotland KC, emphasised the value, power, and potential of the Commonwealth family in her Commonwealth Day address.

"Together, we have built a Commonwealth which is fit for the times we live in — stronger, more connected and more influential than ever; capable of rising to the world's challenges, innovating to seize new opportunities, and working together to shape a more peaceful, resilient and prosperous common future."



# ‘Big win for human rights’: Hindus in Canada, US, UK laud CAA implementation

Calling the government's decision to offer Indian citizenship to persecuted minorities a “big win for human rights”, Hindu organisations across the US, the UK, and Canada on Tuesday hailed the announcement of the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).

The CAA — an integral part of the BJP's 2019 Lok Sabha polls manifesto — will enable the granting of citizenship to people from Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist and Parsi communities, who had migrated to India before December 31, 2014, from



neighbouring countries because of religious persecution.

“The government's decision to offer Indian citizenship to persecuted minorities from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan is a commendable move... India, as a signatory to the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights and various other international conventions, has an obligation to provide asylum to persecuted individuals regardless of their religion,” the Hindu Forum Canada said in a statement.

The group hoped that “Pakistan and Bangladesh will consider

implementing a similar Citizenship Amendment Act to foster brotherhood among Indian nationals”.

US-based advocacy group, Coalition of Hindus of North America (CoHNA), called the move “a big win for Human Rights for the persecuted religious

minorities of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

It further said that CAA has no impact on existing Indian citizens of any faith and that it simply fast-tracks the Indian citizenship process for nearly 31,000 religious minorities who fled to neighbouring nations “in the face of extreme and systemic persecution”.

CoHNA pointed out that each year in Pakistan, thousands of minor girls from minority communities are kidnapped, forcibly converted and “married” to their abductors, with support from police and judicial authorities.

## ‘Food for Gaza’ plan unveiled in Italy to coordinate int’l humanitarian aid



Three multilateral food and aid agencies, together with Italy, have unveiled a “Food for Gaza” initiative aimed at coordinating international humanitarian efforts. The initiative is made to increase food and health aid in Gaza in the short term, and then to focus — in the long term — on the human and social reconstruction of Gaza,

according to Antonio Tajani, Italy's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, on Monday.

Qu Dongyu, Director-General of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation; Cindy McCain, executive director of the World Food Program; and Deputy Secretary General of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent

Societies Xavier Castellanos were present at the event held at the headquarters of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, news agency reported. “This is a program whose objective is to coordinate the activities of these important institutions,” Tajani said. “Together we want to focus on projects and the creation of a humanitarian aid corridor.”

## US sanctions against country caused \$700 bn GDP loss: Venezuelan VP

—Venezuelan Vice President Delcy Rodriguez has said the US sanctions against the country have caused losses of nearly \$700 billion in GDP. At an international seminar in the Bolivian city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra on Monday, the Vice President said Venezuela's oil industry sustained losses of almost 232 billion dollars due to the sanctions, which have in addition frozen more than 22 billion dollars Venezuelan assets in international banks, news agency reported.

The US, she said, has failed to comply with the lifting of sanctions as established in the Barbados Agreement reached between the government and Venezuelan opposition parties in October 2023.

The agreement brought a relief, known as General License 44,

from the US on Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro's government in October 2023, but



the Joe Biden administration reimposed sanctions on Venezuela in January, saying the move was in response to Maduro's decision to ban a leading opposition candidate from running for president.

In view of US unilateral policies, Latin America “essentially” needs a new financial architecture, Rodriguez said.

## UN chief calls for action as women's rights face backsliding, violence

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has stressed the critical urgency of protecting women's rights, now endangered by regressing achievements, escalating violence, and a widening digital gender divide. Addressing the opening of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the pivotal forum dedicated to promoting and safeguarding the rights of women and girls worldwide,



the UN chief on Monday stressed the disproportionate impact of wars on women. “In conflict zones around the globe, women and girls are suffering most from wars waged by men,” he said, urging immediate ceasefires and humanitarian aid, news agency reported.

He highlighted the dire circumstances in Gaza, where reportedly more than two-thirds of casualties and

injuries during Israel's military actions involve women and girls, and pointed out alarming reports of sexual violence against Palestinian women during detentions, house raids, and checkpoints in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Guterres also voiced concern over the situation faced by women in other countries, including Afghanistan and Sudan.



# Salman introduces Raveena as 'Patna Shuklla', says 'swagat karo'

Superstar Salman Khan on Monday shared the character introduction video of Raveena Tandon from the upcoming film 'Patna Shuklla', saying 'swagat karo'. 'Patna Shuklla' revolves around uncommon

The snippet further shows Jatin Goswami as a politician and threatening Tanvi to drop Rinki Kumari's (Anushka Kaushik) case. Tanvi replies, "Kya kar lenge aap, marwa denge?"



Jatin says, "ham aaj kal ke neta hain, illegal kaam illegal tareeke se karte hain". It further shows how Tanvi's husband loses his job because of this case. The video ends with Tanvi saying, "Ham nahi jhukenge".

Sharing the video, Salman wrote: "Roll-number scam hai case jinka agla Swagat karo Raveena ka in and as Patna Shuklla".

Raveena also dropped the video on her official account, and said: "Anyay se dabi

journey of Tanvi Shukla (Raveena), a common woman, who takes matters into her own hands when she sees a student entangled in a roll number scam.

Taking to X, Salman shared a one minute and 54 seconds video, wherein Raveena as Tanvi is seen serving tea and snacks to the guests. She says, "ham sirf housewife nahi hai", to which one man replies, "Tanvi bhabhi lawyer bhi hain".

Manav Vij, who plays Tanvi's husband says, "ye affidavit bahut acha banati hai".

The video then shows a girl student, who approaches Tanvi to fight her case related to examination roll number scam.

aawaz ke liye, nyay ka aaghaz karne aa rahi hai Tanvi."

The movie dives into the education scam of roll numbers that affects the lives of thousands of earnest students in India. It is a heartwarming story of two women that go above and beyond to fight for justice while tackling pressures and the responsibilities of motherhood.

The show also stars Chandan Roy Sanyal, and late actor Satish Kaushik.

Produced by Arbaaz Khan Productions Pvt Ltd and directed by Vivek Budakoti, the courtroom drama begins streaming on Disney+ Hotstar from March 29.



## Joaquin Phoenix, Emma Stone, Austin Butler, Pedro Pascal on board for 'Eddington'

Filmmaker Ari Aster, who is known for 'Hereditary' and 'Midsommar' has brought in an all-star cast for his next film, 'Eddington'.

Joaquin Phoenix, Emma Stone, Austin Butler, Pedro Pascal, Luke Grimes, Deirdre O'Connell,



Micheal Ward and Clifton Collins Jr will be seen in the movie financed by A24. Based on Aster's track record, viewers can only assume the film will give nightmares, reports Variety

Plot details are kept under wraps besides the fact that the film "follows a small-town New Mexico sheriff with higher aspirations." 'Eddington' starts production this week, with Aster writing, directing

and producing alongside Lars Knudsen under their Square Peg banner. As per Variety, two-time Academy Award nominee Darius Khondji is the director of photography. 'Eddington' marks the sixth collaboration between Square Peg and A24, which produced and distributed Aster's previous three films, 'Hereditary', 'Midsommar' and 'Beau Is Afraid', as well as 'Dream Scenario' and the upcoming 'Death of a Unicorn'. Phoenix was recently nominated for Golden Globe for his lead performance in 'Beau Is Afraid', Aster's 2023 dark comedy horror about a troubled man who goes home to see his mother. Stone is fresh off her second Academy Award win for her lead performance in

Yorgos Lanthimos' 'Poor Things', which she also produced, as well as the Showtime series 'The Curse', which saw her teaming up with Nathan Fielder and Benny Safdie. Butler currently stars in 'Dune: Part Two' and has Jeff Nichols' 'The Bikeriders' up next in theatres, while Pascal is in Ethan Coen's 'Drive Away Dolls' and working on HBO's 'The Last of Us' Season 2.

## Raymon Kakar watched Pakistani shows to learn Urdu for her role in 'Rabb Se Hai Dua'

Actress Raymon Kakar, who portrays Dua in the show 'Rabb Se Hai Dua', shared that she watched Pakistani shows to



grasp better Urdu for the preparation of the role.

