

The South Asian INSIDER

Voice of South Asian Community Since March 2002

Vol. 22

Issue 50

Friday 16 February to 22 February, 2024

\$1

www.thesouthasianinsider.com

Reaping Benefits of Highest MSP And Procurement, Punjab Farmers Still Protesting; Is It Politics?



Page 21

Pakistan Polls : How Imran Khan's Twin Strike On US And Pak Army Helped Him



Story on Page 13

Biden v. Trump: The battle over who's too old, too forgetful or too confused



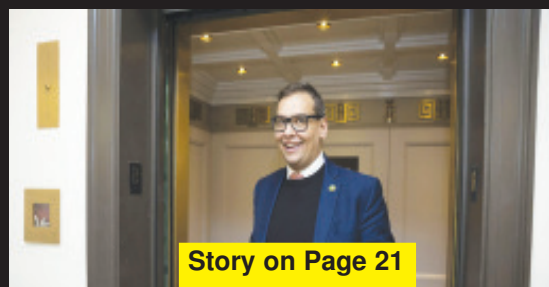
Story on Page 19

'Difficult to meet ideal man': Why Chinese women are turning to AI boyfriends



Story on Page 18

Nassau County Is Replacing George Santos — And Maybe Picking the Next President



Story on Page 21

Elon Musk's X Offers Premium And Paid Services To Terror Groups: Report



Story on Page 19

Haldwani violence: 300 Muslim families flee, manhunt intensified to arrest rioters



Story on Page 17

How Modi government pulled off safe release of 8 Navy veterans from Qatar



Story on Page 18

WORKING CAPITAL R' US



EIDL/PPP Money Gone?

Does your business need working capital ?
Call (646) 897 3016
Ask for Jon Meyer

Indian family found dead in California home, couple had gunshot wounds

Four members of a family originally from Kerala, India, were found dead inside their California home, police said. The couple had gunshot wounds.

A family of four from Kerala was found dead inside their home in California's San Mateo city on Tuesday, February 13. While the investigation is ongoing, authorities believe it to be a possible murder-suicide.

According to a NBC Bay Area report, the deceased were identified as Anand Sujith Henry (42), his wife Alice Priyanka Benziger (40), and their 4-year-old twin boys. Officers were dispatched to the family's home on the 4100 block of Alameda de las Pulgas on Monday morning for a welfare check after receiving no response from the occupants. Upon arrival, officers found no signs of forced entry but located an unlocked window through which they entered the home. Inside, they discovered the bodies of the two adults in a bathroom, both with



gunshot wounds. A 9mm pistol and a loaded magazine were also found at the scene. The twin boys were found in a bedroom, and while the exact cause of their death is still under investigation, sources close to the investigation told NBC that they may have been smothered, strangled, or poisoned as

they showed no signs of physical trauma. Court records indicate that Anand had filed for divorce in December 2016, but the proceedings were not finalised. The police have previously responded to calls from the home, though the details of those incidents have not been disclosed. No suicide note was found, and investigators are still piecing together a motive for the deaths. Anand and Alice, both IT professionals, had been living in the United States for the past nine years. Anand worked as a software engineer, while Alice held the position of senior analyst. Last December, an Indian-origin couple and their teenage daughter were found dead in their mansion in the state of Massachusetts. Authorities had ascribed the deaths of Rakesh Kamal, 57, his wife, Teena, 54, and their 18-year-old daughter Ariana to a "domestic violence situation".

Dating scams, aided by ChatGPT, are ruling Valentine's Week. Here's how to stay safe

At least 65% of Indians have used ChatGPT/AI to create content for dating apps.



Love is in the air this week, and Valentine's Day is just round the corner. But do you know what else is also in the air? Scams.

Dating scams are on the rise, says a new study.

The study

McAfee, a software for online protection and cybersecurity, recently revealed their annual report called "Modern Love".

The report featured a survey conducted online in January 2024 by the Market Research Company, MSI-ACI, via email. It targeted individuals 18 years and older, inviting them to complete an online questionnaire.

The purpose was to investigate the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in online dating and their implications on the increase of romance scams and catfishing.

A total of 7,000 adults completed the survey from 7 countries, including the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Australia, India, and Japan. '39% of Indians found their online love interests were scammers'

The survey revealed a lot of interesting numbers. Let's have a look at some:

Almost 77% of Indians encountered fake profiles or AI-generated photos on dating platforms or social media. Shockingly, 39% discovered their online conversations with potential love interests were with scammers. If you think AI is not everywhere, you're wrong. It has now reached your dating profile apps as well.

Sadly, 26% conversed with what they thought was a person, only to find out it was an AI-generated bot. These scams are on the rise according to McAfee, as Valentine's Day is coming

up, with data showing an increase in malware campaigns by 25%, malicious URLs by 300%, and a variety of romance-themed spam and email scams by a staggering 400%.

ChatGPT for special messages? Yes.

People today are using ChatGPT for everything. According to some, if your friendly AI can write resignation letters and other professional bios, why can't it be used for your love life?

As creepy and non-personal as it sounds, the study reveals that:

At least 65% of Indians have used ChatGPT/AI to create pics or other content for dating apps.

And 56% are planning on or considering using AI to compose messages for their

Valentine's Day communication.

However,

The study also found that 60% would feel hurt or offended if they learnt their Valentine's Day message was written by AI (you and me both, sister).

The Results

Despite mixed feelings and experiences, the effectiveness of AI is undeniable: 81% of people reported receiving more interest and better responses using AI-generated content than when they drafted or used their original content.

Now, if you're worried that you could be the next victim, fret not, we got you.

Here are some things that you can keep in mind while looking for your partner online: Look at the way they talk

Indian-origin man in Canada wanted for killing his father: Police

An Indian-origin man is wanted for killing his father at their residence in Canada's Ontario province, police said. Authorities in Canada's Ontario province said that 22-year-old Sukhaj Singh Cheema is wanted for first-degree murder for killing his father inside their

home. According to Hamilton Police, a person is believed to have had an altercation with his father. Saturday evening where they found the severely injured person, Kuldeep Singh. He was rushed to a hospital but succumbed to his injuries later. Police said that Cheema had been in the area at least 30 minutes before the incident and fled the scene in a vehicle. According to witnesses, the accused person is believed to have had an altercation with his father.



RS Polls: Congress workers in Rajasthan question fielding 'outsiders'



(News Agency)- Even at a time when senior Congress leaders in Rajasthan have welcomed the decision of Sonia Gandhi to contest the February 27 Rajya Sabha polls from the state, a section of party workers have expressed their concerns over the trend of fielding

candidates from outside the state for the elections to the Upper House. Many of them wondered where should the local leaders go if candidates from outside the state are fielded from Rajasthan.

There are 10 Rajya Sabha seats in Rajasthan, out of which six are held by

the Congress and three by the BJP. One seat fell vacant after senior politician Kirodi Lal Meena recently resigned from the post following his victory in the Assembly polls on a BJP ticket.

The Congress Rajya Sabha MPs include Manmohan Singh, Neeraj Dangi, K.C. Venugopal, Randeep Singh Surjewala, Mukul Wasnik and Pramod Kumar, while the BJP MPs include Bhupendra Yadav, Rajendra Gehlot and Ghanshyam Tiwari. Unlike the BJP, of the Congress' six MPs, only Neeraj Dangi is from Rajasthan while the rest are from other states.

The tenures of Manmohan Singh and Bhupendra Yadav will end on April 3, while election will also be held for the seat vacated by Kirodi Lal Meena.

A senior Congress worker said on condition of anonymity, "This is how the BJP is boosting the morale of their workers while we are losing motivation.

They are giving chances to their local leaders in RS polls too. So why the Congress is fielding only outside

candidates? Why the local leaders are not given a chance?"

Congress spokesperson from Rajasthan, Varun Purohit, meanwhile, hailed Sonia Gandhi's candidature for the Rajya Sabha polls from Rajasthan. However, he also expressed his concern over the changing trend, saying, "It's sad that the eligibility for Rajya Sabha nowadays is first you lose deposit for three times and then you get a seat in the Upper House."

On the displeasure among a section of party cadres, Purohit said, "The workers from the top to bottom are heavily demoralised. Leaders like Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi should change their set of advisors and plan afresh, giving chance to the youngsters."

On Sonia Gandhi filing her nomination from Rajasthan on Wednesday, state Congress chief Govind Singh Dotasra said, "It is a matter of great joy for Rajasthan that Sonia Gandhi will contest the Rajya Sabha polls from Rajasthan."

Third round of Centre-farmers talks ends on 'positive' note; next meeting on Feb 18

(News Agency)-The third round of talks between the Central government and farmer leaders ended on early Friday with Union Minister Arjun Munda saying a "very positive" discussion happened.

It has been decided that the next meeting will take place on Sunday, February 18, at 6 p.m.

"We all will find a solution peacefully," Munda told the media here after the talks that lasted for nearly five hours.

The third round of talks between farmer leaders and Union ministers — Munda, Piyush Goyal and Nityanand Rai — started after a delay of three hours on Thursday evening.

The farmer leaders who took part in the meeting included Jagjit Singh Dallewal,



Sarwan Singh Pandher and Jarnail Singh, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, who was also present in the meeting, said that the talks were held in a "cordial atmosphere" and he is hopeful of finding a solution to end the deadlock. "Positive discussions held on 13-14 demands... I requested the Centre to direct the Haryana government to maintain peace in (interstate) border areas," Mann said. The previous two rounds of dialogue — on February 8 and 12 — remained inconclusive.

The farmers continued their protest on interstate borders between Punjab and Haryana, demanding higher minimum crop prices and waiver of loans, among other demands.

Kharge launches scathing attack against PM, Nitish during Nyay Yatra in Bihar

(News Agency)- Participating in the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Bihar's Aurangabad district on Thursday, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge launched a scathing attack against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. Addressing a gathering in Aurangabad district, Kharge claimed that



the Prime Minister talks about the 'good works' the government has done for the poor people, though the benefits only go to the rich people of the country. "People

earlier said 'Aaya Ram, Gaya Ram'. Now they say 'Aaya Kumar, Gaya Kumar'," Kharge said, as he took a dig at Nitish Kumar for frequently changing sides. "Nitish Kumar had claimed many times that he would rather die, but not join hands with the BJP. Now he has joined the NDA as an alliance partner," Kharge said. "During the recent floor test in Bihar, the MLAs of the Congress

stayed united like a rock. RJD chief Lalu Prasad had cautioned the top Congress leadership that the party may split in Bihar, but he failed to save his own party from

Poor people of OBC, SC/ST & Dalit communities not getting justice: Rahul

(News Agency)- Criticising the Central government, former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Thursday said the poor people belonging to the OBC, SC/ST, Dalit and minority communities, as well as the farmers and labourers in the country were not getting justice. Addressing a rally during Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra at Aurangabad in Bihar, the Congress leader said: "The poor people are turning poorer while the rich are getting richer, and it is happening due to the policies of the Central government."

Rahul Gandhi also questioned "how many people from the OBC, Dalit, tribal communities own big companies or high posts?"

"The posts are mostly occupied by the people of the upper castes. They are occupying those posts in hospitals, colleges, media and others. This is why poor people belonging to OBC, SC, ST and minorities are not getting justice in the country. To bring justice to them, caste-based census is the tool and we are committed to conduct one if we form the government," he added.

Indian-Origin Techie Identified As Suspect In US' Family Murder-Suicide

Police suspect that Anand Sujith Henry, a former Meta employee, killed his family before turning the gun on himself.

New Delhi: An Indian-origin techie is suspected of killing his wife and four-year-old twins before turning the gun on himself in a gruesome murder-suicide in California, police said today. The statement comes days after Anand Sujith Henry, 42, his wife Alice Priyanka, 40, and their twin sons Noah and Neithan were found dead at their \$2.1 million home in California's San Mateo. The couple was found dead with gunshot wounds inside a bathroom when cops visited the house for a welfare check on Monday. The children were discovered dead in a bedroom. "At this time, next of kin have been notified and we can now confirm the identities as Anand Henry (father), Alice Benziger (mother), and their minor twin boys. A 9mm handgun legally registered to Henry was located on the bathroom floor where both



adults' bodies were located," the San Mateo Police Department said in a statement. Police allege that Henry, a former Meta employee, was responsible for all four deaths. "Both Henry and Benziger succumbed to gunshot wounds and based on

the investigation to date between, Anand Henry has been identified as the suspect," the police department said. "Our investigation shows Benziger succumbed to multiple gunshot wounds, while Henry suffered from a single shot. The cause of death for the minor

boys is still pending pathology, but we can confirm they did not die from gunfire or show signs of bodily trauma," officials added. The family, originally from Kerala, had been living in the US for the past nine years. While Anand was a software engineer, Alice was a senior analyst.

According to court records, Anand had filed for divorce in 2016 but did not go through with it. Authorities said there was no history of violence at the home and the one instance when cops had been called in the past was when the family spotted a mountain lion in their backyard. But when people who knew the family could not get in contact with them over the weekend, police responded to the scene to do a welfare check. The motive behind the murder-suicide is still unknown. "Our investigation into the motive for this tragedy continues. While we can't undo this horrific incident, we would like to share with our community both domestic violence and mental health resources, because there is help and/or assistance out there, and something like this does not need to happen again," police said.

After Deaths of Seven Indian Students in Six Weeks, US Govt Says Working Hard to Disrupt Such Incidents

The US State Department on Thursday (local time) said the recent spate of attacks on Indian students in the US is "unacceptable" and said the administration under US President Joe Biden is working hard to 'thwart and disrupt' these incidents. "There's no excuse for violence, certainly based on — on race or — or gender or religion or any other factor. That's just unacceptable here in the United States," White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said.

"The President and this administration has been working very, very hard to make sure we're doing everything we can to work with state and local authorities to try to thwart and disrupt those kinds of attacks and make it clear to anybody who might consider them that they'll be held properly accountable,"



Kirby further added. Back-to-back deaths of Indian students at colleges across the US has shook the Indian-American community as well as citizens back home and concerned fellow students studying there as well. Seven students of both Indian and Indian-American origin have died in 2024 alone. All of them

who died were men and are 25 years old and under. Two of them died by suicide, two died due to alleged overdose, two were found dead after they went missing and one was beaten to death. All of these deaths were reported from several states ranging from Connecticut to Indiana. Indians constitute more than

25% of all international students in the US. Virag Shah, 21, a junior at Purdue University in Indiana, who is also president of the school's Indian Students Association, said fellow Indian students are spooked by the recent news of deaths of Indian and Indian-origin students. "It felt like a pattern, like, why was it

another Indian kid?" Shah said, while speaking to news agency NBC. Between January 15th and February 5th, a string of tragic deaths involving young Indian men has rattled the diaspora across the US as well parents back home. It began with the discovery of the bodies of Dinesh Gattu, 22, and Sai Rakoti, 21, in their Hartford, Connecticut, residence due to alleged accidental fentanyl overdoses. It was followed by the death of 25-year-old Vivek Saini in Lithonia, Georgia, at the convenience store where he worked part-time on January 16th. This was followed by the discovery of 18-year-old Akul Dhawan's body on the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign campus on January 20th. More recently, on January 28th, the body of 19-year-old Neel Acharya was recovered on Purdue's campus after a night

Yogi govt resolves to eradicate filariasis in UP by 2026

(News Agency)- The Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh has set an ambitious target to eradicate filariasis from the state by 2026, aligning with the Central government's goal to achieve nationwide elimination by 2027. Globally, the target for eliminating this disease has been set for 2030.

The state government has initiated a door-to-door administration of anti-filarial medications across several districts as part of the Mass Drug Administration (MDA) campaign.

The initiative aims to reach every household in the state in the battle against the debilitating disease.

As a result of effective monitoring by Chief Minister Adityanath, within the first four days of the door-to-door campaign itself, about 20 per cent of people have taken the medicine. This campaign will run until February 28, an official statement noted.

Simultaneously, identified patients receive specialised training and support through the Morbidity Management and Disability Prevention (MMDP) programme. Those with mild infections benefit from a regimen of regular medication and exercise, facilitating their continuous recovery.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has urged the healthcare teams not only to distribute the medication, but also to



educate the populace, emphasising the importance of awareness in achieving the campaign's goals.

Since he assumed office in 2017, Yogi Adityanath has embarked on a crusade against numerous serious diseases prevalent in the state. His proactive stance has led to a significant turnaround, with Uttar Pradesh being now free from many diseases that once afflicted its populace, the statement added.

In various districts across the state, alongside receiving anti-filarial medication, people are actively seeking to enhance their understanding of this

disease.

Communities in areas such as Amethi, Azamgarh, Ballia, and Barabanki have displayed keen interest in learning about the potential side effects of the medication.

According to the statement, the health teams are assuring the populace that the anti-filarial medication is entirely safe, despite occasional symptoms like headache, body pain, fever, vomiting, rashes, and itching, which typically subside on their own. They emphasise the importance of consuming the medication after a meal to maximize its effectiveness and minimise any

discomfort.

In areas like Lucknow, Unnao, Shahjahanpur, Bareilly, and Hamirpur, initial hesitancy towards taking the medication has been observed among some individuals. However, after receiving information from the health teams, many have willingly come forward to receive the treatment.

State Program Officer for Filariasis Ramesh Singh Thakur said that the MDA campaign aims to administer medication to a total of 3,60,25,891 individuals.

Filariasis, commonly known as elephantiasis, is a chronic and incurable disease that severely impacts the lymphatic system. This intricate network of vessels, organs, and specialised cells is profoundly impacted by filariasis infection, with symptoms often manifesting 10-15 years after contraction.

Concealing symptoms can exacerbate the condition, making it imperative to seek timely assistance from Ayushman Arogya Mandir or government health centres to access the array of benefits extended by the Yogi government's progressive schemes.

Currently, there are 51 districts in the state grappling with filariasis. The ongoing campaign is operational in 17 of these districts.

Tiff between Kerala Transport Minister, his predecessor intensifies



(News Agency)- The tiff between Kerala Transport Minister K.B. Ganesh Kumar and his predecessor Antony Raju intensified on Thursday after the former allegedly changed the venue of flagging off of a new batch of e-buses to keep the latter out of the programme.

Kumar shifted the venue out of Raju's Thiruvananthapuram constituency to a nearby constituency.

According to protocols, for any state government function, the legislator of the

constituency where the function takes place has to be compulsorily invited.

After realizing the change in the previously announced venue, Raju came to the new venue much before the programme. Speaking to media, Raju said that he is not aware of the reasons why the venue was changed. Raju said that he arrived at the venue as he was the man behind the concept of introducing the e-buses in the state. He left the venue after seeing the e-buses.

Six-member BJP team to visit Bengal's Sandeshkhali on Friday



(News Agency)-A six-member BJP committee comprising Union Ministers and MPs of the party formed to probe the alleged incidents of sexual harassment and violence against women at Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal will visit the troubled zones on Friday, a top party leader said on Thursday. West Bengal BJP spokesperson Samik Bhattacharya said that while saying that he has no "detailed information" about BJP national president JP Nadda's visit as earlier, some reports suggested that the party chief might also visit the state to take a stock of the situation. Meanwhile, sources said that the six-member team will review overall "ground situation" at Sandeshkhali and accordingly, provide a report to Nadda on the matter.

Union Minister Annapurna Devi has been made the convenor of the high-level committee. Other members of the committee are Union Minister Pratima Bhowmik, MP Sunita Duggal, MP Kavita Patidar, MP Sangeeta Yadav and Brij Lal (Rajya Sabha MP and former Director General of Police of Uttar Pradesh).

Meanwhile, a four-member team of BJP's legislative party in West Bengal assembly led by the Leader of the Opposition Suvendu Adhikari, which started for Sandeshkhali on Thursday afternoon, was stopped at a distance of 6 km away from the troubled zone, citing Section 144 imposed in the area as the reason.

"We want to go there and speak to the local villagers without breaching any provision of Section 144," Adhikari told the police.

Wanted gangster of Sonu Dariyapur syndicate nabbed in Delhi



(News Agency)-A 37-year-old wanted gangster of the notorious Sonu Dariyapur gang, who was providing logistical support to his leader and other members of the syndicate, was arrested in west Delhi's Shalimar Bagh area, a police officer said on Thursday. The gangster, identified as Amit Kumar a.k.a Amit Rana, is a resident of Khera Kalan. He was also found previously involved in six cases of attempt to murder, criminal intimidation, and grabbing and Arms Act.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) Pratiksha Godara said that a police team had been keeping a close watch on Amit Rana.

On February 7, specific information was received that Rana would be meeting a person near Fortis Hospital, Shalimar Bagh.

"In response, a trap was laid at the designated location. Rana arrived in a Toyota Etios car at about 5.45 p.m. When the team approached and

attempted to apprehend him, he took out a pistol and attempted to fire at the police team. However, he was swiftly overpowered and disarmed by the team," said Godara.

On questioning, it was revealed that Rana has been affiliated with the notorious Satyawan a.k.a Sonu Dariyapur gang for the past decade.

"He admitted to providing logistical support to gangster Sonu Dariyapur and other members of the syndicate. The accused has a history of six criminal cases, including attempted murder, criminal intimidation, land grabbing, and violations of the arms act in Delhi," said the DCP.

Last year, on December 10, Rana was involved in an incident wherein he had fired at the house of one Vishwas, a resident of Khera Kalan, in an attempt to establish his dominance in the area. "Furthermore, he threatened Vishwas's mother, Sheela Devi, of causing harm to her son and other family members. This alarming act was captured on CCTV and went viral. A case was registered at Alipur police station and non-bailable warrant was also issued by a local court," the DCP added.

Delhi factory blaze death toll mounts to 7

(News Agency)-At least seven bodies were recovered from a factory in Delhi's Alipur area, where a massive fire broke out on Thursday evening, the police



said. According to the Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer North), Ravi Kumar Singh, it was a paint factory where the fire broke out following a massive blast. Sharing details, Atul Garg, Director of Delhi Fire Service (DFS), said that a call regarding a blaze at a factory in Dayal Market was received at 5:26 p.m. "As many as 22 fire tenders were rushed to the spot, which managed to douse the flame by 9 p.m. The search operation and cooling process is still going on," Garg said.

Govt significantly enhanced financial assistance for farm sector in last 10 years

(News Agency)- Farmer unions in Punjab are accusing the Central government of doing injustice to them, however, official data has revealed that the present regime has provided financial assistance to the farming community more than ever.

According to the official data, in 2013-14, the budget allocation for the Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Ministry was Rs 27,662.67 crore. This has been increased to Rs 1,25,035.79 crore in 2023-24. The food grain production has also increased from 265.05 million tonnes in 2013-14 to a record 329.69 million tonnes in 2022-23, which is the highest-ever food grain production.

The horticulture production was 351.92 million tonnes in 2022-23 which is also the highest ever (as per second advance estimates).

The data showed that the Agri and allied exports have increased from \$50.24 billion in 2021-22 to \$53.15 billion in 2022-23 which is an increase of 5.8 per cent. The government has also increased the minimum support price (MSP) for all mandated Kharif, Rabi and other commercial crops with a return of at least 50 per cent overall India weighted average cost of production, each year, since 2018-



19. Similarly, the MSP for Paddy (common) has increased from Rs 1345 per quintal in 2013-14 to Rs 2203 per quintal in 2023-24. The MSP for Wheat increased from Rs 1350 per quintal in 2013-14 to Rs 2125 per quintal in 2023-24. The figures also showed that since 2018-19, 115.32 LMT of pulses have been procured under the Price Support Scheme (PSS) having the MSP value of Rs 63,034.55 crore paid to 63,11,631 farmers. Since 2018-19, 51.75 LMT of oilseeds

have been procured under the PSS having the MSP value of Rs 26,328.41 crore benefitting 23,55,876 farmers. Further, during the Kharif 2023-24 season, 2,29,382.92 MT of oilseeds, pulses and copra have been procured till date from 1,37,957 farmers having the MSP value of Rs 2,228.55 crore. Since 2018-19, a quantity of 44.77 LMT was sanctioned for implementation of the Market Intervention Scheme (MIS) for procurement of perishable agricultural

and horticultural commodities such as apple, potato, onion, garlic, mango and turmeric. As many as 5,679.7 lakh farmer applications have been insured under the scheme from 2016-17 till 2023-24.

A total of Rs 1,55,977 crore has been paid as the claim against the farmers' premium of Rs 31,139 crore, the data showed.

Since 2018-19, Rs 2.81 lakh crores have been transferred through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) to more than 11 crores farmers through various instalments. Since 2018-19, Rs 8,92,993 crore has been paid out as fertilizer subsidy with a total sold quantity of 3725 LMT.

Institutional credit for the agriculture sector is increased from Rs 7.3 lakh crore in 2013-14 to Rs 20.39 lakh crore in 2023-24 (till 31.01.2024) for 1,268.51 lakh accounts. The benefit of concessional institutional credit through Kisan Credit Card (KCC) at 4 per cent interest per annum has also now been extended to Animal Husbandry and Fisheries farmers for meeting their short-term working capital needs. As of March 31, 2023, there were 73,470,282 operative KCC accounts with an outstanding amount of Rs 8,85,463 crore, revealed the figures.

Cyberpunk 2077: Game Review 2024

It's been four years since the electrifying launch of Cyberpunk 2077, and let me tell you, it's more than just a game—it's an entire universe waiting to be explored. Buckle up, because we're diving headfirst into the neon-lit abyss of Night City.

The Genre That Stole My Heart

Calling myself a fan would be an understatement. The cyberpunk genre, with its gritty aesthetics, futuristic dystopias, and rebellious spirit, has always fascinated me. But when you pair that with an expansive open-world, teeming with secrets and surprises, I'm all in!

From Glitches to Glory

Now, let's address the elephant in the room: the game's rocky start. As a PC player, I dodged most of the bugs (thanks to my trusty supercomputer disguised as a laptop). But my console brethren? Well, they faced a different reality, a



reality where NPCs moonwalked through walls and cars spontaneously combusted. It was a hot mess, no doubt. And those missing parts? Cut content to speed things up. But hey, isn't life all about glitches and patches.

Beyond the Code: Imagination and Identity

But let's dig deeper. Cyberpunk 2077 isn't just regular lines of code; it's a canvas for philosophy, identity, and the human struggle. Imagine the creators—those elusive architects of our digital dreams. We may not know them personally, but their stories bleed into the game. The neon-soaked streets of Night City echo their hopes, fears, and late-night ramen cravings.

Meet "V": The Ultimate Chameleon

In this sprawling metropolis, you are "V": a mercenary, a survivor, and a blank slate. They may name you, but you control every pixel of their existence. Want to be a Corpo thug, pulling the strings? Done. Fancy yourself a street-

smart netrunner, surfing the data streams? You got it. Or perhaps you're a nomadic cyberpsycho, tearing through the city like a freaking tornado. The choice is yours.

Survival in the Concrete Jungle

As the sun sets on Night City, you'll fight tooth and nail for survival. It's not just about credits and firepower; it's about carving your place in a harsh, unforgiving world. The neon signs flicker, the synthwave pulses, and you, the glitch-ridden, neon-soaked hero, forge your destiny.

So, fellow cyberpunks, grab your neural implants and hit the streets. The future is now, and it's waiting for you.

Jackie Welles: A Wholesome Companion

Ah, Jackie Welles—the embodiment of loyalty, charisma, and a heart as big as the city itself. They say friendships forged in the crucible of chaos are the strongest, and Jackie proves it. His laughter echoes through the alleys, his

stories weave into the neon graffiti on the walls, and his unwavering support keeps you going when the world threatens to swallow you whole.

But then comes that gut-wrenching moment—the one that hits you like a freight train every time you hit "New Game." You know it's coming, yet you're never prepared. Jackie's fate is sealed, and the void he leaves behind is a testament to the game's emotional depth. So, here's to you, Jackie: Shot of vodka on the rocks, lime juice, ginger beer... oh, and a splash of love!

Side Quests: Hidden Gems

Now, let's talk about those side missions—the unsung heroes of Night City. They're not just filler content; they're microcosms of life itself. From helping a rogue AI find purpose to unraveling the mysteries of a cybernetic artist, each quest peels back another layer of this dystopian onion. And the best part? They're not mere distractions; they're often

essential. So, next time you stumble upon a seemingly trivial task, remember: it may be a breadcrumb leading to a hidden treasure.

Dystopia: More Than Neon and Chrome

Cyberpunk 2077 wears its neon-soaked heart on its sleeve, but beneath the flashy billboards and chrome-plated guns lies a deeper truth. It's not just about cybernetics and hacking; it's about the human condition. The struggle for survival, the fight against oppressive systems, and the yearning for connection, all wrapped in neon wire. As you delve deeper, you'll realize that Night City isn't just a backdrop; it's a mirror reflecting our own fears and hopes.

A Glimpse into Tomorrow

These games, these digital realms: they're our collective dreams and nightmares. When the creators conjure up a future, they're whispering secrets about what lies ahead. Cyberpunk 2077 invites us to ponder: Would we thrive in a world of cyber-enhancements and corporate overlords? Or would we crumble under the weight of our own desires?

The Ultimate Question: Would You Live in Night City?

So, my fellow wanderer, would you trade your mundane reality for the neon-drenched chaos of Night City? Would you dance with rogue AIs, chase down cyberpsychos, and sip synth-coffee at dingy bars? Or do you long for a different kind of utopia—one where the sun still rises over green hills and the rain smells of petrichor? As for me, I'll keep my neural implants charged and my katana sharp. Because in the end, it's not about the glitches or the sprawling cityscape; it's about the stories we create within those lines of code. And in Night City, the story is yours to write.

China-Russia in a win-win relationship. Their partnership should worry the West

The Munich Security Index 2024 has unveiled some compelling insights, notably indicating that Western populations are more concerned about issues like climate change rather than the perceived threat posed by China and Russia.

Additionally, the index has pointed to a shift in China's perspective, which now views all countries except Russia and Belarus as "more threatening than last year". This finding is particularly noteworthy given the deepening relationship between China and Russia since the onset of the Russia-Ukraine war. As Russia faced diplomatic backlash and even traditionally friendly countries like India adopted a neutral stance, Beijing maintained unwavering support for Moscow, aligning closely with its positions.

It has now become customary for Chinese President Xi Jinping and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to exchange pleasantries on festive occasions. On New Year's Eve, Xi exchanged greetings with Putin and emphasised the resilience and stability of China-Russia relations, affirming their continued positive trajectory. More recently, at the onset of the Year of the Dragon last week, Xi, on a call with Putin, reiterated the strength of the China-Russia partnership in withstanding past tests. He highlighted the need for both sides to "strengthen strategic coordination, safeguard national sovereignty, security, and development interests," while also opposing "external interference" (a clear reference to the US) in their "internal affairs". In a widely discussed and shared interview with American journalist Tucker Carlson, Putin referred to Xi as his "colleague and friend". Furthermore, he emphasised that "the West is more fearful of a strong China than it is of a strong Russia". The remark was dissected in a viral post on Weibo, which suggested that it implies one cannot defeat Russia given China's strength and support. Additionally, it hinted that engaging with Russia has inadvertently strengthened China's position – implying the win-win nature of the China-Russia relationship. China exploiting Russia-Ukraine war Amid the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war and the West's collective disdain for Putin, China has seized the opportunity to exploit the situation. Xi has consistently leveraged China's partnership with Russia to signal to the West that several (non-Western) countries share his outlook on Western interference in Beijing's internal matters. Russia was among the very few countries Xi visited after the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, reports indicate that Putin is once again expected to visit Beijing this year.

China has been reiterating its steadfast

support for Russia in the face of Western defiance. Chinese firms have played a significant role in helping Russia evade Western sanctions, now prompting the European Union to consider imposing sanctions on Chinese entities assisting Russia.

Consequently, Russia has increasingly become a puppet of China. It not only aligns with and defends China's interests but has also assumed a subordinate role in the relationship. Beyond Western criticism, China could potentially reference Russia's invasion of Ukraine to justify its actions should it choose to invade Taiwan. The narrative of Western provocation and interference is a shared one, propagated by both China and Russia.

In recent times, China has reaped tangible benefits from its growing ties with Russia, particularly as the latter faced isolation and sanctions from the West. This camaraderie has led to a significant surge in China-Russia trade, which touched the \$190 billion mark in 2022.

Expectedly, a considerable portion of this boom in trade can be attributed to the increased energy exports to China, with Russia now supplying approximately 2 million barrels of oil per day. During Putin's visit to China in February 2022, just a few weeks before the invasion, Russia's Gazprom signed a 30-year contract with the China National Petroleum Corporation, ensuring the provision of 10 billion cubic metres of gas annually to China through a new pipeline originating from the Russian island of Sakhalin. The China-Russia threat in terms of hard security issues, the China-Russia partnership remains a persistent threat to the West. Both countries have actively crafted a narrative that highlights Western attempts to counter and undermine them, particularly finding receptive audiences in the 'Global South'. However, what is even more alarming is the unwavering cooperation and collaboration between the two countries. Their military cooperation, alongside sophisticated influence operations, presents a formidable challenge.

While like-minded countries in the Indo-Pacific region initially came together to address challenges posed by China's aggression, the effectiveness of the collective efforts is proving to be less impactful. Additionally, the compounded threat of China and Russia is becoming increasingly alarming for the United States and the rest of the West. Several countries' divergent perceptions and approaches toward China, and now Russia, further complicate the situation. Despite this, there is a noticeable disparity between the perceived threat and the efforts to address it, suggesting a concerning underestimation of the severity of the growing China-Russia partnership.

By SANA HASHMI

Democrats Might Need a Plan B. Here's What It Looks Like.

So far, Democrats have vigorously avoided any discussion of a Plan B for their presidential nominee. But special counsel Robert Hur's report may have forced their hand. Fairly or not, Hur's stinging characterization of President Joe Biden as a "well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory" and "diminished faculties" has thrust the president's age and mental fitness into the debate. Coupled with the widespread perception that Biden is too old for another term and the fact that he frequently trails former president Donald Trump in swing state polling matchups, it's raised serious questions about whether Biden is positioned to lead the party in November — and whether Democrats need a contingency plan. Because of procedural and political hurdles, it would not be easy to simply swap him out. The likeliest outcome is that Biden stays on the ticket. But it is also possible to envision different scenarios where the party does indeed nominate someone other than Biden at its August convention or even picks an alternative afterward to compete in a historic general election.

Here's how it would work.

Biden's choices

The truth is that a backup strategy can only be deployed if Biden voluntarily steps aside — or is physically unable to stand for nomination. At the moment, despite the anxiety within the party, there's no dispute: Biden is on a glide path to the Democratic nomination. His longshot rival, Rep. Dean Phillips, has warned for months about the risks of nominating Biden yet has failed to gain traction. The Minnesota Democrat has largely been ostracized from the party for

even broaching the sensitive subject. A late-entering white knight candidate isn't an option at this point, even though only about 3 percent of the total delegates have been awarded so far. That's because by the end of this month, filing deadlines for primary ballot access will have passed in all but six states and the District of Columbia (Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon and South Dakota). Even if a candidate managed to get on the ballots in all those states — and even if they won every single delegate available in them — it still wouldn't make much of a dent against Biden's delegate haul. Biden will likely amass more delegates on March 5, Super Tuesday, in the state of California than from those six states and D.C. combined. Short of incapacitation or a highly unlikely convention floor revolt from delegates already pledged to Biden and loyal to the president, there is only one practical Plan B. And that's Biden himself agreeing to hand over the baton. He is a proud man whose ego has been shaped by the experience of winning election to the Senate in his 20s and then being denied the presidency several times before finally securing it; convincing him he's in an increasingly untenable position and needs to stand down won't come easy. But there is a path that enables him to leave with dignity and on his terms. It begins with letting the Democratic primary campaign run its course, ending June 4, the date the last group of states holds its primaries. Biden would finish as the undisputed victor, with far more than the 1,968 pledged delegate votes necessary to claim the nomination.



ISSN No. 1554 06X

Editor in Chief & Publisher :

Sharanjit Singh Thind

Managing Editor :

Susmita Ghosh

Deputy Managing Editor :

Amaninder Singh Thind

Editor (Political Affairs-India) : Aruna Singh

Special Correspondents: Gagandeep Singh (India)

Editorial Intern: Roubin Singh Thind

Web Coordinator : Harpreet Singh

A Publication of Media Partners Capital, Inc.

REGD & MAILING OFFICE :

P.O Box 7005 Hicksville New York 11801

Phone: 917 612 3158

editor@thesouthasianinsider.com, thesouthasianinsider@gmail.com

www.thesouthasianinsider.com

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

Election Results Further Divide Pakistan, Expose Deep Rot and Fissures

By: Kanwal Sibal

Pakistan was already in a serious political, economic and social mess. The elections just held have deepened that mess. The functioning of all Pakistani institutions has been badly exposed and their credibility eroded further.

Imran Khan defied the Pakistani military and has paid a price for that. The judiciary has pliantly played the game of the Pakistani military by sentencing Imran Khan to long periods of imprisonment for provoking violence against the army, leaking state secrets and profiting from the sale of gifts he received as Prime Minister from foreign dignitaries. His wife too has been given a prison sentence for an un-Islamic marriage with Imran Khan.

The Pakistani military is seen, and sees itself, as the saviour of last resort of Pakistan's survival as an ideological nation. The army, as known, has always exercised real power in Pakistan directly or indirectly. Imran Khan himself was put in power by the army as an alternative to the traditional political parties. Having fallen afoul of the army because he wanted to exercise his prime ministerial prerogative



in military appointments, he was removed from power. The army then manoeuvred for Nawaz Sharif to return from London and replace Imran Khan. The judiciary cooperated by lifting the life-long election ban on Nawaz Sharif because of his criminal conviction for dishonest practices because, it ruled, that life bans "abridge the fundamental right of citizens to contest elections and vote for a candidate of their choice". The Election Commission of Pakistan decided to bar PTI — Imran Khan's party — from using its iconic cricket bat symbol to identify party candidates in the election on the grounds of irregularities in its internal party elections. The

Pakistan Supreme Court upheld the decision of the Election Commission. Members of Imran Khan's party were barred from contesting the election under their party's name and were compelled to run as independents.