Talking about her preparation for Dua, Raymon said: "Preparing for the character of Dua was fascinating for me because I've always had a love for Urdu, even though I've never spoken it. My daughter is quite fluent in Urdu

and really enjoys the language." "I hadn't spoken Urdu before, so our director Yusuf and writer Samir Siddique played an important role. They suggested watching Pakistani shows to grasp Urdu better, which proved helpful during the preparation. I also watched a few episodes of 'Rabb Se Hai Dua' to understand the character of Dua better," shared the 'Kumkum' fame. Talking about the 22 years of

leap in the show, Raymon said: "I won't say pressure, but I would say whenever you start something new, it's always a challenge. Whenever any show takes a leap, a character that has been in the show for a long time and has already won hearts, it is difficult to replace the actor."



## Yami's love filled b'day wish for hubby Aditya: 'Lucked out marrying best man in the world'

Actress Yami Gautam, who is currently riding high on the success of her recently released movie 'Article 370', on Tuesday showered love on her husband and filmmaker Aditya Dhar, who has turned 41, saying she has married the best man in the world.

Aditya is best known for directing 2019 military action drama 'Uri: The Surgical Strike', starring Vicky Kaushal and Yami in the lead.

Yami tied the knot with Aditya in June 2021. Talking to Instagram, Yami shared an unseen picture with her 'sunshine'.

The photo is truly filled with love, featuring the actress known for 'Vicky Donor' in a blue denim jacket, and Aditya in a navy blue coat and black T-shirt.

The couple is holding onto each other closely, and smiling cutely for the lenses.

The post is captioned: "Happy birthday to my... (sun, world, star,

birthday, Aditya."

Meanwhile, in the political action thriller 'Article 370', Yami plays the spirited intelligence officer Zooni Haksar.



The movie is set against the backdrop of the abrogation by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi government of the constitutional provision that assured a special status to Jammu and Kashmir.

Set against the backdrop of true events, the film offers audiences a gripping narrative with political intrigue, national security threats and pulse-pounding action sequences woven in. Directed by Aaditya Suhas Jambhale, 'Article 370' has a stellar ensemble cast that also includes Priyamani, Arun Govil and Vaibhav Tatwawadi.

## Disha Patani & Sidharth bonded over gym sessions, volleyball during shoot breaks

Disha Patani, who plays an air hostess in the adrenaline-pumping action film 'Yodha', recalled playing volleyball with lead actor Sidharth Malhotra during the shoot breaks.

Disha, who was in the national capital on Monday, along with Sidharth and Raashii Khanna to promote their film, directed by Sagar Ambre and Pushkar Ojha, looked resplendent in a white silk saree and a matching embellished sleeveless blouse with a sweetheart neckline.

Talking about the fun thing they did during the shoot of the movie, Disha said: "We shot the entire schedule in the plane, and anytime we used to have a break we used to play Volleyball on the set. So that was the fun thing we had."

Sidharth went on to share how Disha did not miss out on her workouts on the sets of 'Yodha'.

He said: "I remember I shot for 10 days, and then Disha's sequence came. She came on set, we were standing in a studio in Mumbai. There was a vanity van, (and) a

basic tent setup for food. After Disha came, some people came to meet me and said wow you have got a gym set up outside, and now you will work out on the set."

"I said there was no gym on the set 10 days before. So then I got to know that when Disha came she also brought her gym. I found that very amazing because that is the

level of her dedication towards her fitness. In this film, her costume is saree, but the way she had set up her gym so that she doesn't miss out her workouts," he shared.

Lauding his co-star, Sidharth added: "I think people see her dedication not only in the physical aspect but she has performed really well in the film."

Disha added: "I think this is Sidharth's best film ever, the way he is looking and he has performed. Raashii is unreal in the film as well." 'Yodha' will be the first part of an action franchise headlined by Sidharth. It is jointly produced by Hiroo Yash Johar, Karan Johar, Apoorva Mehta, and Shashank Khaitan.

The film is set to release on March 15.





# "Shaitaan": Ajay Devgn's Biggest Overseas Release ever



"Shaitaan" has rapidly emerged as this year's most eagerly awaited supernatural thriller. With its ground-breaking distribution across more than 950 locations in over 60 countries on over 1200 screens, "Shaitaan" is setting the stage for unprecedented global anticipation with early paid previews and advances starting this week in key overseas territories such as USA and the GCC. This extensive outreach marks a milestone, positioning the film as Ajay Devgn's biggest overseas release and widest overseas release for a film in its genre.

Directed by the acclaimed Vikas Bahl, "Shaitaan" features a powerhouse ensemble cast led by Ajay Devgn, alongside Jyotika and R Madhavan, offering a thrilling cinematic journey unlike any other. The film delves into the nightmarish ordeal of Kabir, portrayed by Ajay Devgn, and his family during what was supposed to be an idyllic weekend getaway, only to be disrupted by the arrival of a mysterious stranger.

R Madhavan delivers a compelling performance as the antagonist, bringing tension and intrigue to the home of Ajay and Jyotika's characters, unveiling his dark intentions. This eagerly anticipated film has captivated global audiences with

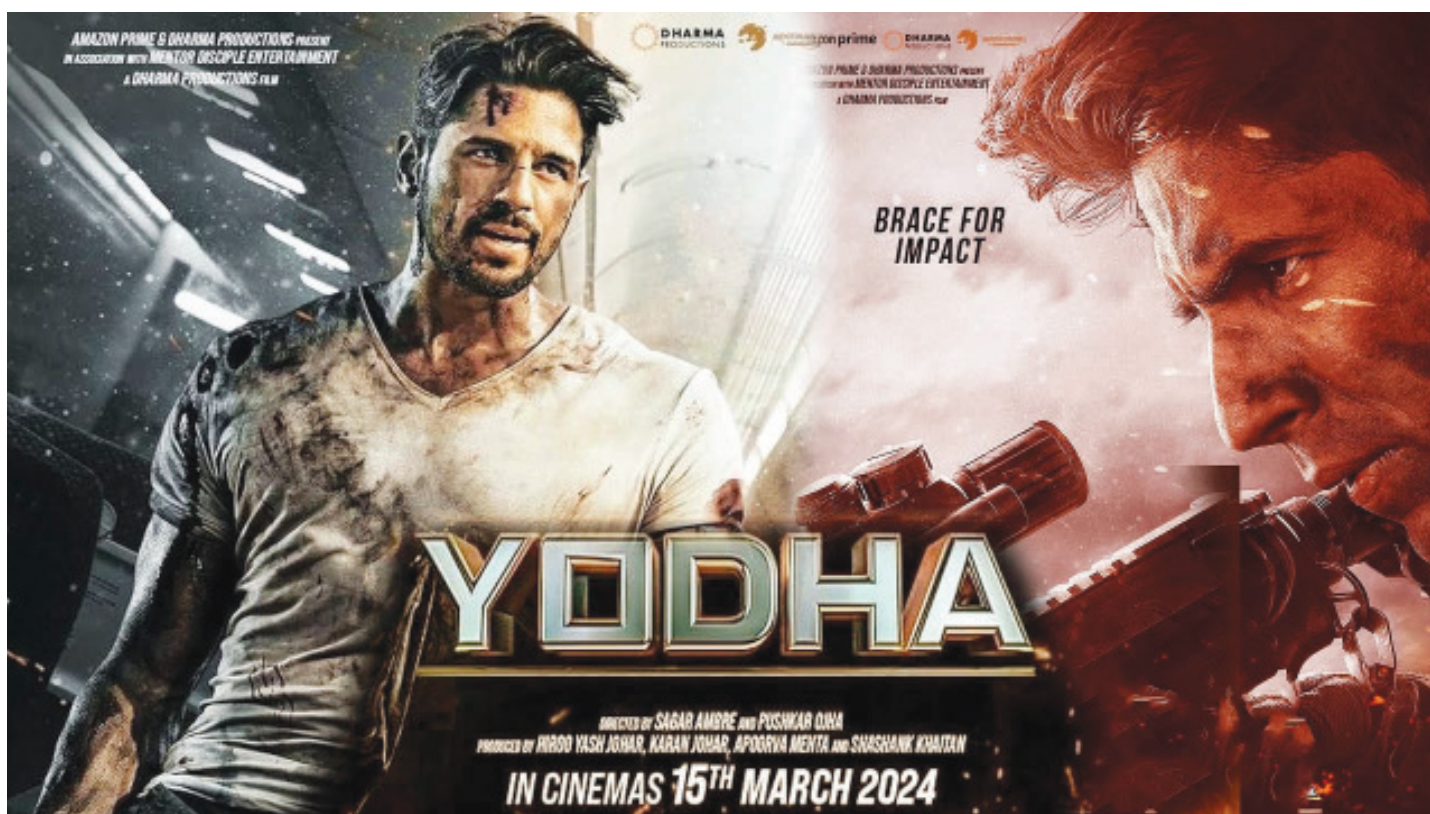
its powerful trailer, innovative marketing strategies, and interactive branding, heightening intrigue around the dark world of "Shaitaan" and black magic. Seamlessly weaving action, emotional depth, and the chilling aspects of Indian Black Magic, "Shaitaan" ensures an engrossing experience that will keep audiences riveted.