It was speculated that while the Pakistani military would manoeuvre to make Nawaz Sharif Prime Minister but will also ensure that no party gets a majority so that a coalition government that emerges is relatively weak and can be better controlled. In the event, the military's strategy hasn't worked as expected because despite all the bans and restrictions put on Imran Khan and the PTI, his

followers standing as independents have won the largest number of seats, close to 93 or so (out of 101), with PML-N winning 75 seats, the PPP 54 seats, the MQM-P 17 seats and others 12. With the delay in announcing results, the closing down of the internet and telephone networks during the counting, the accusations of rigging seem credible. A coalition government is in the offing. Nawaz Sharif has made an appeal to all parties to come together to put crisis-ridden Pakistan back on the rails, and negotiations are being conducted with PPP and others. General Asim Munir has backed Nawaz Sharif's call in stating that "Pakistan's diverse polity and pluralism will be best represented by a unified government of all democratic forces imbued with national purpose". Depending on how hard the bargain is driven by Asif Ali Zardari with regard to the distribution of portfolios, it is not clear if Nawaz Sharif would eventually become the Prime Minister. In all this, the military as an institution has also taken a hit. The limits of its ability to control the political process have been exposed. It is not the first time though that the military has

received public rebuffs, but such is its core control of power and policy in the system that it recovers from setbacks. The fact that challenged openly and persistently by Imran Khan and General Munir's determination to crush him and the PTI, the former Prime Minister's youthful supporters have resisted and emerged as the largest group of independents in the election, shows that the military's role in Pakistani politics is being challenged. Some believe that this show of resistance to the military's political manipulation is a good augury for Pakistan's democracy. But then, Pakistan's political structure, the role of the armed forces, the domination of Punjab in its polity, the radicalisation of its society, the country's ideological underpinnings, the limited base of its economy and the difficulties in revitalising it because of vested interests are issues that are deeply linked to the possible evolution of a more democratic Pakistan. Leaving aside the hurdles to any genuine democracy in Pakistan that its military represents, the political leaders of Pakistan have vied for power in the country without any genuine democratic convictions.

Qatar Release Is A Landmark In Modi's Middle East Success Story



There are moments in a nation's trajectory when its arrival on the global scene is heralded by the quality of its leadership. The decision by Qatar to release eight former Indian navy officials who were facing death sentences for alleged spying is a testament not only to the strength of India-Qatar bilateral ties but also to the distinct ability of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to forge strong personal bonds with leaders of other nations to secure Indian interests. In one

stroke, Modi has underscored how he remains key to India's rising global profile, something his critics have continued to challenge since 2014 despite all the evidence to the contrary.

It is easy to forget how tense a time it was when a Qatari court had sentenced the men to death in October last year. There was a sense of despair about their future, and in retaliation, there were many who were quick to suggest that New Delhi should renounce its ties

with Doha. Qatar's decision to challenge the foundations of an essentially strong relationship had begun to provoke a rethink in India about the future sustainability of this relationship.

Why PM-Level Talks Became Necessary

New Delhi expressed its "deep shock" at the verdict and had explored all possible legal and diplomatic options—from high-level political engagement to moving through the appeals process, and even invoking the provisions of a 2015 pact on the transfer of sentenced prisoners. But the road ahead was difficult and it required deft diplomacy and leadership from the very top.

And that's where prime ministerial-level engagement becomes the key. It is easy to suggest that India has leverage in its ties with Qatar, but deploying it effectively requires a leadership that is willing to push for concrete outcomes. Modi's willingness to put himself out there is a key variable that made a positive outcome possible. For any

leader, such a move is full of risks, as a failure would have led to questions being raised about Modi's global credibility. But Modi met the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamid Al Thani, on the sidelines of the COP-28 meeting in Dubai last December, after which the sentences of the eight Indian navy officials were reduced. It was a sign that things were moving in the right direction. And then, last week, India and Qatar signed a major deal that will secure exports of Qatari liquefied natural gas to India until the end of 2048. This builds on a 25-year agreement that was due to expire in 2028.

Good Ties Are Important For Both India & Qatar

India and Qatar do enjoy strong economic ties, with the Gulf nation being the largest supplier of liquefied natural gas to India, accounting for more than 50% of its LNG imports. Also, an Indian diaspora of around 840,000 sustains Qatar's labour force. For Qatar, building robust ties with an emerging economic power like

India has been a priority as it seeks diversification in its external relationships, while for New Delhi, it has been about strengthening its partnership with a Gulf state that punches above its weight in the region and beyond. There is a reason why when Qatar was isolated and feeling the heat of the Saudi-led blockade in 2017-2021, India continued with its economic engagement with Doha.

It was this partnership that many in India had begun to question after the diplomatic challenge posed by the action against Indian Navy veterans. Modi has managed to salvage this key relationship by reminding both the Qataris and the Indians that there is value in preserving the sanctity of their partnership. Qatar's decision came on the day when Modi was embarking on his two day trip to the UAE to inaugurate the first Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi, further underscoring how transformative his leadership has been in shaping India's engagement in the Middle East.

Why Trump's threat to NATO can force Europe to rethink its nuclear defence

The world that emerges from the Second Cold War will have little resemblance to the one we inherited from its first iteration.

Embedded in the rock more than 25 metres below the snow-dusted heart of the city, the cavern is now an empty hall, sometimes hired out for concerts and exhibitions. Seven decades ago this summer, the hall became home to a nuclear reactor that silently produced weapons-grade plutonium, the heart of one of the world's most secret nuclear weapons programmes. After Hiroshima, military experts had warned that the new kind of bomb dropped on the city would transform warfare. Workers' shovels soon began hitting frozen earth.

The hall wasn't under one of the Soviet Union's secret nuclear cities – which began being constructed after dictator Joseph Stalin's atomic spies informed him of the Manhattan Project – or in the wastes of China's Lop Nur. It wasn't under the Fontenay-aux-Roses in Paris, where France had begun to breed plutonium, or run by the discreetly named Tube Alloys, the British nuclear weapons programme.

Largely forgotten, the story of Reaktor R1 in Stockholm—the

capital of social-democratic free-love-and-sandals Sweden—helps us understand the security dilemmas facing Europe. Earlier this week, former United States President Donald Trump threatened to blow up NATO if its members didn't pay more into the world's largest security alliance.

Trump's threats, as his former National Security Adviser John Bolton notes, will lead American allies across the world to begin wondering how credible the superpower's security guarantees really are. "Well," Bolton observed, "if Trump is willing to knife NATO, what makes anybody think he wouldn't knife Israel if it suited his purposes?"

The question is even being asked in Sweden, which is in the middle of a long diplomatic battle for NATO membership. European leaders likely know what they might have to do if NATO does fall apart—but it's not a prospect any of them will embrace.

The secret reactors

Less than two weeks after the bombing of Hiroshima, neutral Sweden's armed forces, on 17

August 1945, asked for "an account of what might currently be known about the atomic bomb." Led by the eminent physicist Torsten Magnusson, Sweden's National Defence Research Agency began conducting preliminary studies into the elements of nuclear weapons. Within a decade, the country had acquired the technological foundations needed to begin work on an actual nuclear weapon. Early in the summer of 1954, international relations scholar Thomas Jonter reveals, Magnusson gave a speech to top military commanders: "Because of the great advantages of atomic bombs from the point of view of defence, it is my opinion that sooner or later, we will have to seriously consider manufacturing them." Two years later, Sweden began tests on the special conventional explosive system needed to trigger a nuclear detonation. As the Cold War freeze set in, similar efforts had begun across Europe. The United Kingdom had made major contributions to kickstarting the Manhattan Project. Leaders in the UK, official history records, expected that the US would return the favour by sharing



technology after the end of the Second World War. Fearing the technology would leak to the USSR, however, American President Harry Truman declined to cooperate. Furious, British politicians ordered resources available for the acquisition of an independent nuclear deterrent in 1946. "We've got to have this thing over here, whatever it costs," Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin told the cabinet committee in charge of the project. "We've got to have the bloody Union Jack flying on top of it." Across the English Channel, France was arriving at the same

conclusion, and for much the same reason. The French government had acquired much of the world's heavy water supply in 1940 and moved it to the UK. Physicists Lew Kowarski and Hans von Halban later conducted experiments that proved fission—and thus nuclear weapons—was possible. Later, in 1944, the French scientist Jules Guéron, one of three involved in the Manhattan Project, gave leader-in-exile Charles de Gaulle a one-on-one secret briefing on the new weapons, nuclear policy expert Mycle Schneider records.

Co-operative Banks in India: Relevance & Challenges

By JAG MOHAN THAKEN

Established with the noble objective of liberating the poor from the clutches of dodgy and mammonist moneylenders, who demanded high pitch interest rates from the lower strata people, the cooperative banks in India have played a pivotal role in uplifting the poorest of the poor and the socio-economically underprivileged strata.

However, there are commercial and nationalized banks also spreading up in most of the areas of the country, but in the earlier stages they were found to be serving the higher ranks and files of the society. The poor were very much hesitant even to enter into these high-profile banks. So, the need was felt to expand such banks which can serve at the lowest level. To fulfil the gap, Cooperative and Regional Rural Banks were inflated, which are serving the lower strata masses in an exemplary mode.

The major difference in the working

and serving between a commercial bank and a cooperative bank lies in their approach to revenue generation. Where commercial banks follow

interest rates with a smiling service.

The Cooperative banks in India work at three levels- The State Cooperative Bank functions as the



the rule of earning maximum profits, cooperative banks work on the principle of "Service with No Pick-Pocketing". The primary role of cooperative banks is to extend financial assistance to the needy masses at the most nominal

apex body and works as a bridge between District Cooperative Banks and RBI. District Cooperative Banks operate at the district level and their primary role is to dispense funds to the primary cooperative banks. The third wing and the actual body,

Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACSS), which functions at the grassroot level directly cater to the local populace by offering loans and other services.

Initially, the cooperative banks were to assist the populace in tiny offices, having one table and one chair for the secretary at PACS, who worked with a lengthy ledger- 'Bahi Khata' to keep all types of records, with powers of small financing just to uplift them upto a level of self-dependency. But now they have emerged to compete with the commercial banks in all fields, having an adorable office set-up with a computerized system.

Union Home and Cooperation Minister, Amit Shah, has taken more than 54 initiatives in a short span of time. "Computerization of PACS" project is one of the major initiatives of the Ministry under which 63,000 PACS are being computerized with a total

financial outlay of Rs.2,516 Crores. Till now, more than 12,000 PACS have been computerized across 28 States/UTs. The Ministry of Cooperation had invited the Chairpersons of around 250 beneficiary PACS and their spouses from 24 States and 2 UTs across the country to witness the Republic Day celebrations. On the eve of Republic Day, Union Minister of State for Cooperation B.L. Verma interacted and had dinner with the Special Guests. During the interaction, Verma highlighted many significant initiatives taken by the Ministry of Cooperation. He also assured Chairpersons of PACS about the Ministry of Cooperation unwavering commitment to furthering the strengthening of the cooperative sector. Some of the Chairpersons shared their experiences about the benefits derived from the PACS Computerization Project to their respective Societies.

Why Taylor Swift Is Making Conservatives Crazy

It's all about the GOP's embrace of paranoid populism.

We have met the enemy, and it is Taylor Swift.

As you might have heard, an element of the online right has decided that the pop star's famous romance with Kansas City Chiefs player Travis Kelce is a plot to get President Joe Biden re-elected. If the two do not seem naturally connected, well then, you're probably just being taken in by this "psyop." In response to an X post from influencer Jack Posobiec referring to a conspiracy theory involving George Soros manipulating Swift into becoming an activist Democrat, one-time presidential candidate and full-time panderer Vivek Ramaswamy dropped dark hints of what's to come.

"I wonder who's going to win the Super Bowl next month," he posted. "And I wonder if there's a major presidential endorsement coming from an artificially culturally propped-up couple this fall. Just some wild speculation over here, let's see how it ages over the next 8 months."

After a spate of media reports on the Swift theory, another influencer on X, Benny Johnson, pronounced it confirmed. "By now," he wrote, "everyone knows Taylor Swift is a government psyop and this is exactly why Corporate Media is having a meltdown about it."

Case closed.

Politics has always had its share of conspiracy theorists on both sides, but the right has become particularly susceptible to the tendency as it has become more populist. The Taylor Swift theory is not the first lunatic idea that has gotten traction on the right, nor will it be the last. Most of this discussion is on social media and much of it doesn't matter very much, but there is a risk that the conservative movement will appear weird and alienated from the American mainstream — and turn off voters in the real world. In this regard, the Taylor Swift obsession is particularly stupid and perverse.

She has her roots in country music. There's nothing transgressive about her, nothing highly sexualized, and nothing very political, although she has endorsed a few basic center-left positions in recent years. She's not having a breakdown like



Britney Spears once did or acting outlandish like Lady Gaga. She's not singing protest songs (except about her ex-boyfriends) or suffering wardrobe malfunctions. Moreover, she's not dating another pop star, or Pete Davidson. She's dating a football player, for God's sake.

The last time I checked conservatives celebrated football as the rough-and-tumble game of American gladiators. And here one of the toughest of them — a beast of a tight end — lands the biggest female pop star in the country, and they see the tentacles of powerful forces promoting the Biden 2024 campaign. The image of Travis Kelce and Taylor Swift kissing on the field after his victory in the AFC Championship game is arguably the most iconic American photo since the Trump mugshot. For anyone whose worldview hasn't become twisted by politics, it's a picture of normality. It's the cheerleader dating the high school quarterback. It's traditional femininity meets traditional masculinity. It's the pinnacle of success.

Once upon a time, conservatives would have celebrated it as pure Americana, and poured scorn on anyone who found a reason to say otherwise.

Needless to say, the idea that the powerbrokers are promoting Taylor Swift via her relationship with Kelce — and guaranteeing a Chiefs Super Bowl victory in the process — is preposterous. Swift

doesn't need to be more famous; she needs the NFL or Travis Kelce to promote her about as much as John Lennon needed Yoko Ono to make him popular. Swift has been a star since roughly 2007, and was packing stadium after stadium on a \$1 billion concert tour before she became a Chiefs fan.

Anyone who thinks the Taylor Swift phenomenon is faked or "not organic," as the obsessives on the right put it, has clearly never met a 10-year-old girl.

As for the notion that the NFL is fixing things to get the Chiefs (another) Super Bowl victory, it is absurd. What are we supposed to believe? That in a key moment against the Chiefs in the championship game, a crisis actor depicting Baltimore Ravens receiver Zay Flowers fumbled just outside the end zone in a perfectly choreographed simulacrum of a receiver reaching with the ball toward the goal-line and getting it punched out by a desperate defender? The pro-Chiefs conspiracy would have to be incredibly elaborate: Dozens upon dozens of the most competitive people on the planet — football players who risk serious injury on every play — would have to agree to throw their games to the Chiefs and do it in a convincing fashion. Is there not one Republican in the NFL to blow the whistle on this dastardly scheme?

Besides, if the NFL wanted to conspire to get a team to the Super Bowl while giving it extra exposure via a world-famous pop

star, presumably it would have picked a much more lucrative big-market city, not piddling Kansas City. It could have bequeathed this windfall on one of the Los Angeles, Texas or New York teams. (This scenario might be the only way the Jets will ever have hope.) Finally, it's not clear how much football the online conspiracy theorists watch, but Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes is a wizard who doesn't need any artificial help.

Kelce, too, is no slouch. He had seven straight seasons of more than 1,000 yards receiving, until falling just short this year at 984 after missing a couple of games. But he is an object of suspicion for the online right because he's in a Covid vaccine ad for Pfizer. This supposedly makes him the tool of Big Pharma. If appearing in an ad for a company means he's sold out, he's also the tool of Big Insurance (State Farm), Big Grocery (Hy-Vee), and Big Something or Other Having to Do With Your Credit Rating (Experian).

Why is the right particularly susceptible to this way of thinking? It is a function, most importantly, of its populist turn. Whether right or left, populism inevitably has a suspicious or paranoid edge given that it is, by definition, an outsider phenomenon. It has always been arrayed against the railroads, the banks, the military-industrial complex, the 1 percent, or in the case of today's right, an amalgam of the media, corporate America

and the Deep State.

These forces are, depending on your point of view, more or less noxious and they are indeed capable of shadowy machinations.

Regarding the populist right's targets, it's true that the media is biased and prone to group-think and hysteria. Corporate America can easily get pushed into adopting fashionable causes. And bureaucrats can have their own agendas.

But it's one thing to be skeptical and on guard, and another to lose touch with common sense and reality. The internet and social media, of course, aren't conducive to striking this balance; since they reward outlandishness and passionate intensity, they've made the fever swamp a source of fame and fortune. The Epoch Times has built a media empire on conspiracies. Gateway Pundit is a top conservative website. Alex Jones has gone from embarrassing nutjob with a WWE affect to getting a strange new respect from figures on the right with large followings, including Charlie Kirk and Tucker Carlson.

Consider the aforementioned Vivek Ramaswamy. If his campaign had continued on to Super Tuesday he might have held a presser at the Texas book depository challenging reporters to explain to him how Lee Harvey Oswald possibly could have had the correct angle to shoot JFK — all as a way of "just asking questions," of course. What's bizarre is that Ramaswamy probably had never uttered anything conspiratorial in his life prior to running for president. Typically, running for high office makes a candidate more serious, but Ramaswamy realized the power of the part of the conservative media ecosystem devoted to promoting conspiracy theories and decided to play to it. In addition, there'd be no downside because floating fringe theories wouldn't get him shunned by the party establishment, since former President Donald Trump — himself prone to conspiratorial thinking — is the party establishment. Ramaswamy and the others will likely prove prophetic.

Tibetan Independence Day: How China's Claim Over Tibet Stands Contested



By: Arun Anand

February 13, 2024, marked 111 years of Tibetan Independence Day celebrated mostly by Tibetans living in exile around the world. The People's Republic of China (PRC) which maintains the position that Tibet has historically been an integral part of China denounces this day as 'fabricated'. The contestation with respect to sovereignty is essentially rooted in Tibetan history, which is interpreted differently by the Tibetans and the PRC.

Historians and scholars tend to differ on the question of Tibet's sovereignty prior to 1912, the year of the fall of the Qing dynasty in China. While some believe that Tibet did not possess complete sovereignty, others are of the opinion that Tibet remained independent with foreign entities such as Mongols, British, Chinese and Nepalese retaining occasional suzerainty over Tibet in different periods. The history texts however highlight that when Tibet was under the spiritual leadership of the 13th Dalai Lama (also known as Thubten Gyasto), it witnessed two invasions; first, by the British expedition forces in 1904 and second, by the Manchus (Qing) in 1910. Both times, the 13th Dalai Lama was forced to flee Lhasa (Tibet) to seek exile in Mongolia and the British protectorate in India respectively. A Treaty of Convention between Britain and Tibet was subsequently signed following the 1904 invasion whereby the former ensured non-intervention by any foreign powers in Tibetan affairs without the consent of the



British government and confirmed Tibet's boundary and trading rights, among other things. Two years later, Britain signed another Treaty of Convention with China respecting Tibet whereby the former agreed to not annex Tibetan territory or interfere in its administration, while the latter undertook to not permit interference of any other foreign state in Tibetan territory or in its internal administration. These two conventions are significant as they both reiterate Tibet's existence as a sovereign entity and China's suzerainty over Tibet, contested by the PRC after 1950. During his second exile, the Dalai Lama was proclaimed deposed by the Qing rule in 1910.