As the film's release date nears, the promotional strategy has further intensified with out-of-the-box marketing initiatives, including the launch of POP OUT hoardings in India, showcasing an intense Ajay Devgn interacting with a voodoo doll, adding to the international buzz and anticipation for this edge-of-your-seat thriller.

Promising a ground-breaking film experience, setting new benchmarks for the genre on an international scale, "Shaitaan" is presented by Jio Studios, Devgn Films and Panorama Studios, produced by Ajay Devgn, Jyoti Deshpande, Kumar Mangat Pathak and Abhishek Pathak, and directed by Vikas Bahl.

"Shaitaan" releases internationally in cinemas on 8th March 2024 by Funasia Films and Marudhar Entertainment Network.

## Sidharth Malhotra reveals action in 'Yodha' very different from 'Shershaah'



New Delhi- Actor Sidharth Malhotra, who is headlining the adrenaline-pumping action drama 'Yodha', shared on Monday how the action he has performed in this film is different from what he has done in 'Shershaah'.

Sidharth, along with his co-stars Raashii Khanna and Disha Patani, was in the national capital on Monday to promote his film, directed by Sagar Ambre and

Pushkar Ojha.

The trio also launched a patriotic song 'Tiranga' which is sung by B. Praak. The music is by Tanishk Bagchi, and the lyrics are by Manoj Muntashir Shukla.

During the promotions, Sidharth looked dapper in a printed grey coloured shirt, matching leather jacket and light grey ripped jeans. He rounded off his look with white and grey sneakers and transparent

sunglasses. "Delhi is my hometown. It's always good to be back here," said Sidharth. Talking about the movie, and how it is different from 'Shershaah', the biographical war film he did that was based on the life of Vikram Batra, Sidharth said: "Yodha is a completely fictitious story. We have created a new task force – Yodha. So when you create something from zero, then you can take a lot of liberties. We

have done many variations that what all Yodha task force will do."

"And through that, the action I got to perform is very different from 'Shershaah'. Here I am more energetic, and lean, and use different sorts of weapons. It is a far more commercial and entertaining film. I think it has got my best of action sequences that I have done in last decade or so," shared Sidharth, who was last seen in 'Indian Police Force'.

The actor further shared how he is more drawn towards the roles in uniform.

"I think nothing looks better on a man than a uniform whether it is any form of service in the country. I have done the Army, done the Police," he said.

Sidharth further revealed that during his childhood he used to dress in the Army uniform, with a gun on his shoulders, and had some kind of fixation with the uniform.

"In films, I personally love watching action dramas. I think it's a coincidence that in the past few years I am getting to play such roles," he said.

He continued, saying: "I love underdog characters. It is so interesting to see a really relatable, humane underdog character like Captain Vikram Batra, who was a very regular Punjabi boy from Himachal. And then he went on to do such heroic things for the country. And I am sure there are many Army officers whose stories are not told yet."



# Nimrat Kaur celebrates 42nd b'day in Gulmarg, goes skiing for fun

Nimrat Kaur is celebrating her 42nd birthday in Gulmarg, Kashmir, and has shared a glimpse of skiing on the snow-laden landscape.

The actress, who was last seen in 'Sajini Shinde Ka Viral Video' is on an adventurous vacation in the 'paradise on earth'.

On Wednesday, she took to Instagram and shared a series of videos and photos from her first ever skiing experience.

The visuals show Nimrat wearing a white sweater, black tights, and a long beige jacket. She is happily posing wearing the ice skates, showing the victory sign. The birthday girl initially looked nervous

while skiing, but later she happily shouts "Wowww.. I loved it."

Another video shows Nimrat sitting in an open jeep, and enjoying the snow covered mountains of Gulmarg.

The post is captioned: "Skied for the first time ever!!! Highly recommended for all children trying to be adults!! Best way to work the white carpet!!! God blessed times in this God blessed place... Thank you Universe #bucketlist #firsttimesking #lovelovelove #butapathri #birthdaylove #piscesgirl."

On the work front, she next has 'Section 84' in the pipeline. She last featured in a mystery thriller web series 'School of Lies'.



## Nikki Sharma took two days for challenging 'ShivShakti' shoot with cement



Actress Nikki Sharma, who has shot a challenging sequence with cement for the show 'Pyaar Ka Pehla Adhyaya ShivShakti', shared how the whole scene took two full days to shoot, resulting in a physically intense experience.

The story revolves around Shiv and Shakti, played by Arjun Bijlani and Nikki, navigating their life through the challenges thrown at them.

In the recent episodes, Mandira (Parineeta Borthakur) attempted to harm Shiv's son Kartik (Aan Tiwari) once again with her devious plan. Shakti came to his rescue in time. As Kartik finds himself in a dangerous situation chasing a ball

into a construction site, he ends up in a pit full of wet cement.

To ensure that Kartik doesn't get hurt, Shakti bravely jumps in to shield him, ending up covered in sludge.

Talking about the same, Nikki said: "Shooting with cement was very tough. The forceful impact of the liquid falling on my back in bulk was testing my endurance. The whole scene took two full days to shoot, resulting in a physically demanding experience." "Nevertheless, despite the challenges, Arjun and our director's unwavering encouragement kept me motivated, enabling me to deliver my best performance," she added.

The show airs on Zee TV.

## No dating apps for Kriti, who believes in 'old-school' love

Dating apps are a complete 'No' for actress Kriti Sanon, who is gearing up for her upcoming film 'Crew'. The National Award-winning actress is set to appear on the streaming chat show 'No Filter Neha', where she made the revelation that she is quite "old-school" when it comes to the subject of love. In the latest promo of 'No Filter Neha', Kriti can be seen giving audiences a peek into her personal life, as she made some revelations about her ideal partner. The actress said, "I have told everybody around me that if you have anybody in mind please let me know. I can't do dating apps, I am a bit old school that way. I believe in effort, gesture and romance."

She further mentioned, "I need someone who is honest, loyal, extremely loving, and



tall. I am not describing 7-8 men, it's just one guy. I just need a robot I guess. Am I asking for too much, these are just the basics."

'No Filter Neha' season 6, is available to stream on JioTV and JioTV+ with new episodes dropping every Thursday.

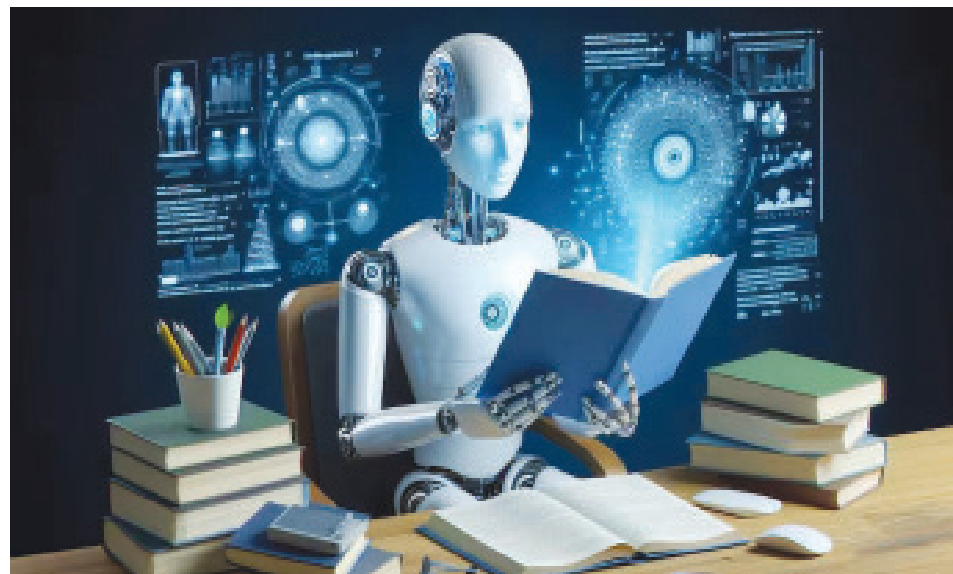


# Authors sue Nvidia for using their work to train NeMo, say their books taught NeMo AI how to write

Last year, OpenAI made headlines when comedienne-author Sarah Silverman as well as several other award-winning authors sued ChatGPT for using their work without their permission. And now, a similar case has been registered against chipmaker Nvidia. As per a Reuters report, Nvidia is facing legal action from three authors—Brian Keene, Abdi Nazemian, and Stewart O'Nan—who allege that the company utilised their copyrighted books without authorisation to train its NeMo AI platform, renowned for powering artificial intelligence. The authors claim that their works were used in NeMo's training. The training dataset was taken down in October following reported copyright infringement issues.