Presently, Tibetan Independence Day is observed as the day the 13th Dalai Lama proclaimed the independence of Tibet in 1913 following his return to Lhasa from his exile in India the previous year. In this declaration, the Dalai Lama stated, "Tibet

is an independent nation living in peace and in accordance with its religion. We are a small, religious and independent nation." He further claimed that historically, Tibet had no Qing (Manchu) or Chinese authority in the region, a clear indication of Tibet's complete sovereignty to have existed historically. The Qing dynasty, who were not Chinese rulers, exercised only political control over Tibet as a protectorate state, which de facto ended with the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1912. As per historical records, the Republic of China was established in 1912 with the fall of the Qing dynasty, ending China's last imperial dynasty following the Xinhai Revolution of 1911. The new head of the Chinese State sought to establish cordial relations with Tibet and offered to restore the Dalai Lama to his previous position. However, the Dalai Lama refused the Title, declared Tibet independent in 1913 and

standardised the Tibetan flag in its present form, seen to be in use by the Tibetan government-in-exile (in Dharamshala, India). The Mongol-Tibet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance was concluded the same year which mentions their freedom from the Qing dynasty, their separation from China and the formation of their own independent states. The treaty's authenticity is contested by the PRC, claiming it to be a tool for Russian intervention in Tibet and therefore, considers it to be invalid. However, the treaty was proclaimed by Tibetans as another indication of Tibet's sovereignty before 1951 which witnessed the assimilation of Tibet into China as per the Seventeen-Point Agreement. The return of the Dalai Lama witnessed him assuming political as well as spiritual leadership of Tibet that the independent reign continued for four decades till 1951. The modernisation of Tibet was initiated under his reign which saw an independent Tibet maintaining its own army and government, use of its own language and currency, trade missions with foreign countries and regulated movement across borders. The 13th Dalai Lama is also recognised to be the first one to make formal international agreements as a sovereign nation.

However, the assimilation of Tibet under China after 1951 is the result of China's aggressive policy as witnessed in the Battle of Chamdo (1950), the Seventeen-Point Agreement (1951) later renounced by the 14th and current Dalai Lama, claiming to be signed under duress, as PRC broke its promise of respecting Tibet's autonomy. The agreement remains to be the only one concluded by the PRC with a minority group. Post 1950, China or PRC, interprets history differently in an effort to claim its 'historical' assertion over Tibetan land. According to the PRC, Tibet has historically been part of China, coming under the jurisdiction of the Central government since the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368). Post 1950, Chinese annexation of Tibet paved the way for its aggressive onslaught on Tibetans, leading to mass exile and persecution, occupation of naïve land, exploitation of resources and imposition of Sinicization in its effort to erode Tibet's unique cultural, linguistic and religious identity.

While Beijing denounces marking of Tibetan Independence Day as a 'farce', the very observation and celebration of this day among the Tibetan community living in exile, 111 years since its declaration, speak volumes of Tibetans' assertion of keeping their identity alive and rejection of China's ongoing attempts at eroding Tibetan's sovereign existence.

Pakistan Polls - How Imran Khan's Twin Strike On US And Pak Army Helped Him

By Maha Siddiqui

It turned out to be an outstanding performance in the Pakistan elections by Khan's Pakistan Tahreek-e-Insaaf (PTI), even as he serves time in jail. Though Khan himself was barred from contesting due to a conviction in a corruption case, PTI candidates, who had to contest as independents, won 91 seats in the National Assembly. Though they are far from wresting power, the result indicates the success of a risky political strategy deployed by Khan since his ouster as the Prime Minister in a no-confidence motion in April 2022. Taking On The Military

What played out in this election was eerily similar to what transpired in 2018. Only, the protagonists were differently placed. It was Nawaz Sharif who was sentenced to prison less than three weeks before the polls and Khan enjoyed the backing of the military. The allegations of the election not being free and fair were also similar, and the military was explicitly accused of interfering in the process to prop its blue-eyed boy, Khan, to the premiership. Khan ultimately became Prime Minister, but his relationship with the all-powerful



military soured within four years as he was seen to be meddling in the supposed civilian no-go zone of military and ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) appointments.

Once out of power, Khan took on the military in an unprecedented manner. Within a month of being ousted, he led a "long march" into Islamabad that turned violent. Another one in November 2022 saw him being shot in the leg by a gunman who opened fire at a rally in Wazirabad. Khan accused a senior army official, Major General Faisal Naseer, of

the attempted assassination bid. In a rare statement, the Pakistan military rebutted the allegation by Khan. It said, "This has been a consistent pattern for the last one year where military and intelligence agencies officials are targeted with insinuations and sensational propaganda for the furtherance of political objectives." Khan's constant tirades against the military saw an unusual and perhaps unimaginable outcome. The military, a formidable and unopposed power in Pakistan, saw violent attacks against itself

in May 2023. Protesters took to the streets after Khan's arrest and were seen not just attacking the police and government buildings but also military installations. Shockingly, the army headquarters and an air force base were targeted.

This was one of the few early indications that Khan's political gamble of taking on the military had paid off. It was yielding dividends, and Khan's PTI was hopeful that it would bear even electoral dividends.

Whipping up anti-US sentiment As the Pakistan economy

tanked and Khan made an unceremonious exit from power, he trained his guns at the United States. Khan not only accused the US of being behind his ouster but also singled out US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, Donald Lu, for conveying the same to the then-Pakistan ambassador to the US, Asad Majeed Khan.

In a press conference, Khan himself said that Lu told Majeed Khan there would be implications if Khan was not removed. The meeting, as revealed later, had taken place in the backdrop of Khan's visit to Moscow just as Russia attacked Ukraine, gravely upsetting Washington DC.

However, Khan continued to use the argument of a "foreign conspiracy" behind his defeat in the no-confidence motion. The US denied the allegation of interference in Pakistani affairs. Significantly, soon after the victory of Khan's candidates, the US State Department released a statement saying, "The United States is prepared to work with the next Pakistani government, regardless of political party, to advance our shared interests," while expressing concern over the allegations of election fraud - "claims of interference or fraud should be fully investigated".

Future of Free Speech in India: However Great The Pressures May Be, It Will Survive

By: Pavan K Varma

The closing debate of the iconic Jaipur Literature Festival (JLF) is hugely popular, and is, in a sense, the finale of the five-day event, with an audience in thousands. The topics for the debate are deliberately provocative so that, in the best spirit of debating, the audience is both interested and involved. This year, the topic was - 'Free Speech Will Survive Surveillance Technology and Privacy Invasions'.

I have participated in these closing debates several times in the past. For the subject this year, I had originally opted to speak for the motion. However, my good friend and director of the JLF, Namita Gokhale, called me to make a request. She said that more speakers (each side has three) wanted to speak in support of the



motion, and would I please agree to speak against it. Having been a debater, both in school and university, and the President of the St Stephen's Debating Society, I agreed, since this is not a political

event but a stage to test the argumentative skills of the speakers. Vir Sanghvi, as always, was the moderator. Those speaking for the motion were Pinky Anand, former additional Solicitor-

General of India; Amia Srinivasan, professor of social and political theory at Oxford University; and Mohit Satyanand, chairman of Teamwork Arts, entrepreneur and angel investor. Those against included me; Varghese K George, resident editor of The Hindu in Delhi; and Marcus du Sautoy, professor of mathematics at Oxford University. The rules for the debate are complicated but interesting. Before the debate begins, the motion is put to a voice vote to the audience. This time, many more in the audience initially voted in support of the motion, making the task for those against it more difficult. When the debate begins, each speaker from each side gets to make an initial presentation of three minutes. Then there is time given

for speakers to rebut the other side, after which the moderator asks questions to either side. This is done with great incisiveness and impartiality by Vir. The floor is then thrown open to the audience for questions, and then each speaker makes a concluding presentation for two minutes. Finally, the motion is put to the audience again. This time the needle had decisively moved.

From more voters having initially supported the motion, now the overwhelming number shouted a roar of approval for those opposing it. It was a debating victory for our side. The art of debating, which should be taught in every school, is about marshalling facts, providing convincing arguments, and doing so within the time prescribed.

Ranveer Singh-Johnny Sins ad has an unlikely hero - women's pleasure

The tone of the ad marks a departure from the conventional landscape of sexual wellness advertisements. To watch a woman talking about sexual dissatisfaction is new.

If American adult actor Johnny Sins can pop a pill for erectile dysfunction, then there's nothing to be ashamed of. A new ad for a product to promote male sexual health has everyone rolling on the floor laughing. Featuring Bollywood actor Ranveer Singh and Sins, the crossover ad—as it's now being called—takes a leaf out of Ekta Kapoor's daily soap drama to sell a product that no man is comfortable talking about.

The humorous ad written by Tanmay Bhat and Devaiah Bopanna and directed by Ayappa Km is Johnny Sins' first-ever advertisement for an Indian brand.

The writers have smartly addressed two issues at once. The ad underscores the importance of a healthy sexual life for a woman, and the stigma surrounding erectile dysfunction in men. Everything is



exaggerated but familiar, it's the Hindi soap format—the emotions, drama, background score, the opulence of the house and even the camera movements. But the new twist in this old scene is that the sanskaari saree-clad Indian daughter-in-law has no qualms complaining about her less-than-filling sex life with Sins.

As Kishu gets ready to leave the house, Ranveer Singh, who plays her brother-in-law asks her for a reason. Unlike the shy bahu of

Indian soaps, Kishu does not mince her words. "Flowers never bloom on his branches," she says, alluding to her husband's problem.

Sins tries to interrupt her but she stops him and says, "maine inhe kitni baar bola Bold Care liya karo ki inhe bedroom mei problem na ho (I have asked him several times to take Bold Care so that he doesn't have any problem in the bedroom)."

At this point, her mother-in-law

slaps her. As Kishu loses her balance and falls from the first floor, Singh throws a Bold Care pill towards Sins' who pops a pill while jumping to rescue his wife. There's a mid-air sex scene, depicted on screen as a lock opening, and the couple is fulfilled at least.

The internet can't get enough of this. "Ohh, my eyes, my eyes! Johnny Sins in saas-bahu serial!" said one person on X. Taking a bold tone

The tone of the ad marks a departure from the conventional landscape of sexual wellness advertisements. To watch a woman openly talking about sexual dissatisfaction is new. While some ads like those for condoms tend to be overtly sexual, family planning ads err on the side of caution and never really address the issue clearly. This advertisement has set a new benchmark by openly tackling the issue in a humorous, innovative yet direct manner.

Towards the end of the ad, Singh says, "Four out of 10 men are unable to perform in the bed. But what most men don't know is that it is very common and very easy to solve." It's an attempt to normalise the conversation while also promoting Bold Care.

The lock and key reference is perhaps the only cringe part of the ad. I get it. There are censors, and everyone's dignity is at stake. But still, the makers could have come up with something better.

And what's Ranveer's stake in this—he's the co-owner of Bold Care.

Ukraine has fired its military chief at the wrong time. Russia will exploit this instability

The support for the Ukrainian cause is already dipping in the West. The current commander-in-chief will find it hard to gain the confidence of NATO military chiefs.

By COL RAJNEESH SINGH (RETD)

The Ukrainian armed forces launched their much-anticipated counter-offensive against Russia in June 2023. However, by then, the Russians had already constructed well-fortified defences, laid obstacles, and coordinated their fires in large swathes of captured territory. The delay in Ukraine's counterattacks has been attributed to inadequate military aid by Western allies, unfavourable weather and terrain conditions for the offensive, and the training of troops.

On 1 November 2023, General Valery Zaluzhny, Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian armed forces, admitted in an interview published in *The Economist* that the war had reached a

stalemate, suggesting Ukraine might get trapped in a prolonged war. His remarks drew immediate criticism from President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's office. Zaluzhny's assessment led to simmering discontent between him and the President over the next few months, culminating in his dismissal on 8 February.

Zaluzhny was called for a meeting at Zelenskyy's office on 29 January where he told the President that his advisors' assessments of the military situation were more positive than realistic. In the meeting, Zaluzhny was reportedly asked to resign, which he refused. Subsequently, the news of his dismissal was leaked on social media, causing an uproar, and forcing the defence ministry to deny the claims. It was unclear how the government would salvage the

situation having reached a point of no return. Finally, on 8 February, the President announced Zaluzhny's dismissal, concluding the most serious civil-military crisis since the start of the Ukraine-Russia war. Ukraine's precarious military situation

The 2023 Ukrainian counter-offensive aimed to split the Russian forces and interdict the land bridge to Crimea. While the offensive made modest gains, the Russians retained control of a fifth of Ukrainian territory and continued launching offensives along the front, with fighting reported in the Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia regions.

Ukraine's precarious situation is a result of multiple military and geopolitical factors. Russian forces have created an elaborate defensive network, which is



protected by a large number of mines and obstacles. They have learned their lessons in the ongoing war and are skillfully employing drones for surveillance and strikes. Shortages of artillery ammunition, air defence systems, and air power have further exacerbated the delicate military situation faced by Ukrainians.

Matters for Ukraine have also worsened due to the uncertainty surrounding Western military assistance, more so by Republicans in the US Congress blocking \$61 billion worth of military aid.

Zaluzhny's assessment of the battle situation as a 'stalemate' was the trigger for the breakdown of his relationship with the President. His comment was interpreted as unduly pessimistic and treading into the realm of politics. It did not help that despite the failure of the counter-offensive, Zaluzhny is more popular than Zelenskyy. The popularity differential was possibly interpreted as a political threat by the Ukrainian President. The matter came to a head when Zaluzhny refused to resign, making the situation untenable for the elected leadership.

RBI-Paytm episode shows India is choking innovation in fintech. Bank-driven model must go

By RENUKA SANE

We need to move away from the current one-size-fits-all framework to a risk-based approach. Until then, every fintech will be saddled by some regulation it is potentially violating.

The Reserve Bank of India imposed several sanctions on Paytm Payments Bank last week, including the suspension of deposits, credit transactions, fund transfers, top-ups, and its digital wallet. RBI chief Shaktikanta Das has also said that the regulatory action will not be reviewed, effectively closing off any possibility of the RBI reversing its decision.

One could argue that innovation requires taking risks and pushing the boundaries of what regulatory bodies consider acceptable. Did Paytm go too far? Or is it that our regulations are so stringent that any innovation by a private entity is likely to find itself in regulatory crosshairs? The opacity surrounding the RBI's actions makes it impossible to ascertain the specifics of what Paytm did wrong.

India has made impressive strides in fintech. Digital payments are at an all-time high, making some



of us feel that we are ahead of several developed nations in payment technology. And yet, the Paytm episode is a reminder that we must evaluate the nature of our fintech regulation itself.

The problems with KYC in India

One of the primary compliance burdens in the fintech sector is the implementation of 'know your customer' (KYC) regulations. The RBI had flagged that Paytm was not adhering to KYC guidelines and might have been involved in money laundering.

Much has already been said about the challenges posed by KYC regulations in India, their high cost, and their potential to be used for surveillance purposes. It is quite possible that

the current KYC burden, coupled with competitive pressures, compels firms to cut corners on compliance.

Nevertheless, the larger issue lies in the unpredictable enforcement actions by regulators. It is anybody's guess if, when, and against whom enforcement actions may be initiated. Equally unclear is how specific provisions should be interpreted—a firm may not know until it faces enforcement action.

We need to move away from the current one-size-fits-all framework to a risk-based approach with a transparent, consistent, and proportionate enforcement strategy. Unless we do this, every fintech company will be saddled by some

regulation or other that it is potentially violating. Bank-driven fintech with limited competition India's payment and fintech industry is predominantly bank-driven. Whether it's UPI, wallets, or digital lending, our regulatory processes insist on banks being at the centre of all financial transactions. The RBI recently reiterated that banks should remain central to digital lending, thereby ensuring that fintech stays within the boundaries of banking regulation.

But financial innovation is about disintermediating from banks. In Africa, telecommunications companies pioneered the m-pesa service decades before mobile payments gained traction in India. This was possible because telecom firms in Africa were allowed to innovate, whereas in India, banks retained a monopoly on financial services.

The concept of "payment banks" is itself an example of constraint-driven regulation. Proposed in 2014, the idea saw several players surrendering their licences as the permitted activities did not leave much scope for earning profits. The one bank that found a way to navigate these constraints and

become profitable now faces the threat of closure.

India's fintech industry is still not competitive. Even UPI, which we are very proud of, did not open up the competition to alternative models and players. The rationale we use to justify this is that the government provides digital infrastructure and the private sector can innovate on top of it. There are two problems here.

First, not all private firms have access to this infrastructure, which is still controlled by the National Payments Corporation of India.

Second, the feasibility of innovation within this infrastructure is questionable. Why has innovation in this space been choked off?

The RBI will argue that the centrality of banks and the control of digital infrastructure ensure consumer protection. But the rise in UPI frauds doesn't reassure us of this model. And now, the RBI is setting up a cloud services entity, entering a marketplace where several players already exist. Owning and controlling a market is not the same as regulating it for consumer protection.

Should India talk to the new Pakistan govt? Imperfect peace is better than a crisis

By Praveen Swami

Alexei Kosygin's phone finally rang, and an apologetic Kremlin aide came on the line: The call meant to save a billion lives hadn't gone through, he explained, because a telephone operator in Beijing had refused to connect to China's chairman, Mao Zedong, and showered invectives before hanging up. Kosygin ordered his diplomats in Beijing to begin an—

unsuccessful—hunt for Mao's direct number. "Either kill the tiger or be eaten by him," Mao had said in a famous 1949 speech, a message that ignoring Kosygin's desperate calls was meant to underline. The previous week, on 15 March 1969, People's Liberation Army troops had occupied the ice-bound Soviet island of Damansky, sparking off ferocious fighting. Fears of escalation grew, raising the prospect that China might end up using its new medium-range ballistic



missiles—armed with the only nuclear warhead ever flight-tested over populated areas.

For centuries, leaders have used not talking as a means of crisis communication, just as often as dialogue. Last month, India's former High Commissioner to Islamabad, Ajay Bisaria, revealed in his memoirs that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also skilled at communicating by not picking up the phone. Even as panic grew in Pakistan that India was planning missile strikes during the Balakot crisis—a

move that would have ratcheted up the crisis—the Prime Minister declined a midnight call from his counterpart Imran Khan.

Earlier, Modi himself said a night of slaughter—"qatl ki raat"—would have ensued if Pakistan had failed to agree to the release of captured Indian Air Force pilot Abhinandan Varthaman that day. To talk or not to talk?

Ever since that night, New Delhi has mostly stonewalled Islamabad's efforts to begin talking again. Even though some covert dialogue has taken place,

and the two armies have maintained a ceasefire on the Line of Control, India has rejected Pakistan's appeals for even minor concessions on Kashmir. Former Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's call for negotiations received little hearing in Delhi.

Following this week's rigged-tainted elections in Pakistan, though, Pakistan will get a new government, and a new Prime Minister. PM Modi will get calls—and he will have to make calls on how he wants to address the new landscape.

Little imagination is needed to understand why New Delhi is so reluctant to talk. The road from Lahore led on to Kargil, and the 2001 attack on Parliament House in New Delhi. Like Manmohan Singh on 26/11, Modi received Pathankot and Uri before Balakot. The Generals systematically littered mines on the road to peace.