## Nvidia sued by authors

The authors, Brian Keene, Abdi Nazemian, and Stewart O'Nan say that their literary words were included in a dataset comprising around 196,640 books. This dataset was utilised to train NeMo in replicating ordinary written language. However, the dataset was removed in October following reports of copyright infringement. The report then adds that in a class action filed on Friday



night in San Francisco federal court, the authors argued that Nvidia's decision to take down the dataset is equal to an acknowledgment of using their copyrighted material to train NeMo, thereby violating their copyrights.

The authors are seeking unspecified damages on behalf of individuals in the United States whose copyrighted works contributed to the training of NeMo's large language models over the past three years. Notable works mentioned in the

lawsuit include Keene's 2008 novel "Ghost Walk," Nazemian's 2019 novel "Like a Love Story," and O'Nan's 2007 novella "Last Night at the Lobster."

## When authors sued OpenAI

As mentioned already, Nvidia isn't the only company that has faced legal action for training AI on authors' works. Last year in September, a group of US-based authors including Pulitzer Prize winner Michael Chabon, sued OpenAI in federal court in San Francisco. The

authors accused OpenAI of misusing their writing to train ChatGPT.

The lawsuit said that OpenAI copied the authors' work without permission to teach ChatGPT to respond to human text prompts. The lawsuit added that the authors' works like books, plays and articles play a key role in training ChatGPT as these works are the "best examples of high-quality, long form writing."

Before that in July 2023, comedienne and author Sarah Silverman, and two other authors made headlines for suing ChatGPT creator OpenAI over copyright infringement. Silverman, who authored the book *The Bedwetter*, argued that ChatGPT summarised the contents of her book when prompted and that she had never given permission to OpenAI to use her book's content to train the chatbot.

Writer Christopher Golden, who wrote *Ararat*, and author Richard Kadrey, who wrote *Sandman Slim*, also sued the company for using their books' contents without their permission. The trio asked for a jury trial along with monetary damages.

## OpenAI denies any agreement with Elon Musk, says the X chief wants all success for himself

For a long time, Elon Musk has criticised OpenAI for turning into a for-profit company and forgetting its original mission. On February 29, the X boss took legal action against OpenAI and filed a lawsuit against the Sam Altman-led company. In the lawsuit, Musk accused OpenAI of abandoning its original mission and breaching its founding agreement.



Founding Agreement is instead a fiction Musk has conjured to lay unearned claim to the fruits of an enterprise he initially supported, then abandoned, then watched succeed without him," the lawsuit states. In addition to this, OpenAI, in the filing, also said that Musk "dropped OpenAI" when his wishes were not

following and looking at OpenAI's technological advancements, he wants "all success for himself."

"Were this case to proceed to discovery, the evidence would show that Musk supported a for-profit structure for OpenAI, to be controlled by Musk himself, and dropped

the project when his wishes were not followed. Seeing the remarkable technological advances OpenAI has achieved, Musk now wants that success for himself," the lawsuit states. For those unfamiliar with the situation, Elon Musk filed a lawsuit against Sam Altman's OpenAI last week, alleging contract breaches and unfair business practices. Musk claimed that OpenAI's shift towards maximizing profits for Microsoft, rather than serving humanity, contradicted the company's original mission.

Now, OpenAI has sent a legal response to the lawsuit, denying the existence of any agreement and saying that Musk just wants all the success for himself. OpenAI responds to Elon Musk's lawsuit. This is the first legal response from OpenAI concerning the lawsuit. According to a report in *The Verge*, the company, in a court filing, has said that there was no founding agreement with Musk at all and that it is all "fictional". "There is no Founding Agreement, or any agreement at all with Musk, as the complaint itself makes clear. The

## Nothing phones now lets users record calls discreetly, here is how

Nothing, the innovative tech company founded by Carl Pei, has announced the addition of a new feature that allows users to record phone calls discreetly, without alerting other participants on the call. Carl Pei announced the introduction of this feature on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter.

According to Pei, users of Nothing phones, including owners of Nothing Phone 1, Phone 2, or the newly launched Phone 2a, can now utilize discreet call recording via the new recorder widget integrated into Nothing's phones. Previously, users seeking to



record phone calls on Nothing devices had to rely on the default recording option in the Google dialer. However, this method would alert all parties on the call that the conversation was being recorded, as is typical with call recording on Android phones. With the new recorder widget, however, users can initiate call recording without triggering any notifications to others on the call. The feature can be found in the new

recorder widget on Nothing's phones.

Pei emphasized that this feature was highly requested by Nothing's user community. While discreet call recording has raised concerns about potential misuse, Pei clarified that the purpose of this feature is to protect users from unwanted scenarios. In

addition to the discreet call recording feature, Pei revealed that Nothing is also working on revamping the notifications panel on their phones. Although no specifics were provided regarding the changes, this announcement hints at further

improvements that could arrive soon to enhance user experience on Nothing devices. Besides, Nothing just recently launched its new Phone 2a smartphone, priced under Rs 25,000. It is the most affordable 5G phone from the brand and the device will cost you Rs 23,999. The first sale of the device will take place on March 12 and interested people can buy it via Flipkart, Croma and Vijay Sales, along with other retail outlets.



# Small cap index down 10 pc from the peak after SEBI red flags



Small and mid cap stocks are coming under intense selling pressure with the regulator raising red flags. The small cap index is down more than 3 per cent on Wednesday. The mid cap index is down more than 2 per cent.

The SME IPO index is down more than 4 per cent. Other pockets of the market are also very weak with the PSU index down more than 4 per cent. Market breadth is extremely negative with 83 per cent of the

listed stocks declining. More than 700 stocks have hit the lower circuit indicating the meltdown in the small cap stocks.

V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services said in the

near-term investors should focus on the sustained weakness in the broader market, particularly the small cap segment. The excessive valuations in these segments driven by the irrational exuberance of retail investors have been a concern for many

months now. But it has taken the strong message from the regulator SEBI to trigger a correction in the Nifty Small cap index by 10 per cent from the February 8 peak.

He said that 396 stocks are in the lower circuit indicating that there is more pain to come in this segment. Actions from mutual funds also indicate the excessive valuations in the broader market. ICICI Pru has joined two other leading funds in stopping lump sum investments in their mid and small cap schemes. More are likely to follow. The net impact of this shift would be more money flowing into large caps.

Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities said adverse breadth data is weighing on the minds of investors and traders.

## Unifor says SaltWire's credit protection filing is more devastating news for a walloped media sector



to continue in operation once the crisis that led to the filing of the CCAA application is addressed. It is also used as a way to liquidate companies in an orderly way.

Unifor will expect the courts supervising the CCAA process to diligently consider employee interests and strictly apply the limited rules that protect employees instead of lenders.

Meanwhile, the loss of local news across Canada – including in the Atlantic region – is devastating to our country and our democracy, if you consider this announcement is on the heels of Metroland newspaper closings and Bell Media layoffs.

“Employees and members at The Telegram, who consistently punch above their weight, were hoping that their recent sacrifices through tough pandemic times would help stabilize the company and pay off with job security,” said Unifor Atlantic Regional Director Jennifer Murray. “Instead, they now face the stress and uncertainty of their paycheques, benefits, pensions and severance at risk, while watching their communities’ democracy suffer with every additional news media bankruptcy or restructuring.”

The union has not received any word of changes in day-to-day operations, including layoffs, and will continue to monitor the situation and keep the membership informed.

Unifor is deeply concerned after learning creditor protection Atlantic newspaper owner SaltWire Network Inc. filed for creditor protection yesterday. In addition, a private equity fund has alleged the company owes it roughly \$33 million after years of mismanagement out of its \$94 million total debt load.