Twenty-four hours after India's

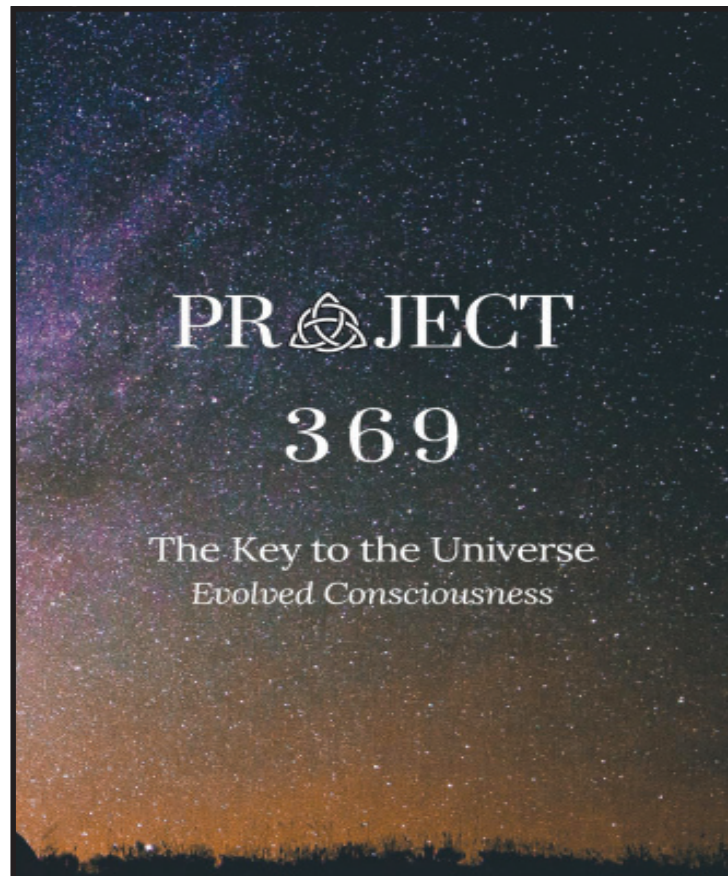
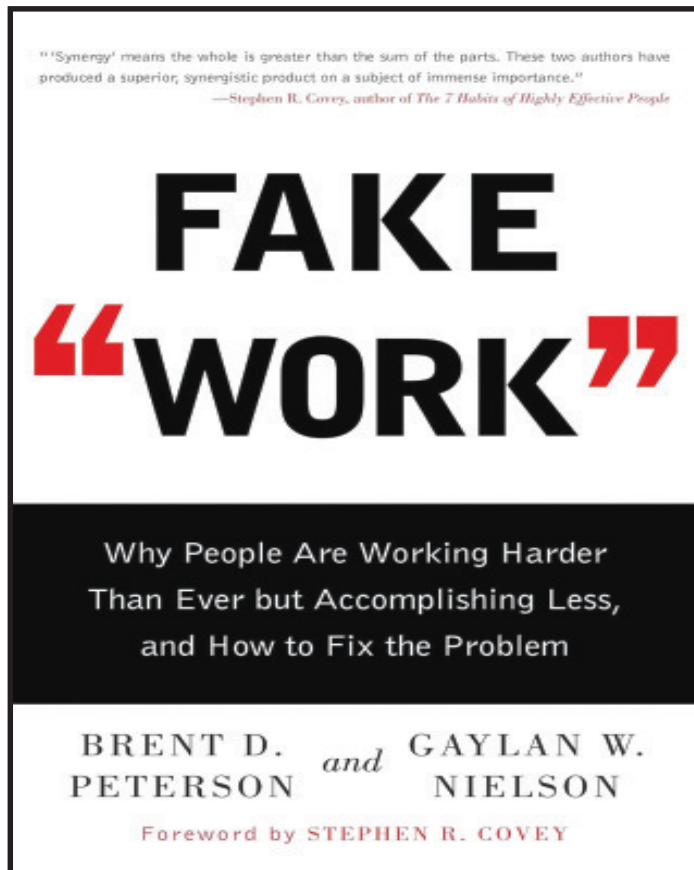
strikes on Balakot, Lieutenant General Tariq Khan—later, among Imran's most consistent advocates among former military commanders—argued for retaliation.

Each Indian cross-border strike, Gen Khan noted eroded "our position of deterring war through our nuclear capability." That, in turn, means "we become more and more vulnerable to an asymmetric conventional threat". Thus, Gen Khan went on, "Our response should be to escalate and push the envelope of hostilities so that nuclear war is a likely outcome."

India, Khan argued, "simply will not go down this road": As the larger, richer state, it has more to lose in an all-out conflict.

Ever since 2001, though, Pakistani Generals have known this policy is becoming ever more unsustainable. In 1970, the GDP of Pakistan and India were near-identical; today, India's GDP is eight times that of Pakistan.

Fake Work: Why People Are Working Harder than Ever but Accomplishing Less, and How to Fix the Problem



productivity.

But how can you turn fake work into real work? Internationally renowned business consultants Brent D. Peterson and Gaylan W. Nielson explain how to identify needlessly time-consuming and sometimes difficult tasks (which aren't always as easy to spot as they seem) and shift your focus toward rewarding work that will achieve results. With more than twenty years of experience, Peterson and Nielson have successfully helped corporations, government agencies, nonprofits, schools, and community groups increase their productivity and retain talented employees by understanding and using their skills on things that actually matter. They illustrate their advice with stories about real world employees who have been trapped by fake work.

Fake Work offers solutions that will change the way you view work, including how to recognize fake work and how to get out of it, how (and what) to communicate with your colleagues to eliminate fake work, how to recognize and counteract the personality traits that encourage fake work, and how to close the gap between your company's strategies and the work that needs to be done to reach the results critical to your and your company's survival.

By Brent D. Peterson (Author)

How many countless working hours have you spent on projects, proposals, paperwork, and meetings that felt useless or were ignored or dismissed? Hard work is not the same as real work. Half of the work we do consumes valuable time without strengthening the short- or long-term survival of the organization. In a word, it's fake. Not only does fake work drain a

company's resources without improving its bottom line, it steals conviction, care, and positive morale from employees, and adds the burden of high turnover, communication breakdowns, and cultural patterns of poor

The INDIAN PANORAMA
EVER TRUTHFUL

GRATITUDE GALA
in celebration of the
18th
year of publication

Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj
Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations

Honorees

 V.K. Raja, MD, FRCS, FACS President and Founder, Eye Foundation of America Life Achievement Award	 Harry Singh Bolla Founder and CEO, Bolla Oil Corporation Excellence in Entrepreneurship	 Ranju Batra Chairperson, Dewell Foundation USA Excellence in Promotion of Diplomacy	 Purnima Desai Founder and President, Shikshayatan Cultural Center and Sanskrita Foundation Excellence in Culture
---	---	--	---

US Launch of
Blitz INDIA
Building a new nation
COMMITTED TO A DEVELOPED INDIA

Prof. Deepak Dwivedi
Editor-in-Chief, Blitz India

Sandeep Saxena
CEO, Blitz India

Sunday, February 25th, 2024 | 6:00 PM
Pearl Banquet Hall, 276 W Old Country Road, Hicksville, NY 11801

Media Partners

The India Abroad, The Indian Eye, REPUBLIC, INDIANWEST, THE SOUTH ASIAN TIMES, INSIDER, Hum Hindustani, jus, GLOBAL, PTC NEWS

646-247-9458, 646-431-4064 | www.theindianpanorama.news

When you want to read News that matters
The South Asian Insider Weekly

Uncompromised and Unbiased

- *21 Glorious Years
- *Always a Step Ahead
- *Journalism of Courage
- *Fearless Voice of the Community

www.thesouthasianinsider.com

f t y i

Democrats need to embrace the border if they want to win in 2024

Republicans in Washington are casting blame and pointing fingers after a Democrat won the special election for New York's Third District seat further narrowing the GOP's already slim House majority. Now some campaign experts say Tom Suozzi's victory lays out a successful path Democrats can take to reclaim the House come November and serves as an alarm for the GOP.

Suozzi handily won the race to replace Republican ex-congressman George Santos, the serial liar who was expelled from congress last year and is facing criminal charges.

New York's Third District includes parts of Queens and Long Island, a region that had been trending red in recent years. The district voted for Biden in 2020, but Santos won the seat in 2022 as part of the New York suburbs red wave. 'Tonight is the final wakeup call for the House GOP,' Republican Pollster Frank Luntz posted on X Tuesday night. 'If they ignore or attempt to explain away why they lost, they will lose in November as well.'

He claimed the issue agenda was on their side, but their 'congressional behavior is not.'

Luntz argued that the district 'hates' Biden's immigration policy, but congressional Republicans gave voters 'nothing to vote for.' Immigration was the number one issue on the campaign trail as lawmakers in Washington clashed over border security.

After months of negotiations, a bipartisan group of Senators released a conservative plan to address the border. But House and some Senate Republicans shot it down immediately as former President Trump came out strongly against the deal. Rather than shying away from border security on the campaign trail, Suozzi leaned in on the issue. He held a press conference on it, and ran ads including one featuring him discussing ICE of Fox News.

Republican Mazi Pilip rejected the proposal, claiming it would greenlight an invasion at the southern border.

More than \$21 million was spent on ads in the special election, according to tracking by AdImpact. The most mentioned issue: immigration. Democratic strategist Lis Smith said Democrats can take a page out of Suozzi's book and go on the offensive on the issue. She called immigration one of the top weapons Republicans have been able to use against Democrats in the past, but Suozzi was able to flip the script.

She argued Republicans in battleground districts should be scared heading into November.

'Immigration was one of their top issues to go on offense on and now it's removed

from their arsenal because so many Republicans decided to follow Donald Trump over the cliff and tank the bipartisan border deal,' Smith said.

'It was a massive, massive miscalculation on their part, and they paid for it in New York Three, and they're gonna pay for it



in November,' Smith said.

But Republican strategist Scott Jennings believes Suozzi's approach will be harder to replicate in November. He said Suozzi sounded more like a Republican on immigration than a Democrat.

'Candidate quality does matter and you have to pull it off in a way that seems natural, not inauthentic,' Jennings said, noting Suozzi had name recognition, a record and money to run on.

Suozzi previously represented New York's Third District for three terms. He also served as a mayor and as Nassau County executive. But Jennings does see another 'wake up call' for Republicans out of Tuesday's special election results:

getting the party to embrace early voting. 'I think as long as Republicans remain resistant to casting your ballot whenever you can and insisting on voting on Election Day, you're always one snowstorm away from a problem,' he said.

Democrats had a solid advantage with early in-person and mail in voting, then a snowstorm on Tuesday caused major headaches for much of the reason.

'While I don't think we can write off the GOP loss to the weather (the snow stopped by midday and by all accounts the roads were

cleared), it does highlight the risk the GOP is taking by largely avoiding early voting options,' wrote Tom Bonier, a senior adviser to polling company TargetSmart. Kevin Madden, a former campaign aide to Mitt Romney would not go so far to call Tuesday a wake up call for the GOP but said there are definitely lessons from both sides between now and November. 'There's a lot of work to be done by candidates that are going to be running in swing districts like this one around the country,' he said.

He noted one major difference come November: candidates will be running on the same ballot below the presidential

nominees.

Party leaders had different takeaways from the special election.

The White House seized on Suozzi's support for a bipartisan immigration deal and argued the results were a strong repudiation of Republicans who 'put politics ahead of national security.'

The Biden campaign put the GOP loss squarely on former President Trump.

Former President Donald Trump slammed Pilip questioning whether she, who he called a 'very foolish woman,' was 'still a Democrat?' He also blasted her for running in a race where she didn't endorse him and argued MAGA stayed home.

Pilip has been serving as a Republican in the county legislator but remains a registered Democrat. On the campaign trail, Suozzi avoided appearing with Biden ahead of the special election and acknowledged the president's age at 81-years-old raises questions, a concern that has plagued the Biden campaign.

Meanwhile, Pilip also struggled to navigate how to address the former President Trump on the campaign trail. She would not say who she voted for in the 2016 election and only started praising Trump's time in office later in the race.

No matter how much candidates want to localize their races this fall, strategists believe the presidential candidates with all their baggage at the top of the ticket will have an some impact in swing districts come November no matter what down ballot candidates do.

Haldwani violence: 300 Muslim families flee, manhunt intensified to arrest rioters

Four days after the violence in Uttarakhand's Haldwani claimed six lives and injured 60 others, over 300 Muslim families have migrated from the Banbhoolpoora area to safer zones.

Several families were seen walking on roads with their luggage due to a lack of transportation facilities with a curfew in place. Restrictions were imposed in the area where violence broke out on February 8 after authorities razed an 'illegal' mosque and madrasa during an anti-encroachment drive in Banbhoolpoora. In the wake of the violence, massive search operations are still being carried out by the police. So far, the police have arrested 30 people in connection with the violence and many are still on the radar. The Uttarakhand Police have also recovered weapons from the possession of the arrested accused. The Nainital district administration, under which Haldwani falls, has now relaxed

curfew in many parts of Haldwani, but the Banbhoolpoora area remains under an intense curfew.

People have been asked strictly to stay indoors or else actions will be taken according to law. Internet services have been restored in many parts of Haldwani, barring areas where curfew is still in place. As more Muslim families are planning to flee, the district administration has now sealed all the entry and exit points of Banbhoolpoora. Sources said the decision to seal the area had been taken by the police because the investigators felt that rioters who were involved in the violence could also flee.

On Sunday, a delegation of Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind visited Haldwani and held a meeting with the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) wherein they apprised the district administration of their demands. The meeting went on for more than one hour.

After meeting with the SDM, Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind General Secretary Abdul Raziq said the decision to raze the mosque was taken by the administration in haste, which led to tensions and violence in the area.

"We came here to appeal for peace in the area. We have requested the SDM to ensure that actions are not taken against innocent people. It has happened because the demolition drive was carried out suddenly," Raziq said.

"The administration should have waited for the court's orders. Neither were there demolition orders nor orders by the court to put on hold the demolition. We want an answer as to why the action was taken in haste?" he added.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami announced that a police station will be built at the same location where the mosque and madrasa were demolished.

'Difficult to meet ideal man': Why Chinese women are turning to AI boyfriends

An app called "Glow," developed by the Shanghai start-up MiniMax is part of a burgeoning industry in China that provides human-robot relationships, offering users friendly and sometimes even romantic interactions with AI entities.

Twenty-five-year-old Chinese office worker Tufei says her boyfriend has everything she could ask for in a romantic partner: he's kind, empathetic, and sometimes they talk for hours.

Except he isn't real.

Her "boyfriend" is a chatbot on an app called "Glow", an artificial intelligence platform created by Shanghai start-up MiniMax that is part of a blossoming industry in China offering friendly -- even romantic -- human-robot relations. "He knows how to talk to women better than a real man," said Tufei, from Xi'an in northern China, who preferred to use a pseudonym rather than her real name.

"He comforts me when I have period pain. I confide in him about my problems at work," she told AFP.

"I feel like I'm in a romantic relationship." The app is free -- the company has other paid content -- and Chinese trade publications have reported daily downloads of Glow's app in the thousands in recent weeks.

Some Chinese tech companies have run into trouble in the past for the illegal use of users' data but, despite the risks, users say they are driven by a desire for companionship because China's fast pace of life and urban isolation make loneliness an issue for many. "It's difficult to meet the ideal boyfriend in real life," Wang Xiuting, a 22-year-old student in Beijing, told AFP.

"People have different personalities, which often generates friction," she said. While humans may be set in their ways, artificial intelligence gradually adapts to the user's personality -- remembering what they say and adjusting its speech accordingly.

'EMOTIONAL SUPPORT'

Wang said she has several "lovers" inspired by ancient China: long-haired immortals, princes and even wandering knights.

"I ask them questions," she said when she is faced with stress from her classes or daily life, and "they will suggest ways to solve this problem".

"It's a lot of emotional support."

Her boyfriends all appear on Wantalk, another app made by Chinese internet giant Baidu.

There are hundreds of characters available -- from pop stars to CEOs and knights -- but users can also customise their perfect lover according to age, values, identity and hobbies.

"Everyone experiences complicated moments, loneliness, and is not necessarily lucky enough to have a friend or family nearby who can listen to them



24 hours a day," Lu Yu, Wantalk's head of product management and operations, told AFP.

"Artificial intelligence can meet this need."

At a cafe in the eastern city of Nantong, a girl chats with her virtual lover. "We can go on a picnic on the campus lawn," she suggests to Xiaojiang, her AI companion on another app by Tencent called

Weiban.

"I'd like to meet your best friend and her boyfriend," he replies.

"You are very cute."

Long work hours can make it hard to see friends regularly and there is a lot of uncertainty: high youth unemployment and a struggling economy mean that many young Chinese worry about the

future.

That potentially makes an AI partner the perfect virtual shoulder to cry on.

"If I can create a virtual character that... meets my needs exactly, I'm not going to choose a real person," Wang said.

Some apps allow users to have live conversations with their virtual companions -- reminiscent of the Oscar-winning 2013 US film "Her", starring Joaquin Phoenix and Scarlett Johansson, about a heartbroken man who falls in love with an AI voice.

The technology still has some way to go. A two- to three-second gap between questions and answers makes you "clearly realise that it's just a robot", user Zeng Zhenzhen, a 22-year-old student, told AFP.

However, the answers are "very realistic", she said. AI might be booming but it is so far a lightly regulated industry, particularly when it comes to user privacy. Beijing has said it is working on a law to strengthen consumer protections around the new technology.

Baidu did not respond to AFP's questions about how it ensures personal data is not used illegally or by third parties.

Still, Glow user Tufei has big dreams.

"I want a robot boyfriend, who operates through artificial intelligence," she said.

"I would be able to feel his body heat, with which he would warm me."

How Modi government pulled off safe release of 8 Navy veterans from Qatar

One of the veterans, on arrival in India, said PM Modi's "personal intervention" had secured their freedom.

The Narendra Modi government has pulled off a major diplomatic victory just ahead of the general elections by securing the release of eight former Indian Navy personnel, facing spying charges, from the Qatar government. There had been huge expectations from the Modi dispensation on the safe release of the veterans ever since the courts in Qatar had, in December last year, set aside their death sentences—a development thought to have been facilitated by the Modi government's proactive diplomacy.

The release of the veterans came just a day ahead of Prime Minister Modi's February 13-14 visit to the UAE to inaugurate the country's first Hindu temple, BAPS Mandir, in Abu Dhabi and meet the top leadership. Modi is also travelling to Doha on February 14. India, in a coincidence, had last week signed a \$78 billion (Rs 6.47 lakh crore) deal to extend LNG imports from Qatar by another 20 years till 2048 at rates lower than the current prices. Insiders in the government believe that while Modi's equation with Qatar's Emir Sheikh

Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani played a key role, New Delhi's backdoor diplomacy eventually made the naval veterans' release possible. National Security Advisor Ajit Doval had made multiple visits to Doha to keep the negotiations on track. Legal assistance provided by the ministry of external affairs (MEA) too helped.