“Yesterday’s news is devastating for the journalists and media workers who have continued to deliver local news for communities throughout Atlantic Canada and who have been through numerous challenging times,” said Unifor’s National President Lana Payne. “This one cuts close to home as I got my start in journalism many years ago at the St. John’s Telegram. I know how committed these media workers are.”

“This is yet another massive hit to local news that threatens the jobs of hard-working journalist and media worker members and worsens what has been a

growing number of news deserts across this country. We stand by our members as we weather this storm together,” Payne added. There are 35 Unifor Local 441-G members working as reporters, videographers, printing press, and in advertising at the Telegram who were notified by the company’s Chief Operating Officer Ian Scott yesterday of its Companies’ Creditor Arrangement Act (CCAA) filing. The private fund also claims the Chronicle Herald, the Halifax-based newspaper that SaltWire owns, owes \$2.6 million for missed pension payments, according to the legal documents. The status of pension funding will be of particular concern to Unifor during the CCAA proceedings.

The CCAA is federal legislation designed to provide large companies the opportunity to restructure their operations and/or their financial obligations in order

## PM Modi to launch new credit scheme to help poor start biz ventures



Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday will launch the Pradhan Mantri Samajik Utthan evam Rozgar Adharit Jankalyan (PM-SURAJ) national portal and sanction credit support to one lakh entrepreneurs of disadvantaged sections of the country, the Prime Minister’s office said. The credit support will be provided to the eligible persons across the country through banks, non-banking finance companies-microfinance institutions (NBFC-MFIs) and other organisations.

The Prime Minister will also interact with beneficiaries of various government schemes from disadvantaged groups, including Scheduled Castes, Backward Classes and sanitation workers. He will also address a public rally on this

occasion.

PM-SURAJ national portal for credit support to disadvantaged sections embodies Prime Minister’s commitment to prioritise the underprivileged (‘vanchiton ko varyyata’). It is a transformative initiative, aimed at uplifting the most marginalised sections of society, according to the official statement.

During the programme, Prime Minister Modi will also distribute Ayushman health cards and PPE kits to ‘Safai Mitras’ (sewer and septic tank workers) under the National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem (NAMASTE). This initiative represents yet another step towards safeguarding the health and safety of frontline workers who serve in challenging conditions.



# US rancher used tissue and testicles to breed 'giant' sheep to sell for hunting

A Montana rancher illegally used tissue and testicles from wild sheep killed by hunters in central Asia and the US to breed "giant" hybrid sheep for sale to private hunting preserves in Texas, according to court documents and federal prosecutors.

Arthur "Jack" Schubarth, 80, of Vaughn, Montana, pleaded guilty to felony charges of wildlife trafficking and conspiracy to traffic wildlife during an appearance Tuesday before a federal judge in Great Falls.

Each count carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. Court documents describe a years-long conspiracy, beginning in 2013, in which Schubarth and at least five other people sought to create "giant sheep hybrids" by cross-breeding species. Their goal was to garner high prices from hunting preserves where people shoot captive trophy game animals for a fee. Using biological tissue obtained from a hunter who killed a wild sheep in Kyrgyzstan belonging to the world's largest species of the animals – Marco Polo argali sheep – Schubarth procured cloned embryos of the animal from a lab, according to court documents.

The embryos were later implanted in a ewe, resulting in a pure Marco Polo argali sheep that Schubarth named "Montana Mountain King", the documents show.



Semen from Montana Mountain King was used to artificially impregnate other ewes to create a larger and more valuable species of sheep, including one offspring that he agreed to sell to two people in Texas for \$10,000, according to the documents.

Male argali sheep can top 300lbs with horns up to 5ft long, according to officials, making them prized among some hunters. They are protected under international convention as a threatened species and outlawed for import into Montana to protect native sheep from disease and hybridization. A person who was not named in court documents shipped 74 ewes of a prohibited sheep species from

Minnesota to Schubarth's ranch to be artificially inseminated with Montana Mountain King's semen, the documents show. Offspring that had only a portion of the central Asian sheep's genetics sold for lesser amounts.

In 2019, Schubarth paid \$400 to a hunting guide for testicles from a trophy-sized Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep killed in Montana. Schubarth extracted semen from the bighorn sheep's testicles and used it to breed large bighorn sheep and sheep crossbred with the argali species, the documents show.

The assistant US attorney general Todd Kim described Schubarth's actions as "an audacious scheme to create massive

hybrid sheep species to be sold and hunted as trophies". Kim said the defendant violated the Lacey Act that restricts wildlife trafficking and prohibits the sale of falsely labeled wildlife.

Schubarth said when reached by telephone on Wednesday that his attorney had advised him not to talk about the case.

"I would love to talk about it, but can't do it now," he said.

His attorney, Jason Holden, did not immediately respond to telephone messages seeking comment.

Authorities agreed under the terms of a plea deal not to pursue further charges against the defendant pending his cooperation with the government's ongoing investigation in the wildlife trafficking case.

Montana Mountain King is in the custody of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, according to Department of Justice spokesperson Matthew Nies. As part of the plea deal, Schubarth agreed to quarantine any other sheep containing Marco Polo argali genetics and any bighorn sheep that had been harvested from the wild. The deal also allows federal wildlife officials to inspect and, if needed, neuter the animals. Captive animal facilities where game species can be raised and hunted were banned in Montana under a 2000 ballot initiative.

## Here's What You Need to Know About Orgasmic Meditation'

If you're down to try something new in the bedroom and you want to learn to connect with your body in the process, then allow us to introduce you to orgasmic meditation—aka OM. Orgasmic meditation combines meditation and mindfulness with masturbation and can ultimately help you achieve a higher level of pleasure. Interested? Thought so.

Essentially, orgasmic meditation is a clitoral-rubbing technique that can be done solo or with a partner while, well, meditating (hence the name). All about slowing down, turning your mind off, and listening to your body and breath, meditation comes with a ton of physical and mental benefits just on its own. But combining it with mindful masturbation can result in a winning combo either just for yourself and your own sexual practice or for you and your partner if you want to try it together. "Science is clear



that all meditation practices, including orgasmic mediation, have significant health benefits, including reducing stress, promoting mental health, improving sleep, helping with anxiety, and enhancing self-awareness, to name a few," says clinical psychologist Megan Fleming, PhD, a relationship and sex therapist. For Avi Klein, LSCW, clinical director of

Downtown Somatic Therapy in New York City, there is a clear link between orgasmic meditation, mindfulness, and sexuality. "There are many kinds of somatic therapies (a form of alternative therapy that aims to treat trauma and stress-related disorders), but one point of emphasis is about mindfully noticing sensations in the body, listening

to them, and following them in order to release blocked emotions," Klein says. "Anyone who is struggling with issues around sex could benefit from becoming more aware of their anxiety or other emotions that are getting in the way of feeling pleasure and relaxing into the body." First, orgasmic meditation has a controversial history. While orgasmic meditation may sound like a centuries-old

practice, it actually originated in the early 2000s under controversial circumstances. In 2004, the now-nonexistent company OneTaste trademarked a clitoral stimulation exercise technique developed by businesswoman Nicole Daedone, author of *Slow Sex: The Art and Craft of the Female Orgasm*, that was taught during OneTaste workshops.

According to Fleming, orgasmic meditation as trademarked is a 15-minute technique where the vulva owner, who lies in butterfly position with their legs open, rubs (or has a partner rub) the upper left quadrant of the clitoris in an up-and-down motion with a light touch. If they're practicing with someone who isn't a romantic partner, they'd use a lubed, gloved hand. OneTaste's original practice took off, but in 2015, the company made headlines after reportedly paying a former employee a six-figure settlement after she said she was sexually assaulted and harassed on the job. During that time, other media outlets also reported on additional questionable business practices by the company, and a subsequent FBI investigation brought to light shocking accusations against it and its employees, including labor violations and running their business in a way that felt "cult-like." Following the controversy, the company rebranded and is still promoting orgasmic meditation as the Institute of OM.

While all this controversy understandably does not cast orgasmic meditation in a positive light, some elements of OneTaste's original technique can still offer a number of benefits when done in a safe, comfortable setting alone or with someone you trust. It's also important to note that many sex and somatic therapists, including Fleming, do recommend clients try stroking the clitoral area in ways that feel good to the vulva owner while practicing meditation and mindfulness techniques. How orgasmic mediation can up your sexual and mental game.