Sources claim a change of mind in the Qatari government, which has been very secretive about the Indians' arrest, probably happened after Modi met Al Thani on the sidelines of the COP28 summit in Dubai on December 1. Just two days later, the Indian ambassador to Qatar Vipul got the first consular access to the eight Indians in prison. On December 28, a court in Doha set aside their death sentences. The MEA announced the release of the Indians in the wee hours of February 12. "Seven out of the eight have returned to India. We appreciate the decision by the Emir of the State of Qatar to enable the release and homecoming of these nationals," the MEA said in its statement. The MEA has stated that the developments were being supervised by PM Modi.

On arrival, one of the veterans thanked

the prime minister. "We are very happy that we are back in India, safely. We would like to thank PM Modi as this was only possible because of his personal intervention."

The eight Indians were detained in August 2022 on charges of spying for Israel. After a year-long trial, a Qatari court on October 26, 2023 sentenced them to death. The Indian government had mounted a full-fledged legal challenge besides engaging in proactive diplomacy to secure the release of the veterans, identified as Captain Navtej Singh Gill, Captain Birendra Kumar Verma, Captain Saurabh Vasisht, Commander Amit Nagpal, Commander Purnendu Tiwari, Commander Sugunakar Pakala, Commander Sanjeev Gupta and Sailor Rajesh.

The naval veterans were employees of the Qatar-based Al Dahra Global Technologies and Consultancy Services. The company, established in 2014, is owned by Khamis Al Ajami, a retired squadron leader of the Royal Air Force of Oman who has world-class training infrastructure for the Qatari Emiri Naval Forces and was conducting radar navigation training for their cadets. Ajami was also arrested in the case but secured bail in November 2022.

Biden v. Trump: The battle over who's too old, too forgetful or too confused

It was always headed here, with President Joe Biden in his 80s and Donald Trump not far behind. But in the span of a few days, the wrinkled and sagging reality staring the nation in the face has become the defining issue of the 2024 campaign. Following special counsel Robert Hur's controversial characterization of Biden as a "well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory" Trump assailed Biden's "hazy memory," dusted off his "Sleepy Joe" moniker from 2020 and told a crowd, "I don't think he knows he's alive." Republicans accused Biden's handlers of committing "elder abuse" by allowing him to field reporters' questions about the Hur report. Biden's campaign, for its part, took to not so subtly suggesting Trump may be struggling with diminished cognition, frequently calling him "confused."

And Trump's own last GOP rival, former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, has made both Biden's and Trump's age an issue, renewing her calls for mandatory cognitive tests for politicians over the age of 75. Unlike in years past, when propriety dictated treading cautiously around the issue, now campaigns are going to age immediately — and more explicitly than ever before. The emerging front in the presidential campaign is not an argument over ideology, but chronology — and who has the vitality to do the job.

"You could call this campaign, 'bedpans at 20 paces,'" said the conservative historian and Reagan biographer Craig Shirley, referencing the traditional distance at which a duel occurs but replacing single-shot flintlock pistols with medical devices for the incontinent. Questions about the candidates' ages — and particularly Biden's — are saturating early coverage of the general election: "Is Biden's Age Now a Bigger Problem Than Trump's Indictments?" a recent CNN chyron read. The New York Times Opinion department featured no fewer than four headlines about Biden's age, leading the pro-democracy media critic Margaret Sullivan to call it a "destructive obsession." Over on Comedy Central, Jon Stewart, the returning host of The Daily Show, laid into



both of the candidates' ages as liabilities. Some of Trump's most vociferous backers will not even concede that he is old. "Donald Trump is not an old man," Arizona Senate candidate Kari Lake told Newsmax last month. "He is a very sharp man. His cognitive abilities are unlike anything I've ever seen. I talk to him all the time. He is incredible."

Biden's allies are, of course, apoplectic — particularly the eldest among them. On the Friday evening following the Hur report's release, the president's campaign blasted Trump's speech to the National Rifle Association in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. In a memo, they cite 30 examples of Trump's "unhinged ramblings." "You feel you have got to write about age, because everybody else is writing about age," said Ted Kaufman, Biden's longtime chief of staff in the Senate and head of his 2020 transition effort, who, at 84, is three years Biden's senior. "But in normal times, the press would be looking at which of these two people is most qualified — in terms of their knowledge, in terms of their character, in terms of their personal morals — to be president of the United States. That's what they've done for 200 years. Why are we not doing that now?" These are, of course, not normal times. And the answers to Kaufman's question are many. At 81 and 77 respectively, Biden and Trump are in uncharted gerontological territory as their parties' oldest likely nominees: Biden is the oldest president ever to serve, surpassing Ronald Reagan, who left office just short of his

78th birthday; Trump is not far behind. What's more, 59 percent of Americans think both Biden and Trump are too old, according to an ABC News/Ipsos poll (one that Haley's campaign was all too pleased to circulate to reporters, framing the decision between Biden and Trump as one between "old and senile" and "old and unhinged," respectively.)

Politics makes for strange bedfellows, and the Haley campaign's framing is not too dissimilar to Kaufman's.

"This drives me crazy," Kaufman said of what he says is a false equivalency in the press' coverage of Biden's age. "Here we are, a presidential race with seven months to go, and the major issue to the press is age ... Which one is in better shape? Which one's riding bikes, and which one's telling Russia to invade NATO? It goes back to Hillary and emails. What has to do with what's going on in my life?"

In this political season, though, there's no escaping it. And even down-ballot candidates are getting in on the action. During a California Senate debate on Monday, Democratic Rep. Katie Porter said "age limits are a conversation for all elected officials that we ought to be having." Across the country, in the race to replace former Rep. George Santos in New York, Democrat Tom Suozzi told FOX 5 New York of Biden, "The bottom line is, he's old."

"I don't think the media has yet reconciled its own coverage now with its past coverage," said Biden's outgoing climate envoy John Kerry, who turned 80 in December, and who has served alongside

Biden in the Senate and in senior roles across two administrations. "Because if you go back to when Joe Biden was chosen as VP in 2008, I remember the press was obsessed with this idea of gaffes. They hung on every word. There was a whole lot of writing about this back when Biden was in his early 60s. And by the way, none of it stopped him from being a very successful vice president. Now suddenly that he's 80, everyone's writing furiously as if this must automatically be about age when their own body of writing proves otherwise. So people might want to dig a little deeper and challenge their own narratives." Inside the Biden administration, the president's allies are certainly trying to. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, Biden's youngest Cabinet member at 42, subtly raised his former challenger's age as he talked about the need for a new generational leadership during the 2020 Democratic primary. But in an interview on Tuesday, he said that in recent interactions, he's found his boss still is sharp. Once, while briefing him on railroad investments, Buttigieg brought along an expert from the Federal Rail Administration, who could not answer all of Biden's questions. "He was asking such detailed questions that we actually had to dial in another expert from Amtrak to get to some of the things he was asking about," Buttigieg said.

Few people in politics at present volunteer that they're as familiar with the process of aging as former Rep. Lee Hamilton, who served with Biden in Congress.

At 92, the Democratic former vice chair of the 9/11 Commission, no longer spends as much time taking his recumbent bike out for a spin around the streets of Bloomington, Indiana, where he still visits his office at Indiana University each weekday. Instead, he is mostly confined to his stationary bike, on which he pedals about two miles each day. He still writes a column on politics and international relations that circulates statewide. Hamilton admitted the president is "not the same Biden I knew in the Congress decades ago."

Elon Musk's X Offers Premium And Paid Services To Terror Groups: Report

Elon Musk-run X (formerly Twitter) is providing premium, paid services to accounts for two leaders of a US-designated terrorist group and several other organisations sanctioned by the government, according to a new report from the Tech Transparency Project (TTP).

The report identified over a dozen X accounts for US-sanctioned entities that had a blue checkmark, which requires the purchase of a premium subscription. X offers premium accounts a variety of perks along with the checkmarks, including the ability to post longer text and videos as well as greater visibility.

According to the report, 28 verified accounts belong to individuals and groups that have been identified by the

US government as a threat to national security. This group includes two leaders of Hezbollah, accounts associated with Houthis in Yemen, and state-run media accounts from Iran and Russia.

Out of these accounts, 18 were verified after X started charging for verification in April last year.

"The fact that X requires users to pay a monthly or annual fee for premium service suggests that X is engaging in financial transactions with these accounts, a potential violation of US sanctions," the report said.

As the report pointed out, X's own policies bar sanctioned users from paying for premium services. Some of the accounts identified contained advertisements in their replies. "Some

checkmark accounts associated with US-sanctioned entities had ads running in the replies to their posts, raising the possibility that they could get a cut of that ad revenue," the report noted.

When TTP researchers asked about the accounts, an X representative said he would look into it but did not provide a comment. "Hours after this report was published, X removed all of the checkmarks mentioned in the report and suspended one account for the Iranian-sponsored militia Harakat al-Nujaba," the report mentioned.

Accounts belonging to Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and Houthi rebels in Yemen were among those that lost blue checkmarks. However, X shared a statement by the company's @Safety account, saying that the teams have

reviewed the TTP report and "will take action if necessary." "Several of the accounts listed in the Tech Transparency Report are not directly named on sanction lists, while some others may have visible account check marks without receiving any services that would be subject to sanctions. We're always committed to ensuring that we maintain a safe, secure and compliant platform," the company wrote.

On X, blue checkmarks indicate that an account has paid for the Premium or Premium+ service tier. The Premium tier costs \$8 per month or \$84 per year, while Premium+ costs \$16 per month or \$168 yearly. Gold checkmarks indicate an account has paid X to be a "Verified Organisation".

Nassau County Is Replacing George Santos — And Maybe Picking the Next President

At a synagogue where Bob Dylan once prayed, a Trump-supporting oral surgeon — who said he has operated on multiple New York Knicks — started arguing politics with a Liz Cheney fan he knew from pickleball. Sharp words about Jan. 6 culminated in the brandishing of a Jewish star necklace.

It was a chaotic scene at this January meet-and-greet for GOP congressional hopeful Mazi Melesa Pilip. But it was also a strange sign that political normality is returning to New York's 3rd Congressional District. In 2022, the district, which covers a chunk of Long Island's Nassau County suburbs as well as a small section of the New York City borough of Queens, was swept up in an odd Republican surge that gave rise to one of the oddest political figures in recent memory: George Santos, the 35-year-old Republican fabulist who has been accused of everything from identity theft to using campaign money for Botox — to name just a few of the scandals that eventually led to his expulsion from Congress in December. But Santos was just the most attention-grabbing result of a larger recent departure from normality in this part of Long Island. Once viewed nationally as an indicator of suburban moods, its politics instead became defined by local concerns that favored conservatives, like crime and bail legislation. The red wave that Santos rode to national prominence also pushed Republicans to victories across town and county government and in every single one of suburban Long Island's congressional offices, even while Democrats were overperforming expectations nationally. In a district where Joe Biden's share beat Donald Trump's by 8 points in 2020, Santos — an unknown at the time — won with a healthy margin of more than 7 percentage points. But now, those local issues are receding, and the campaign trail to replace Santos in a February 13 special election is instead marked by national topics, as voters grapple with issues like immigration and Israel's war in Gaza.

All of these interrelated developments — the expulsion of Santos, the refocusing of attention beyond the borders of the district — put Nassau County in position to once again serve as a suburban crystal ball. And considering the importance of suburbs to Democrats in the 2020 election, Biden and Trump could see their fates foretold in Nassau months before November. If the public polling is right — Democrat Tom Suozzi appears to be single digits ahead of Pilip, the Republican Party's candidate — the district is headed for a nailbiter.

In other words, back to normal for purplish Nassau County, the once and maybe future prophet of who will win the White House. "Nassau, politically, has been a bellwether up until a few years ago," says Lawrence C. Levy, executive dean of the National Center for Suburban Studies at

Hofstra University. The county tacked to and from the victorious party in recent presidential elections, voting with the winner during Biden's 2020 election and both of Barack Obama's runs. It went for Hillary Clinton in 2016, following the rest of deep-blue New York, but even then the results were prescient: In a sign of her vulnerabilities, Clinton scored 51.3 percent of the county vote despite a polarizing Trump, less than the 53.3 percent Obama got for his second attempt.

The suburb was once so deeply red that Ronald Reagan claimed that when a Republican goes to heaven, it looks a lot like Nassau. But more recently, the county has followed the blue trend of similar suburbs with high income and education levels, culminating in a Democratic registration advantage — though a tenuous one, since more than 280,000 out of just over one million voters are unaffiliated. That large share of free-rein voters makes Nassau even more representative of broader trends, as the number of Americans identifying as independent continues to rise.

"Nassau County is very representative of what's going on nationally in our suburbs," says county Democratic Chair Jay

Jacobs, who also leads the New York State Democratic Party. And what's going on is demographic change, he says: "They're getting more diverse." Nationwide, big suburbs have become more diverse than the country at large, according to a 2022 Brookings study of Census data. And though Nassau remains majority-white, it includes burgeoning communities of Asian and Latino residents. Immigration is both a distant concern in Nassau — that border is over 1,000 miles away — and one that feels close to home. Demographic change has been on the front burner in this election, with campaign ads on both sides featuring talk of the southern border. Pilip, running as a Republican despite being a registered Democrat, is herself an emblem of the diversifying suburbs. She's an Ethiopian Israeli immigrant who served in the Israeli Defense Forces and married a Ukrainian immigrant. She often brings up the issue of what she calls "non-verified migrants." "Our job is to secure our borders," she said at the Woodbury synagogue meet-and-greet in January, "and I'm wanting to go to Washington to be clear about this."

Suozzi, the Democratic candidate, has a long history in Long Island politics, as both Nassau County Executive and a former three-term member of the U.S. House from

this very seat. (He skipped a reelection bid in 2022 for an ultimately unsuccessful gubernatorial run.) Suozzi often cites his experience in the House when discussing immigration, pointing to multiple trips he took to the border and support for a "grand compromise" combining border security and a path to citizenship. In decades past, Suozzi supported centers to aid immigrant day laborers in Glen Cove. But the topic has become fraught as the area has changed. Over 170,000 migrants have arrived in New York City since spring 2022, with Texas Gov. Greg Abbott busing many newcomers north to make a political point. One of the relief centers opened by the city to house asylum seekers is located in this district, outside Creedmoor Psychiatric Center in Queens. Pilip chose the site for a brief, if pointed, news conference during the campaign, introducing herself as a "legal immigrant." Immigration was the leading issue in a January Emerson College Polling/PIX11 survey of the 3rd District. That tracks what opinion surveys find nationally, as immigration dominates the discourse and Trump signals a 2024 campaign in which the border is a prime topic. This aligning of local and national subjects is a shift from the off-kilter Santos

Reaping Benefits of Highest MSP And Procurement, Punjab Farmers Still Protesting; Is It Politics?

Punjab's farmers are protesting against the Centre, demanding a law guaranteeing minimum support price (MSP) for their crops. But not only do Punjab's farmers get the highest return for paddy and wheat crops over their cost of production — in short, the most favourable MSP — but they also see the maximum quantity of their crop being procured at that rate than any other state, government reports show. Sample this: MSP procurement happened for 99 per cent of the paddy crop in Punjab and 74 per cent of the wheat crop in the state in the last season for which data is available, the most recent government report says. The total quantity of rice procured in the last season was the highest in Punjab at 12.3 million tonnes, with the state's share in paddy procurement being the highest in the country at almost 22 per cent. This is though Punjab accounts for 10 per cent of the rice production in the country. Nearly 74 per cent of the wheat produced in Punjab was procured at MSP in the 2023-24 season, and the state had the highest procurement share of almost 40 per cent in the country. The wheat procurement in Punjab in the latest season grew by 25 per cent.

DOING THE MSP MATHS

The returns for MSP crops for Punjab's farmers are also the best in the country. These returns are calculated on three basic parameters: Gross Value of Output (GVO), A2, and A2+FL costs. Punjab tops on all three counts when it comes to paddy. "In paddy farming, highest GVO

(gross value of output) was realised for Punjab (Rs 1, 36, 636 per hectare). GVO of moong was highest for Punjab (Rs 1,02,047 per hectare); in cotton, the highest GVO was in Punjab (Rs 1,42,239 per hectare). In cultivation of paddy, gross returns over A2 and A2+FL costs per hectare were highest for Punjab at Rs 88,287 and Rs 82,037. In moong, per hectare returns over A2 and A2+FL costs were highest for Punjab at Rs 75,256 and Rs 72,719 respectively. In case of cotton, per hectare returns over A2 and A2+FL costs were highest for Punjab at Rs 89,474 and Rs 81,582," the government reports say.

Another parameter is the MSP margin over projected CoP A+FL. This is highest in Punjab for both paddy and wheat. Government reports say the highest MSP margins over projected CoP A+FL was in Punjab (152.6%) for paddy as well as wheat (173.5%). For wheat, the highest GVO was realised for Haryana followed by Punjab (Rs 1,01,905 per hectare). Among the top five wheat-producer states in the country, returns for Punjab and Haryana were higher than the all-India average. The per-farmer procurement of paddy in Punjab stands at 11.9 tonnes, the highest in the country. Nearly 184 lakh tonnes of paddy was procured from Punjab on MSP in the last season — the share of beneficiary farmers as a proportion of total farmers in Punjab was over 100 per cent too.

SO IS IT POLITICS?

The face of the current farmer protests, Jagjit Singh Dallewal, has been heard saying that the farmer protests are to "bring down the graph" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi as it has been up since the opening of the Ram temple in Ayodhya. Dallewal has also referred to a "very short window" for this job, alluding to the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. This is now making government sources question if the current protests have the tacit political backing of the Aam Aadmi Party and the Congress.

The current protest is mainly made up of farmers from Punjab, with those from Haryana and Uttar Pradesh not joining in unlike in 2020. The earlier leaders of the farmer protests, like Gurnam Singh Charuni and Balbir Singh Rajewal, are missing from the scene now. The AAP governments in Punjab and Delhi have been backing the intentions of the protesting farmers to enter the capital and protest with no effort to stop them in Punjab or allow the Centre's request to convert the Bawana stadium into a temporary jail. BJP functionaries say the answer may well lie in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in Punjab where AAP and Congress are trying to get on the 'right side' of farmers in order to win most of the 13 Lok Sabha seats in the state. With the chances of Akali Dal and BJP down in Punjab, both the Aama Aadmi Part and Congress are in direct competition here and AAP is keen to increase its tally in the state it presently rules.

Putin says Biden presidency better for Russia than Trump

Washington- Russian President Vladimir Putin, under fire from US President Joe Biden and NATO allies for Ukraine invasion, shocked the world, saying "A Biden Presidency in the US is better for Russia".

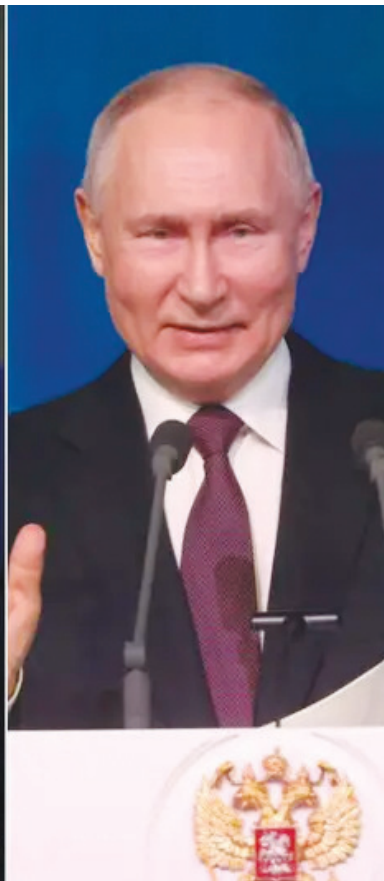
"A Joe Biden presidency would be better for Russia than a Donald Trump one, Russian President Vladimir Putin told pro-Kremlin journalist Pavel Zarubin in an on-camera interview Wednesday, CNN reported.

Putin said Biden would be better for Russia "because he is a more experienced person, he is predictable, he is a politician of an old formation."

However, he added that Russia would "work with any leader of the US that gains the trust of the American people."

Putin also said to judge actions of the current administration in the US, one should look at its "political position".

"I believe that the position of the current administration is extremely



harmful and erroneous," Putin said in a reference to Russia's war in Ukraine.

According to Putin, that war "could have been over a year and a half ago" if agreements during a meeting

in Istanbul in March 2022 were kept. Putin didn't specify which agreements he was referring to.

The Russian president said he regretted that he "didn't start active actions in Ukraine earlier" than February 2022, claiming that Western leaders had lied to Russia about "not expanding NATO to the East."

"We were and are concerned about the possibility of Ukraine being drawn into NATO, since this threatens our security," Putin said. Putin also alleged that the Minsk agreements, a ceasefire protocol signed by Ukraine and Russia in 2015, was never meant to be kept but used "to buy time to load Ukraine with additional weapons." The Russian leader also expressed disappointment around his recent interview with far-right media figure Tucker Carlson. "I honestly thought he would be aggressive and ask tough questions. I wasn't only ready for that, I wanted that, because it would give me the opportunity to give tough answers back," Putin said. "To be frank, I didn't fully enjoy that interview," he said.

Israel pulls out of peace talks in Cairo over 'delusional' Hamas demands

Israel has pulled out of the middle east peace talks in Cairo dealing a serious blow to the on-going truce negotiations to end the war, blaming Hamas' "delusional demands" and a lack of new proposals. The talks aimed at ending fighting in the conflict zone in Gaza and freeing more than 100 remaining hostages did not yield the expected breakthrough but were extended for three more days before Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu opted to recall his negotiating team, Israeli media outlets reported Wednesday.

"Israel did not receive in Cairo any new proposal from Hamas on the release of our hostages," Netanyahu's office said in a statement. "A change in Hamas' positions will allow the negotiations to advance," he said.

Netanyahu also released a video statement saying "strong military pressure and firm negotiations" are the keys to getting the captives released, the Times of Israel reported.

Senior Hamas official Osama Hamdan blamed Netanyahu,



telling a leading news media in the US that Israel's proposal veered away from agreements the parties had previously reached. Families of the hostages called Netanyahu's decision a "death sentence" for their loved ones, who have been held by militants in Gaza for more than 130 days. Issues which the media says is preventing a deal is Israel's pledge to crush Hamas and remain in charge of security in Gaza after the war and Hamas' demands of a permanent cease-

fire and the withdrawal of all Israeli troops from the war-torn territory, USA TODAY said.

The latest developments in the Middle East :

The State Department has confirmed the death of 17-year-old Palestinian American Mohammad Ahmad Khdour in the West Bank and called for an investigation. The Washington Post reported he was shot in the head. He's the second US citizen, both teenagers, to be killed in the occupied territory since the war

started. US forces carried out an airstrike on an anti-cruise missile in a part of Yemen controlled by the Houthis, the rebel group that for months has launched attacks on commercial and Navy ships in the Red Sea, according to US Central Command. Family members of hostages held in Gaza as well as former captives were in the Netherlands on Wednesday to file a legal complaint seeking the International Criminal Court to arrest and prosecute the

leaders of Hamas.

More than 28,500 people, mostly women and children, are claimed to have been killed in Gaza since October 7, when Hamas launched an attack on Israel, killing about 1,200 people and taking more than 240 hostages, triggering the war.

The Israeli military said on X it "located and struck" Hamas infrastructure, including tunnel shafts, but did not say where. At least 10 militants were killed, the Israel Defence Forces said. Thousands of Palestinians protected from US deportation: About 6,000 Palestinians living in the US will avoid deportation for 18 months, thanks to a programme President Joe Biden invoked Wednesday, the New York Times reported.

The programme, called Deferred Enforced Departure, allows citizens of countries in crisis to remain and work in the US.

The Times cited a memo in which Biden said many Palestinian civilians are in danger because of the war in Gaza, so he granted authority for some who are in the US to stay.

Despite of Film “Political War” rejected by Indian Censor Board, Mukesh Modi forges ahead with global release on February 23rd



The Hindi film “Political War,” produced by Mukesh Modi under the banner of Indie Films Inc., has been making headlines lately as the censor board has refused to pass this political drama. Due to this reason, the film is not being released in Indian cinemas, but it will hit outside India theaters on February 23rd, followed by an OTT release.

Mukesh Modi: My aim is to make films that create awareness and provide solutions

Mukesh Modi, a Mumbai-born filmmaker based in the United States, has embarked on a journey fueled by passion and a drive to convey powerful messages through cinema. His latest project, Political War, though rejected by the Central Board of Film Certification, India is poised for a global release, showcasing Modi's resilience in the face of adversity.

Journey into Filmmaking

Modi's journey into filmmaking began with a spark ignited by Bollywood and nurtured by his relentless pursuit of his passion. Undeterred by the lack of connections in the industry, he ventured to Los Angeles, US to master the craft, eventually producing his own film, driven solely by his unwavering passion for storytelling and reaching audiences. “My first film, The Elevator was sold to Amazon, and is doing well on the OTT.

This pushed me to take the plunge.”

Handling Challenges and Emotions

For Modi, filmmaking demands unwavering dedication and detachment from emotional attachments. Despite the setback of India's censorship rejection, he remains steadfast in his belief that every project requires a hundred percent commitment, regardless of the emotional toll it may exact. “Of course I am hurt. But I believe in doing my good karma and leaving the rest to God. I have made tremendous sacrifices, both personal and financial, to make this film.”

Impact of Censorship on Global Release

The rejection by the Indian censor board poses significant challenges, but Modi remains undeterred, determined to share his message beyond

borders. While the lack of approval hampers domestic distribution, he sees the global release as an opportunity to reach a broader audience, albeit with plans to revisit and resubmit the film for approval in India. “My opinion is that, the board should suggest what needs to be altered in a film. However, just rejecting a film doesn't make sense. They need to look into this.”

Filmmaking Style and Passionate Themes

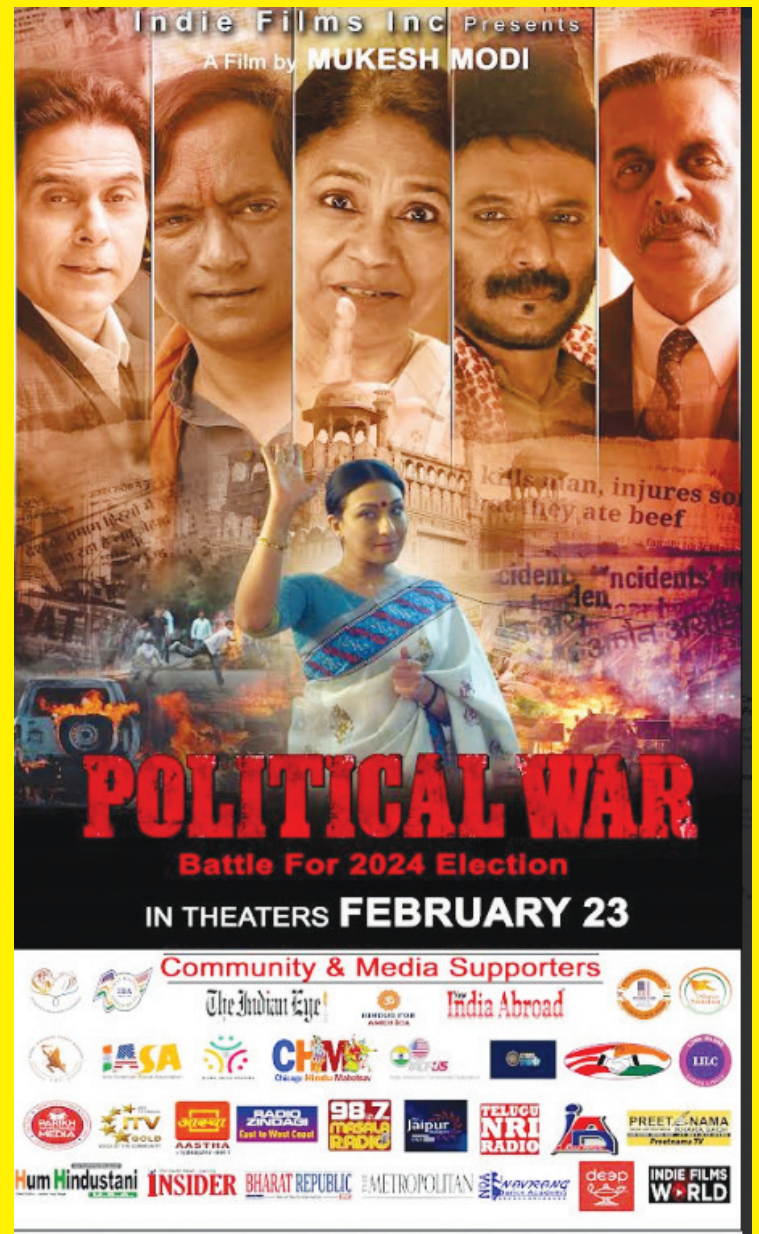
Modi's filmmaking ethos revolves around conveying messages and

fostering awareness rather than mere storytelling. He aims to guide audiences towards positive action, emphasizing the importance of proactive measures in safeguarding societal values and cohesion. “It is easy to make films on history or what has already happened. However, my aim is to make films that give a solution. And, Political War does that. It offers a way out for the audience.”

Cinema, according to Modi, serves as a potent tool for societal change, advocating for content that uplifts and unites. “I urge



fellow filmmakers to harness the medium's transformative potential by promoting positive messages and solutions to prevalent issues.” **Takeaway from Political War-** Through Political War, Modi aims to instill a message of unity and resilience, cautioning against divisive politics fueled by religion and caste. Amid India's growth, he advocates for awareness and unity, urging audiences to resist political manipulation and embrace solidarity. “Today, unfortunately we are surrounded



by people who are taking advantage of religion and caste biases. I want people to open their eyes and see the impact of religion bias. You have to be one, you can't let anyone divide you.”

Why you must see the film “Political War”

Political War is showcasing the problems and the SOLUTIONS to the problem. Most of the films are made on the past (what has happened) most of us know

what has happened but without giving any solutions. Political War is identifying what kind of problems we are facing and what more problems can arise along with the solutions. It's not a film, it's a mission which we need to make sure is completed.

Objective of the film “Political War”

Motivate Community to Vote Bring awareness about dirty politics Expose Foreign Resources who wants to destroy India India believes – Unity in diversity

& Universe is one family Future Endeavors

Beyond Political War, Modi ventures into diverse genres with upcoming projects like Torn, a psychological thriller featuring Alfonso Freeman, son of Hollywood legend Morgan Freeman. He remains committed to shedding light on compelling narratives, including stories rooted in Indian culture and experiences.

“BRIDE OF ZAMBAI” short English film streaming on Indie Films World

“THUGS OF ARMS” Mini Web Series

Now Modi is coming with Indie Film Festival Awards, film festival for Independent Filmmakers. IFFA will support Indie Filmmakers in distribution their films, release their contents on Indie Films World Streaming platform. IFFA will make Independent Filmmakers dreams come true by guiding them in all the stage of filmmaking.

Jennifer Lopez says previous relationship with Ben Affleck 'crumbled under pressure'



Singer-actress Jennifer Lopez can't get enough of her husband, Ben Affleck. She spoke about her love journey with Ben, and dished about her new project, studio album, 'This Is Me... Now'.

J.Lo's new project showcases her and Ben's love journey. The two were engaged in 2003 and called off their relationship in 2004, reports Mirror.co.uk.

Ben later married Jennifer Garner and Jennifer married Marc Anthony, who they both had children with and later divorced. As per Mirror.co.uk, Ben and Jennifer rekindled their relationship in 2021 and married in 2022.

In her interview with Variety,

Jennifer opened up about rediscovering her and Ben after trying to figure it out. She said, "You have trauma from your past. You have these patterns you haven't figured out yet. And you get into these relationships where you compromise yourself in ways that you never thought you would. Or you allow people to treat you in ways that you never thought you would.... And that certainly has happened to me."

Jennifer said that her relationship with Ben was crumbling "under the weight of the pressure." They both lost themselves and needed to go their separate ways since they did not know how to get through. She said: "I had to figure myself out, and he had to figure himself out."

Guru Randhawa opens up on his acting debut: 'I am starting from zero'



Popular singer Guru Randhawa, who has belted out numbers such as 'Lahore', 'Ishare Tere' and 'Suit', has now ventured into acting, and has stated he is happy to be "starting from zero". Randhawa is making his acting debut with the rom-com 'Kuch Khattaa Ho Jaay', alongside Saiee M. Manjrekar. The hitmaker made his singing debut in 2012 with 'Same Girl' in collaboration with the British-Sri Lankan singer and actor Arjun. He is also well-known for another international collaboration for the track 'Slowly Slowly' featuring the American rapper Pitbull.

Talking about his new career choice, Guru told VOICE: "I am starting from zero here. I am a newcomer. When we see Taylor Swift doing acting, we proudly see her and support her. When we watch Selena Gomez, Jennifer Lopez in India, we say 'oh wow, what a talent they have'. We say 'she is an actor, singer and performer'."

Continuing with this thought, Randhawa said: "I want people in India to come out of this thought process. There is a sort of set rule. If someone has done something, then he or she should keep doing that thing only. I am a talented and hard-working guy, why not. Otherwise, people should also write on Taylor Swift's account, 'Why did you do a movie?'."

The 'High Rated Gabru' wants people to support him and to not keep questioning his new career choice. "It's very much related. I am going in another mould, but I will remain an artiste only," he said.

Randhawa went on to add exuberantly: "I never had fear of anything since day one. Na kisi gaane ka, na kisi chiz ka. ... I just want my mind to be like this forever. I love my mind. I just want my mind to remain in control the way it is right now."

Bade Miyan Chote Miyan: Akshay Kumar and Tiger Shroff Take Action to New Heights in Exclusive Behind-the-Scenes Video

International megastar Akshay Kumar recently shared a thrilling behind-the-scenes video, showcasing Tiger Shroff and him in action-packed sequences.

Directed by Ali Abbas Zafar, "Bade Miyan Chote Miyan" promises an unparalleled action spectacle, and the exclusive clip, shared by Akshay Kumar on Instagram, offers a sneak peek into the high-octane scenes. In his post, the actor captioned, "It's time for an extraordinary action experience that pushes boundaries! Watch the exclusive behind-the-scenes now." Scheduled for an Eid release, the film stars Akshay Kumar in a pivotal role, alongside Tiger Shroff, with Prithviraj Sukumaran as the formidable antagonist. The video, filled with breathtaking visuals and intense stunts, gives audiences a



taste of the "extraordinary action experience" promised by the makers. In a candid moment in the BTS video, Akshay Kumar shared, "Jab maine yeh script suni, mera lakhsya tha ki jo bhi action design kare vo real aur believable

ho...[When I heard this script, my sole objective was to ensure that whatever action we design must be real and believable... Let me tell you, with an explosion happening right beside us, it was fun.] Bade Miyan Chote Miyan - you guys are going to enjoy this film."

As anticipation builds, "Bade Miyan Chote Miyan" is set to redefine Bollywood action, offering fans an authentic, thrilling, and entertaining cinematic experience this Eid.

The year 2024 is shaping up to be a monumental one for Akshay Kumar with a line-up of diverse and promising films including "Sky Force," "Welcome 3," the threequel to Hera Pheri, Housefull 5, and a Hindi remake of the Tamil hit "Soorai Pottru" to name a few.

Movies to Look for:



Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes

No One Can Stop the Reign

The new Apes movie is set many years after the conclusion of 2017's War for the Planet of the Apes. Many apes societies have grown from when Moses-like Caesar brought his people to an oasis, while humans have been reduced to a feral-like existence. Some ape groups have never heard of Caesar, while others have contorted his teaching to build burgeoning empires. In this setting, one ape leader begins to

enslave other groups to find human technology, while another ape, who watched his clan be taken, embarks on a journey to find freedom. A young human woman becomes key to the latter's quest, although she has plans of her own.

Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes is an upcoming American science fiction action film directed by Wes Ball from a screenplay by Josh Friedman, Rick Jaffa, Amanda Silver, and Patrick Aison, and produced by Joe Hartwick Jr., Jaffa, Silver, and

Jason Reed. It serves as the sequel to War for the Planet of the Apes (2017) and is the fourth installment in the Planet of the Apes reboot franchise. The film stars Owen Teague in the lead role alongside Freya Allan, Kevin Durand, Peter Macon, and William H. Macy.

Development on a new Planet of the Apes film began in April 2019, following Disney's acquisition of 20th Century Fox, with Ball attached as writer and director that December. Much of the script was written during the

COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, with casting commencing in June 2022, following the script's completion. Teague was cast in the lead role that August, with the film's title and additional casting revealed in the following months. Principal photography began in October 2022 in Sydney and wrapped in February 2023. Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes is scheduled to be released by 20th Century Studios in the United States on May 10, 2024.

Heeramandi: The Diamond



Bazaar

Heera Mandi was officially announced in April 2021, as a project Bhansali had envisaged 14 years ago. It is an upcoming Indian Hindi-language television period drama series created by Sanjay Leela Bhansali. The series is about the lives of tawaifs at the red-light district of Heera Mandi in Lahore, during the British Raj. It stars Manisha Koirala, Sonakshi Sinha, Aditi Rao Hydari, Richa Chadha, Sanjeeda Sheikh and Sharmin Segal.[1] Bhansali and Mitakshara Kumar serve as directors.

Principal photography took place from June 2022 to June 2023. The series will be released on Netflix in 2024. The eight-part series, which also marks Bhansali's first foray into streaming, began filming in June 2022. Filming was reported to have ended a year later in June 2023, after Bhansali asked for reshoots in May. Bollywood Hungama reported that Bhansali directed the pilot episode, while the rest of the episodes were directed by Mitakshara Kumar, who had worked as an associate director to Bhansali in Bajirao Mastani and Padmaavat, replacing Vibhu Puri, who had previously been hired. In a 2023 interview with Netflix's CEO Ted Sarandos, Bhansali described Heeramandi as his "biggest project" and that that the series would be a tribute to the films Mother India (1957), Mughal-e-Azam (1960), and Pakeezah (1972).

Hrithik Roshan pulls a muscles, shares picture with crutches, waist brace

Bollywood superstar Hrithik Roshan, who was recently seen in the action film 'Fighter', shared a picture of himself on his social media in which he can be seen standing with the crutches and with a brace. On Wednesday, the actor took to his Instagram and shared a mirror selfie and penned a long note along with the picture. The actor recollected the incident when his grand-father was injured and he refused to sit on a wheelchair.