## *Biden and Trump clinch nominations, heading to another general election rematch*

By Gregory Krieg,

Donald Trump has clinched the Republican nomination for president, CNN projects, setting up a rematch with Joe Biden, the incumbent president who secured the Democratic nomination earlier Tuesday night.

Biden and Trump will win their parties' presidential primaries in Georgia, Mississippi and Washington, CNN projects. Also Tuesday, Hawaii Republicans are holding caucuses, while voting wraps up in the primary for Democrats Abroad, the official arm of the Democratic Party for Americans living overseas. Biden is the projected winner of the Democratic primary in the US territory of the Northern Mariana Islands, held

earlier Tuesday.

In a post to the social media platform X, Biden celebrated his status as his party's presumptive nominee, calling it "a time of choosing" in a new campaign video.

"Today's a day, a call to action," Biden says in a voiceover. "With your voice, with your power, with your vote – come November, we will vote in record numbers, and can do it, we have the power to do it. Are you ready? Are you ready to defend democracy? Are you ready to protect our freedom? Are you ready to win this election?"

Trump's campaign posted a video on X of the former president later Tuesday, shortly after he clinched the nomination.

"This was a great day of victory. Last week was something very special – Super Tuesday – but now we have to get back to work because we have the worst president in the history of country. His name is Joe Biden, sometimes referred to as crooked Joe Biden, and he must be defeated," Trump says in the video.

The shorter slate of elections follows last week's Super Tuesday, when Biden and Trump dominated across the map, putting both on the cusp of winning a majority of the delegates needed to be crowned their parties' presumptive nominees. Their rematch – long anticipated, but hardly clamored for – is broadly expected to mirror the 2020 campaign, though Trump will run this time under the specter of 91

felony charges related to allegations that he plotted to overturn his 2020 election defeat; played a lead role in the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the US Capitol; illegally took classified documents from the White House; and covered up hush money payments to an adult film star ahead of the 2016 election. Though he now has a record of accomplishments and missteps for voters to weigh, Biden is so far running a similar campaign to 2020 – appealing to concerns over Trump's authoritarian behavior and a middling economy. Unlike Trump, the president never faced a serious, well-funded primary challenge, with Minnesota Rep. Dean Phillips, his lone rival in elected office, dropping out and endorsing Biden last week.

## **'Sect and the city': Striking photo shows bosses of 'orgasm cult' OneTaste leave NYC courthouse with female entourage**

It made for a glamorous change to the usual perp walk outside Brooklyn Federal Court.

The founder and the ex-sales boss at 'orgasmic meditation cult' OneTaste dressed to impress as they appeared with an entourage of supporters to face charges of forcing women into sex acts and keeping them in 'residential warehouses'.

But there were no grimy mugshots for Nicole Daedone and Rachel Cherwitz as they faced down photographers outside the New York courthouse for a procedural hearing on Thursday. Their San Francisco based company was making \$12million a year from

their sexual disfunction treatments for women which included being genitally massaged by a man with a latex glove. It won praise from celebrities including Gwyneth Paltrow and Khloe Kardashian,

and welcomed 35,000 people to its events in 2018. But the FBI began investigating in November that year after ex-customers



came forward saying they were left in debt after paying for expensive classes, and former employees said they were ordered to have sex with potential investors. Former staffer Ayries Blanck filed a lawsuit

against the company in August of 2015, claiming they subjected her to a 'hostile work environment, sexual harassment, failure to pay minimum wage and intentional infliction of emotional distress'.

But she was counter-sued by the group for breaking a non-disclosure agreement when she contributed to the 2022 Netflix documentary Orgasm Inc: The Story of OneTaste in 2022.

Blanck's sister Autymn repeated allegations that OneTaste 'condoned violence' and 'found strangers to rape her'. Prosecutors say that Daedone and former head of sales Rachel Cherwitz deployed a series of abusive and manipulative tactics against volunteers,

contractors, and employees.

They also claim the duo rendered OneTaste members dependent on the group for their shelter and basic necessities and limited their independence and control.

The company operated in 39 cities including New York, San Francisco, Denver, Las Vegas, Boulder, Los Angeles, Austin and London, but some former customers alleged that they were 'raped' after becoming involved in the company, with one telling the BBC she was attacked by a man called 'Jake'.

The company closed all of their US locations in 2018 halting all in-person classes, and Anjuli Ayer, who became CEO in 2017 is not facing charges.

But she told Dailymail.com last year the allegations are 'totally false', and that consent is the 'first thing' they teach. 'I did not anticipate a five-year snowballed media campaign of negative allegations against us,' she added.



## Ask NAPCA



NATIONAL ASIAN PACIFIC  
CENTER ON AGING

### <1> What is the difference between GEP (General Enrollment Period) and MAOEP (Medicare Advantage Open Enrollment Period)?

GEP and MA OEP take place annually during the same time window but are distinct periods related to Medicare, and they serve different purposes.

GEP is for individuals who were first eligible for Medicare but didn't enroll in Medicare Part A and/or Part B during their Initial Enrollment Period (IEP) and who aren't eligible for a Special Enrollment Period (SEP). For example, if you delayed initial enrollment when you were first eligible for Medicare due to having current job-based health insurance, and later, when you retire or you are no longer covered by your employer insurance, you may be eligible to have 8-months SEP. If you missed the SEP, you should use GEP to enroll in Medicare. Note that MA OEP is specifically only for individuals who are already enrolled in a Medicare Advantage Plan (Part C, MA plan) and want to make changes.

### <2> What can I do during GEP (General Enrollment Period)?

During GEP, individuals can enroll in Medicare Part A and/or Part B for the first time. Coverage will begin on the first day of the following month after you enroll, and you may face a late enrollment

penalty because you missed your Initial Enrollment Period. The penalty could result in higher premiums for as long as you have Medicare. Note that you may not sign up for a stand-alone Medicare Part D prescription drug plan during GEP even if you need drug coverage with Original Medicare as drug coverage is not included. The GEP is specifically for enrolling in Medicare Part A and/or Part B, not for Part D. To have a stand-alone Part D plan, you may have to wait for the upcoming Medicare Open Enrollment Period that occurs between October 15 and December 7 every year.

### <3> What can I do during MA OEP (Medicare Advantage Open Enrollment Period)?

As mentioned in <1>, MA OEP is only for those who already are enrolled in MA plan.

You can switch from one MA plan to another, or you can disenroll from your Medicare Advantage plan and return to

Original Medicare (Part A and Part B). If you return to Original Medicare, you have the option to enroll in a stand-alone Medicare Part D prescription drug plan. Note that MA OEP does not apply to Original Medicare beneficiaries, that means you cannot switch from Original Medicare to MA plan, you cannot join a part D prescription drug plan or cannot switch one part D plan to another if you're in Original Medicare.

### <4> Can I add a Medigap plan to Original Medicare during GEP or MA OEP?

Medicare basically covers 80% of the cost for each Medicare-covered service or item after you've paid your deductible. If you decide to stay with Original Medicare (Part A and B) and want to cover the 20% financial gap that Medicare doesn't pay for, you may want to add a Medigap plan to your Original Medicare. Ideally, the best time to purchase a Medigap policy is during your Medigap OEP, which starts

the first day of the month that you're both 65 or older AND enrolled in Medicare Part B. This period lasts for six months. During this period, Medigap companies must sell you a policy at the best available rate regardless of your health status, and they cannot deny you coverage.

If you miss your Medigap Open Enrollment Period, you can still apply for a Medigap policy, but you may face underwriting which insurers use to figure out your health status and determine whether to offer you coverage, at what price, and with what exclusions or limits. Based on your pre-existing health conditions, you may have to have a waiting period or insurers may charge you more or deny coverage based on pre-existing conditions. Be aware that this information only pertains to protections that apply nationwide. Some states have other protections that give their residents additional opportunities to enroll in a Medigap.

# The problem isn't Biden's 'illegal' gaffe

By Jose Antonio Vargas

In 2017, then-House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi invited me to attend President Donald Trump's first address to a joint session of Congress, one of a few undocumented immigrants who were invited by Democratic leaders to the "People's House." Then, as now, immigration was central to Trump's election campaign. And then, as now, calling people like me "illegal" was a part of Trump's vocabulary, a signal to the right-wing, anti-immigrant media machine consumed by his voter base. Seven years later, in Thursday's State of the Union address, President Joe Biden echoed Trump's dehumanizing rhetoric, referring to an undocumented immigrant who allegedly killed a young woman as "an illegal." Reacting to a clip of the moment on CNN, Pelosi remarked, "He should have said 'undocumented,' but it's not a big thing."

And you know what? She's right. Even though Biden told The Washington Post's Jonathan Capehart in an MSNBC interview Saturday that he regrets using that word – and a White House spokesperson felt the need to clarify today that the president "absolutely did not apologize" – it's not a big thing that a sitting US president referred to a group of people as "illegal." Obsessing over this single word loses



sight of the more sobering reality that, in action and in copious, insidious words, Trump will be worse on immigration than Biden if reelected.

The gaffe does underscore the political reality that, in the Trump era, the country has veered right on immigration, and the language that shapes the anti-immigrant policies being pushed at almost all governmental levels reflects it. Though the Biden administration began by offering solutions intended to fix the immigration system that has been broken for decades, the White House is now in reelection mode and is under pressure to respond to public fears stirred by right-wing voices and media.

In 2021, Biden ordered US immigration enforcement agencies to stop using terms

such as "illegal alien" when referring to immigrants in the United States, a rebuke of terms widely used under Trump. Three years later, Biden was at the US-Mexico border inviting Trump to work with him to push Congress to pass "the toughest, most efficient, most effective border security bill this country's ever seen." This is what it means to be undocumented in America: Though many of us have called this country our home for decades, paying local, state and federal taxes; though most major American cities would collapse without undocumented labor; though we are a sizable portion of the population in our country's biggest states (an estimated 900,000 undocumented individuals in Florida and about 1.6 million in Texas, according to Pew Research Center), we are not a voter base. Come election season, we are always on the menu, but we never get to order. We are pawns in a political game, a boogeyman rolled out regularly by both sides to scare up votes. For the right, it's "the left will legalize them and they'll all vote Democratic" – never mind that there are plenty of immigrants from all racial and ethnic backgrounds who identify as Republican. For the left, it's "the right will never legalize them" – never mind that undocumented people are very much

aware of the complicated legacies of the Clinton and Obama administrations on immigration. And while immigration is a galvanizing electoral force on the right, the issue is rarely ever a priority for the left. "Illegal" does not mean anything meaningful or substantive – it's just vibes. When I publicly disclosed my undocumented status in 2011, I started Define American, a nonpartisan, narrative change nonprofit that serves as a resource to anyone interested in telling the stories of immigrants with the necessary facts, context and humanity. Key to understanding immigration as a process – how undocumented people like me can adjust our immigration status – is being aware of the nuances and complexity of legalization. Language is at the core of that understanding. Language is not a slice of the pie – it's the pan. It's how we understand the issue of immigration – and also how we misunderstand it. For years, as immigration has become a third rail in American politics, advocates have worked to change language and center the humanity of immigrants, with wins such as the Drop the I-Word campaign. Unfortunately, for every dehumanizing or misleading term we get someone to drop or change, two more pop up.



# Navigating the SEO Landscape: Google and AI-Generated Content

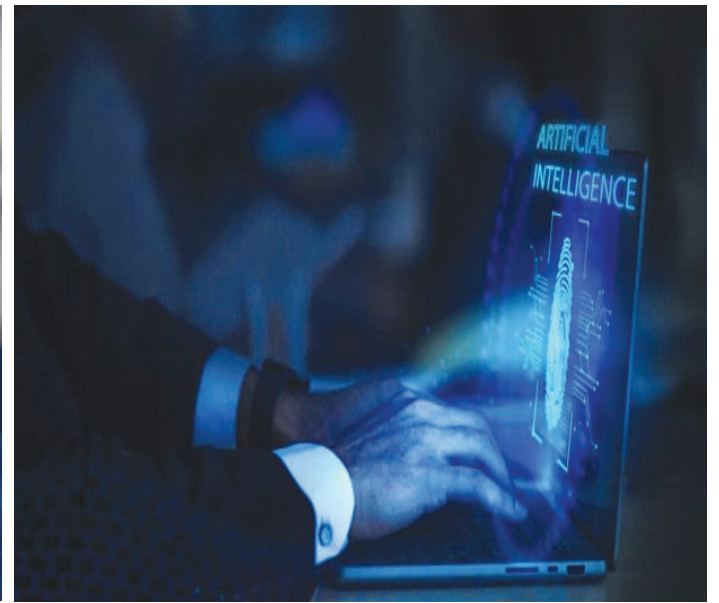
In the ever-evolving landscape of online content creation and search engine optimization (SEO), the symbiotic relationship between Google and AI-generated content is a topic of paramount importance. In this article, we aim to shed light on Google's approach to content quality, user satisfaction, and the evolving role of artificial intelligence.

## Navigating Google's Perspective:

Google is committed to delivering high-quality, relevant, and valuable information to users. The consensus is that Google's algorithms prioritize user experience and content substance over the method of creation, be it human or AI-generated. The key takeaway is that quality matters, and content creators should focus on producing material that adds genuine value to users.

## Evolution of Search Algorithms:

Recognizing the dynamic nature of search engine algorithms is crucial for content creators. It's important to stay informed about Google's updates and guidelines, as these algorithms adapt to changing user behaviors, technological advancements, and emerging trends. A user-centric approach, addressing the needs of the target audience, is highlighted as a fundamental principle for success.



## Rewarding Quality Content:

Google's emphasis on content quality remains consistent. The search giant's ranking systems prioritize original, reliable content exhibiting expertise, experience, authoritativeness, and trustworthiness (E-E-A-T). Whether the content is AI-generated or human-crafted, the focus is on rewarding high-quality material that aligns with user needs.

## Automation's Role in Content Creation:

While Google maintains a strict stance against the use of automation, including AI, for manipulating search rankings, it acknowledges the positive role of

automation in generating helpful content. Google's perspective is that AI can be a tool to elevate expression and creativity, empowering content creators to provide valuable information such as sports scores, weather forecasts, and transcripts.

## Guidelines for Content Creators:

The unified message for content creators is to adhere to Google's guidelines for content creation and optimization. It is important to produce original, high-quality, people-centric content that aligns with E-E-A-T principles. This involves optimizing for relevant keywords, maintaining a clear

site structure, and focusing on overall content quality.

## Conclusion:

In the dynamic realm of SEO, the relationship between Google and AI-generated content is marked by a commitment to quality, relevance, and user satisfaction. Content creators, whether human or AI, are urged to prioritize a user-centric approach and stay informed about Google's evolving guidelines. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, the synergy between content quality and AI's capabilities will play a pivotal role in shaping successful SEO strategies.

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# NIA raids: Khalistani-gangsters nexus akin to pre-1993 Mumbai blasts era

Investigations into the nexus of pro-Khalistani elements (PKEs) and gangsters-smugglers based in several north-Indian cities and those hiding in countries such as Canada, the US, the UK, Germany, Thailand, Philippines and Australia, have so far revealed that they feed into each other. How it started: Hindustan Times - your fastest source for breaking news! Read now.

This nexus is said to have been born after two particular incidents: The Bargari agitation in 2015 and Nabha jailbreak in 2016. These two incidents were the first instances to suggest that north India-based gangsters and Khalistanis, who reports said already had an alliance with Pakistani elements, came together to form a network which had plans to carry out high-profile killings, smuggle drugs and arms and create problems for the Indian security establishment.

Slain Khalistan Tiger Force (KTF) leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar, who was shot dead on June 18, other Canada-based gangsters-turned-Khalistanis like Lakhbir Singh Landa, Arshdeep Singh alias Arsh



Dalla, Satwinderjeet Singh alias Goldy Brar, and Pakistan based Harwinder Singh Rinda and Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) leadership worked with gangsters in India such as Lawrence Bishnoi. The gangs in India further collaborated with smaller gangs. Bishnoi, security officials say, is a key figure at the centre of this nexus among north India-based gangsters and runs the largest criminal network of around 700 members in the syndicate.

"The Bargari Morcha (agitation)

which started after the sacrilege of Guru Granth Sahib in Faridkot in (October) 2015 and subsequent police action on agitators provided a public space to radical extremists. Many Sikh radicals held a protest in Bargari with the support of pro-Khalistani elements (PKEs) based abroad, in guise of 'Kaum Vaaste Kamm' (task in the name of religion). The PKEs used this opportunity and started their nefarious activities to disturb the hard-earned peace and unity in the state," NIA said in its

charge sheet filed in March, a copy of which has been reviewed by HT. "These PKEs started identifying and executing killings in the garb of 'Kaum de Dushman' (enemies of the religion). Radicalising innocent people, they started using the large pool of people gathered at Bargari Morcha and such other options, across the state, for terror activities. It has been revealed in numerous investigations that most of these accused were radicalised after the incident," the charge sheet said, adding that the PKEs,

however, faced a major problem as they didn't have foot-soldiers who were ready to execute the killings on the directions of terror groups based abroad, and lacked logistical support in terms of supply of weapons, training, and access to vehicles and safe havens

This is where gangsters came handy.

The charge sheet mentions that Pakistan-based and now deceased chief of Khalistan Liberation Force (KLF) Harmeet Singh alias PhD was first approached by a gangster Dharminder Singh alias Gugni (lodged in Ludhiana jail) seeking "weapons for the Kaum (religion)". Gugni, it added, provided weapons to Hardeep Singh alias Shera and Ramandeep Singh alias Canadian who embarked on a spree of targeted killings. Their victims included Brigadier (retd) Jagdish Gagneja (vice president of Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, Punjab), Shiv Sena leaders Durga Das Gupta and Amit Sharma, RSS leader Ravinder Gosain, and a few Dera Sacha Sauda followers.

## Boss of 'orgasmic cult' OneTaste, Anjali Ayer, denies it forced members into sex acts and kept women in residential warehouses

A CEO of a sexual wellness company accused of abusing women and forcing them into sex acts says the allegations are 'totally false' - with their lawyer branding the federal indictment as 'horrifying'.

The 'orgasmic meditation cult' OneTaste claims the allegations levied against them for several years are untrue and part of a 'malicious crusade' by a former worker.

OneTaste founder Nicole Daedone, 56, and Rachel Cherwitz, 43, have both been accused of keeping women in residential warehouses where they were forced into sex acts for the company. Claims levied against the company for several years have been denied by Daedone, Cherwitz and CEO Anjali Ayer - who was not at the helm when the allegations were made.

Speaking to DailyMail.com, Ayer said that the 'snowballed' allegations made against the company are completely false and



left her 'devastated'. Ayer took over OneTaste in 2017 after being introduced to the orgasmic meditation company the year before by Daedone

Cherwitz is still working with the company, but Daedone has taken a step back since being indicted earlier this year in Brooklyn.

The current CEO said: 'It was utterly devastating. When I acquired the company, I knew that I couldn't ignore how much it changed my life and how much I wanted women to have

access to power like that.

'I did not anticipate a five-year snowballed media campaign of negative allegations against us.

'That's what happened if you look at it. You take women and you take sexuality and then you put it together with a couple of people who are upset in some way and want to tell lies.' Prosecutors say the alleged victims were subjected to 'constant surveillance' and isolated from friends and family. When members could no longer afford OneTaste classes,

they were pressured to take on debt, and that at times Daedone and Cherwitz even assisted them in opening new credit cards, according to the indictment.

The federal charges come after several serious allegations were made public by former employees of the company. Those at the head of the company say the allegations have 'come from really just one person'. Ayries Blanck was paid \$325,000 as part of a settlement with the company after parting ways in 2014 - which included an NDA.

Legal documents filed by OneTaste earlier this year claim Blanck said she wanted to 'f\*\*\*ing kill' her ex-boyfriend and his new girlfriend - who he met through a company event in Los Angeles.

She flew to Los Angeles and confronted the other woman before punching her in the face and dramatically quitting the company, according to the documents. OneTaste has since

launched a lawsuit against Blanck, accusing her of breaching their NDA, claiming she regularly voices her hatred of the firm - and say she was involved in a Netflix documentary about the company.

Blanck has not responded to the claims in the new lawsuit, and Ayer insists that the allegations are 'false' and that their community has been 'ripped apart'. 'We teach a practice that's based in connection. So the most powerful thing we have is connection, and we teach a practice, that's for women's empowerment,' she said.

'If you look at the allegations, and every single piece of media there have been four major pieces. They're all based on just a very, very small number of people who are upset personally upset'. Ayer said that at the time the first accusations were leveled at the company, it didn't have the resources to fight them and insisted on Blanck signing an NDA.





# Shiva: Destroyer or Restorer?

By: Sean Bradrick

Having been a Western Shaivite and Shakta for a few decades and a former Catholic, complete with my silly white man trishula and Kali tattoos, I have regularly been asked by non-Hindu family, friends, and random strangers why I worship destroyer deities. I have even been asked why I worship demons. I do not blame Abrahamic dualists for their concerns, as these are simply byproducts of their religious upbringing and monocultural conditioning. Since I have been both a Christian and an adherent of Vedic darshana, I view these inquiries as an opportunity to educate and open the minds of whoever may truly be interested in hearing from a Dharmika, rather than from their priest or pastor. Non-Hindus and Hindus alike are not immune to being conditioned to the 'this is all good and that is all bad' perception. The following is how I tend to explain these matters to those who may be caught up in dualistic thinking. The Hindu deity Shiva is known as the destroyer. Some in the West and the East for that matter, misunderstand this out of ignorance and sometimes, bigotry. What is needed today is comprehension and compassion. We all must at least begin to see beyond the illusions of separation. We must be able to wrap our heads around allegory and find union in notions and attitudes which seem to be at odds, but ultimately complement

one another. The Abrahamic deity is most often seen simply as the creator. This deity killed over 300 million people as per the Old Testament, sent and continues to send the majority of people to an eternal hell at the time of their deaths, and flooded the Earth. So this deity is himself quite destructive out of vice.

Hindus have a destroyer god who destroys not arbitrarily or out of spite but out of necessity. It's only logical. Creation cannot stand on its own in any aspect of life. There is always creation, preservation and transformation. There is always the past, present, and future. This is true on a cellular, ecological, and cosmological level. We must consume food in order to survive. Food is created. We must ingest food matter. It must be assimilated for its nutrients to be preserved in our tissues. What is not assimilated must be eliminated. Even every cell of our body is in time, a new regenerated cell. Without ingestion, we starve. If we cannot assimilate food, we become emancipated and die. If we cannot eliminate it, we become toxic and die. What we call 'waste' has its purpose. It breaks down back into the elements where the food cycle begins again. There is no structure without a function.

So, destruction is an important part of creation. Hindus believe all of creation is an extension and reflection of Brahman. So 'God' in Hinduism is Creator, Sustainer and Transformer. G = Generator, O = Operator, D = Destroyer. It's just a Good Orderly

Direction.

The word 'destroyer' is a bit of a misnomer. In the West, it has negative connotations and of course, anything with a negative connotation that is associated with the divine is misunderstood as being backwards, demonic, or dangerous. Some adherents of the Abrahamic faiths like to say Shiva and Kali must be some sort of devils, because they are referred to as the God and Goddess of destruction and because they carry a trishula or trident. The Bible and the Quran offer little to no description of what demons look like. Some people have simply seen too many cartoons. When they see a depiction of Kali Maa or Bhairava, they tend to become frightened. Many Hindus too might be, in a sense, terrified.

Certainly, Kali and Bhairava worship is something quite serious. Ultimately, however, we know that Kali is as kind as time (kaal/kala) which heals all wounds. Bhairava is the annihilator of fear, greed, lust, and anger. He is not simply a 'destroyer' but at the same time, a restorer. Of course, as devotees, we know that Shiva is the most kind, compassionate and thoughtful deity, as his name implies. 'Siva' means kind, benevolent, benign, and gracious. Referring to Mahadeva simply as a 'destroyer' is limiting. A more

appropriate word may be 'transcend-er'. Nothing is ever destroyed completely. Matter breaks down into energy. Energy can only be transformed, not destroyed. To the Shiva/Shaktas, Shiva is the creator, preserver, and destroyer. Other sampradayas do not agree. No matter. Hindus should know that religion is not a competition. There exists Harihara, a deity known more in ancient times than today, who is both Shiva and Vishnu. So, no real need to reconcile Shaivism and Vaishnavism.

At the end of the day, destruction breeds creation. We can see in Hindu philosophies some talk of karma and reincarnation. Some are deistic and others are non-theistic. We can see the functions of tri-dev (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva) in both the spiritual and material worlds, and we can see the same in what the Hindu sages have said on the topic of karma and reincarnation.

As many ways as action can take place, is karma in one form or another. Every action has a certain reaction no matter if we understand it or not. No matter our particular belief system. Every cause has an effect. This is true with astronomy, physics, biology, psychology and neuroscience. Reincarnation? All of nature is a part of an observable cycle that returns to itself upon its death where growth begins again. We are a part of that nature and growth.