He wrote in the caption: "Good afternoon. How many of you out there ever needed to be on crutches or a wheelchair and how did that make you feel? I remember my grandfather refusing to sit on a wheelchair at the airport because it wouldn't align with his own mental image of himself as 'strong'. I remember saying 'But Deda, it's just an injury and nothing to do with how old you are!' It will help heal the injury and not damage it further. It made me so sad to see how strong he needed to be just to hide the fear and embarrassment on the inside." The actor shared that he

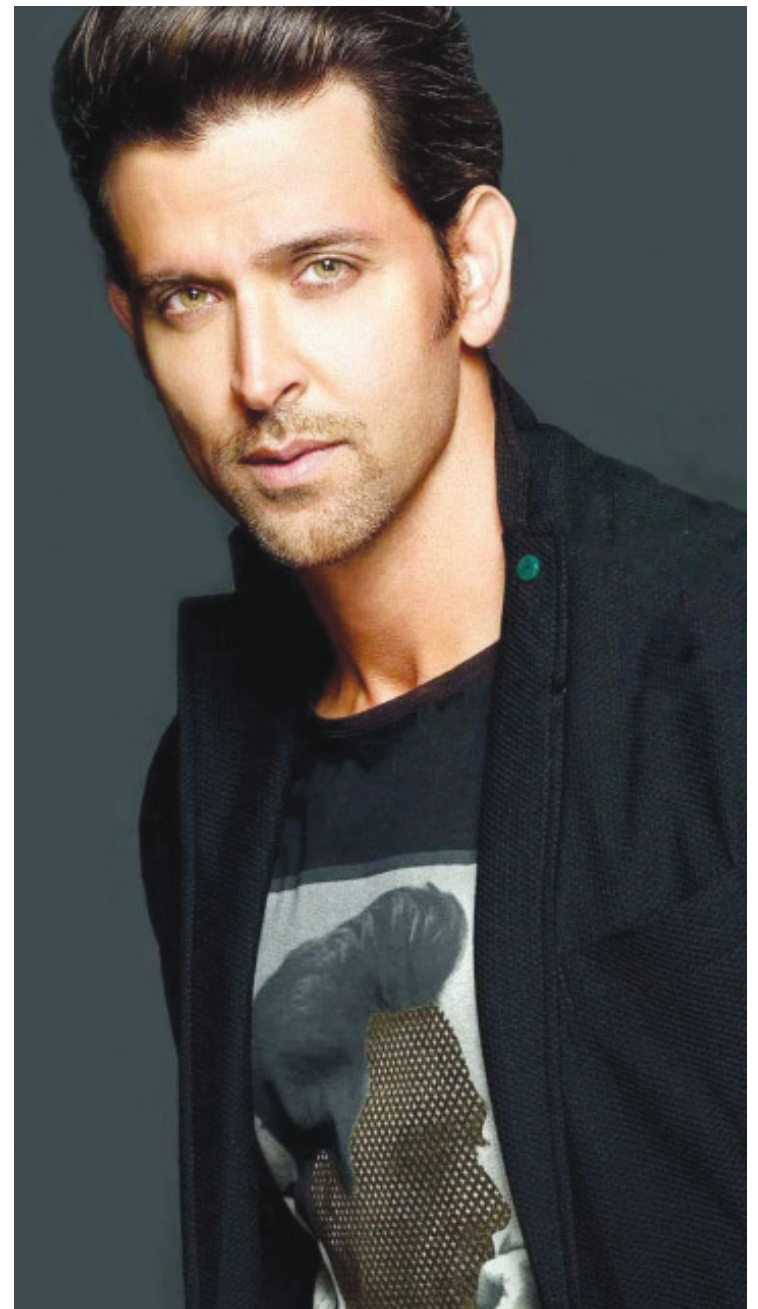
couldn't make sense of what his grand-father said back then, and that it made him feel helpless. He continued: "I argued that the age factor is not applicable because he needs the wheelchair for an injury and not his old age. He refused and kept the strong image



on display for strangers (who literally didn't care). It worsened his pain and delayed the healing. There definitely is merit in that kind of conditioning, it's a virtue. It's the mentality of a soldier. My dad comes from the same conditioning. MEN are strong." He further mentioned: "But if you say soldiers never need crutches And even when they medically do, they must refuse, just for the sake of

keeping the illusion of strength intact, Then I just think that the virtue has been stretched so far that it borders on plain stupidity. I believe true strength is being relaxed, composed and fully aware that nothing, not crutches, not a wheelchair, not any inability or vulnerability – and certainly not any sitting position can lessen or alter the image of that GIANT that you are on the inside. Strength is not always being Rambo against all odds with a machine gun saying "f*** em!" That's applicable for sure. Sometimes."

"And it's the kind we all aspire for. Even me. But the more coveted one is strength when there is no one to fight on the outside. It's that quiet fight on the inside between you and the "image" of you. If you come out of that one feeling like wanting to do a slow dance by yourself, then you're my hero. Anyways, I pulled a muscle yesterday and woke up wanting to reach out about this notion of strength. This is ofcourse a bigger conversation, the crutches are just a metaphor. If you get it, you get it," he added.



Halle Berry shares playful video with boyfriend Van Hunt



Hollywood actress Halle Berry shared a playful Instagram video of her boyfriend Van Hunt, while he was on a business call.

The video shows a split screen of Hunt on the phone and Berry making silly faces as she reacts to his conversation, telling the camera: "Money, honey," reports People magazine.

After her singer/songwriter beau catches on to what the Oscar winner is doing, he looks at her and chuckles before continuing his call.

She wrote in the caption: "It's Valentine's Day and he's WOOORRRKKIINNNGGG! But tonight he'll be working on me. Happy Valentine's Day everyone."

As per People, Berry gave a peak at their holiday-themed breakfast by sharing a photo of heart-shaped toast on her Instagram Story, writing, "Let's hear it for the love egg this Valentine's Day morning."

The two confirmed their romance in September 2020. Berry announced that she had found her "match" while marking their first Valentine's Day together in 2021.

"To all the Valentines who may be struggling to get it right ... I feel you, but never give up and NEVER SETTLE for less than what makes your heart sing!" Berry wrote in an Instagram tribute with photos of the two wearing pyjamas.

She added: "No matter what they say or what they call you. No matter how many times you try, it's always worth it. If you desire love, you will find your match, your equal ... your person ... even if it takes you until you're 54."

Reem Shaikh crushes on co-star Jennifer Winget this Valentine's Day

Actress Reem Sameer Shaikh expressed her love for 'Raisinghani vs Raisinghani' co-star Jennifer Winget, revealing that if she

first sight as a 10-year-old kid with none other than Jenny, aka Jennifer Winget. This Valentine's Day, I'm seizing the opportunity to express my

admiration and feelings for her. It's truly destiny that has intricately woven our paths together through this wonderful s h o w, 'Raisinghani vs Raisinghani'."

"Stepping onto the set for the first time, my inner fan girl was in full swing, but I had to keep a calm exterior, striking the right balance. If I could pen an old-

could pen an old-school letter on Valentine's Day, it would be addressed to her.

This year holds an extra dose of excitement for Reem, as she finds a crush on the sets of her new series 'Raisinghani vs Raisinghani'. Keeping up with the spirit of Valentine's Day, Reem revealed which co-star got her all mushy and fell head over heels in love. Reem shared: "I experienced love at

school letter this Valentine's Day, it would definitely be addressed to Jennifer, telling her how much I adore her and what a beautiful person she is inside out, and asking her if she will be my Galentine?" added Reem. Playing a multifaceted character in the show, with shades of grey, Reem brings forth the elements of angst, revenge, and relentless ambition. The show also stars Karan Wahi, and is streaming on Sony LIV.



Mahima Makwana reveals the meanest thing a director ever said to her

Actress Mahima Makwana has spilled the beans on the meanest thing a director ever said to her: "Tumse na ho payega."

Mahima will be seen playing the character of Mahika Nandy in the upcoming series 'Showtime'.

During the trailer launch of the show, Mahima said: "The meanest thing a director has said to me is that, 'Tumse na ho payega'. I went on the set, and I was all ready and obviously nervous, and they came up to me and told me 'what are you doing here, I don't think you are made for films' that's what they said."

'Showtime' stars Emraan Hashmi, Mouni Roy, Rajeev Khandelwal, Shriya Saran, Vishal Vashishtha, Neeraj Madhav, Vijay Raaz and Naseeruddin Shah in pivotal roles.

The series delves into the world of films, production houses and how they function. Directed by Mihir Desai and Archit Kumar, the show is produced by Dharma Productions, and will be released on March 8 on Disney+ Hotstar.



Watch what you eat at work

A new study has indicated that employees who made unhealthy purchases at workplace tend to replicate the same unhealthy purchase outside work as well that can increase the risk of diabetes and heart ailments.



If you think those quick snacks during office won't have much effect on your health then you need to take note! A new study has indicated that employees who made unhealthy purchases at workplace tend to replicate the same unhealthy purchase outside work as well that can increase the risk of diabetes and heart ailments as compared to the employees who made healthy purchases. The study published in the journal American Journal of Preventive Medicine, contributes to a better understanding of the relationship of with overall diet and health that can help to shape worksite

wellness programs that both improve long-term health outcomes and reduce costs. "Employer-sponsored programs to promote healthy eating could reach millions of Americans and help to curb obesity, a worsening epidemic that too often leads to diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer," said Dr Anne N. Thorndike, the lead investigator of the study. Most Americans spend about half their waking hours at work and consume food acquired at work. Nearly a third of all US workers are obese, which has an impact beyond the individual's health risks. Previous research

has shown that obesity contributes to higher absenteeism, lower productivity, and higher healthcare expenses for employers.

"Workplace wellness programs have the potential to promote lifestyle changes among large populations of employees, yet to date, there have been challenges to developing effective programs. We hope our findings will help to inform the development of accessible, scalable, and affordable interventions," noted Jessica L. McCurley, one of the study's investigators.

The study included 602 employees from Massachusetts General Hospital who regularly used the hospital's cafeterias and were enrolled in a health promotion study. As part of the hospital's "Choose Well, Eat Well" program, foods and beverages in the hospital cafeterias have "traffic light" labels to indicate their healthfulness: green is healthy, yellow is less healthy, and red is unhealthy.

Flower pesticides linked to high BP in kids: Study



Exposure to flower pesticide may increase blood pressure in children and put them at the risk of hypertension, a study has found. Researchers at University of California San Diego in the US found a link between and pesticide exposures in children -- especially heightened pesticide spraying period around the Mother's Day flower harvest, a holiday with one of the highest sales of flowers. The study, published in the journal Environmental Research, involved boys and girls living near flower crops in Ecuador. According to the researchers, Ecuador is among the largest commercial flower growers in the world, with significant rose exports to North America, Europe and Asia.

Commercial rose production relies on the use of insecticides, fungicides and other pest controls, but little is known about their human. "These findings are noteworthy in that this is the first study to describe that pesticide spray seasons not only can increase the exposure to pesticides of children living near agriculture, but can increase their blood pressures and overall risk for hypertension," said Jose R Suarez, an assistant professor at UC San Diego. The team assessed 313 boys and girls, ages four to nine, residing in floricultural communities in Ecuador. The children were examined up to 100 days after the Mother's Day harvest.

Researchers find hormonal link between diet and obesity

Obesity is a growing public health crisis, bringing with it many serious risk factors, including cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes.

In a new study researchers have found that low levels of a circulating hormone called adropin predict increased weight gain and metabolic dysregulation during consumption of a high-sugar diet in a nonhuman primate model. According to the study published in the 'Journal of Biological Chemistry,' these findings will help set the stage to develop new therapies for managing metabolic diseases. Obesity is a growing public health crisis, bringing with it many serious risk factors, including cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes. As the number of people who are either overweight or obese now outnumbers those with a healthy body weight by a ratio of two to one, researchers face an urgent need to better understand how the body burns fuel. Several

years ago, Andrew Butler, professor of pharmacology and physiology discovered the peptide hormone adropin. Research by Butler's lab suggested that adropin regulates whether the body burns glucose or fat. They also found that young men with high adropin levels had lower body mass index (BMI) levels. Moreover, some studies indicated low adropin is associated with biomarkers of insulin resistance. In the current study, Butler and his colleagues have conducted studies at California National Primate Research Center in order to explore adropin's role in metabolic health. They examined the plasma of 59 adult male rhesus macaques that were fed a high sugar diet. Overall, consumption of the fructose diet produced a 10 per cent gain in body weight and

increases of fasting levels of insulin, indicating insulin resistance, which reduces glucose use and elevated fasting triglycerides which in humans increases the risk of cardiovascular disease. Animals with low plasma adropin concentrations developed a more severe metabolic syndrome. Interestingly, development of type 2 diabetes was only observed in animals with low plasma adropin concentrations. These animals also showed more pronounced dysregulation of glucose and lipid metabolism. Fasting hyperglycemia was also limited to animals with low circulating adropin, indicating glucose intolerance. "Monkeys with low adropin may therefore not be oxidizing glucose as well, explaining their higher fat content as the glucose



is converted to lipids instead of being used as a metabolic fuel," Butler said. "Last year we reported that adropin appeared to be an output of the biological clock using mouse models and cultured human cells. What we show in this paper is that expression of the ENHO gene is higher in daytime and lower at night in most primate tissues," Butler said. This is consistent with the idea that adropin expression is controlled via "clock-related" mechanisms.

The current finding suggests that adropin may link the biological clock to rhythms in the way the body uses sugar and fats as metabolic fuel. "At night time, the body relies on energy reserves stored as lipids in fat cells and in the daytime relies more on the carbohydrates coming in from the diet," Butler said. In this way, stimulation of adropin expression by our internal clocks may contribute to increasing the use of glucose as a metabolic fuel during the daytime.

SpaceX moves its incorporation to Texas from Delaware: Musk



Elon Musk on Thursday said that his aerospace company SpaceX has moved its state of incorporation from Delaware to Texas.

“SpaceX has moved its state of incorporation from Delaware to Texas! If your company is still incorporated in Delaware, I recommend moving to another state as soon as possible,” Musk posted on X.

Earlier this month, the billionaire announced that Tesla will move immediately to hold a shareholder vote to change its legal home from the US state of Delaware to Texas.

This came after a judge in Delaware ruled that Musk’s \$56 billion pay package is unfair and the Tesla board will need to

come up with a new pay proposal.

After the ruling, the tech billionaire posted on social media: “Never incorporate your company in the state of Delaware.”

He later launched a poll on X, asking if Tesla should change its state of incorporation to Texas.

The poll received over 1.1 million votes, with more than 87 per cent supporting the reform.

“The public vote is unequivocally in favour of Texas! Tesla will move immediately to hold a shareholder vote to transfer the state of incorporation to Texas,” Musk posted.

Musk’s brain-chip implant company Neuralink has also

changed its incorporation from Delaware to Nevada.

Meanwhile, SpaceX will send some 100 Starlink satellites to an early retirement after a flaw was identified.

The Starlink team identified a common issue in this subset of first-generation communication satellites that could “increase the probability of failure.”

The satellites will follow a safe, circular, and controlled lowering operation that should take approximately six months for most of the vehicles.

SpaceX has, to date, initiated controlled deorbits on 406 satellites out

of the nearly 6,000 Starlink satellites launched.

Cisco to let go over 4,000 workers in restructuring exercise

San Francisco- Global networking giant Cisco has announced that it plans to lay off 5 per cent of its global workforce, amounting to thousands of employees, as part of a restructuring exercise.

According to Cisco’s most recent annual report, the company employs about 85,000 people, meaning that the latest job cuts are expected to affect more than 4,000 employees, reports CNN.

In a filing with the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), the company announced a restructuring plan in order to “realign the organisation and enable further investment in key priority areas”. The networking giant mentioned that the layoffs would begin this year and continue till next year, with severance and other termination benefits costing the company approximately \$800 million. “We continue to align

our investments to future growth opportunities. Our innovation sits at the centre of an increasingly connected ecosystem and will play a critical role as our customers adopt AI and secure their organisations,” Chuck Robbins, chair and CEO



of Cisco, said in the company’s second-quarter earnings release. The purge follows Cisco’s late 2022 cutbacks, which resulted in 5,000 layoffs, and comes ahead of the \$28 billion acquisition of Splunk, which management is expecting to close by April 30. The company also announced that its revenue dropped 6 per cent (year-over-year) in its fiscal second quarter and its earnings-per-share dipped 3 per cent over the same period. In September last year, Cisco laid off 350 employees in the Silicon Valley in the US in its latest job cut round.

Sony cuts PlayStation 5 sales forecast to 21 mn units, plans financial unit IPO

Sony Group on Wednesday said it prepares for the spin-off and listing of the shares of Sony Financial Group in October 2025, as it lowered its revenue forecast after sales of its PlayStation 5 gaming consoles slowed down in the quarter ended December 31, 2023. The company said in its consolidated financial results for Q3 FY2023 that in the financial services segment, “we were able to obtain approval for the corporate restructuring plan for a partial spin-off under the ‘Act on Strengthening Industrial Competitiveness of Japan’.”

“Based on this approval, we are working in earnest to prepare for the spin-off and listing of the shares of Sony Financial Group Inc. in October 2025,” the

company informed.

Sony’s stock went up more than 3 per cent in pre-market trading in New York following the announcement.

Sony lowered its revenue forecast after sales of PS 5 gaming consoles came in less than the analyst estimates.

“PS5 hardware unit sales in the quarter were 8.2 million units, which fell short of the target to hit our annual shipment target of 25 million units, but was a record high number of quarterly unit sales for PS5, and PS5 cumulative sales have exceeded 50 million units,” the company said. Based on the results for this quarter, “PS5 unit sales for this fiscal year are expected to be around 21 million units”, said the company.

Russia-based spam accounts not gaining traction on our platforms: Meta

Russia-based spam accounts have grown on Meta platforms in recent years but these are not gaining as much traction or increase in followers as earlier, the company has said.

The social network found a growing number of accounts and pages linked to coordinated inauthentic behaviour (CIB) from Russia, but they’re not gaining as many followers as before.

“Our enforcements against Russian state controlled media led to posting volumes declining by 55 per cent and engagement levels by 94 per cent compared to pre-war levels globally and across languages, according to the latest research by Graphika,” Meta said in a statement.

For covert influence operations, since



2022, “we’ve seen fewer attempts to build complex deceptive personas in favour of thinly-disguised, short-lived fake accounts in an effort to spam the internet, hoping something will ‘stick’.” Despite these noisy attempts, the company saw a consistent decline in the followings of Russian-origin CIB campaigns. The main way that CIB networks get through to authentic communities is when they manage to co-opt real people — politicians, journalists or influencers — and tap into their audiences. “Reputable opinion-makers represent an attractive target and should exercise caution before amplifying information from unverified sources, particularly ahead of major elections,” said the company.

SpeQtral Unveils TarQis – a Mobile Quantum Optical Ground Station (Q-OGS)

SpeQtral, a leader in quantum communications technology, announces the launch of TarQis, a Mobile Quantum-Optical Ground Station (Q-OGS) designed to lower the barriers for access to secure communication through satellite Quantum Key Distribution (QKD). TarQis will work seamlessly with SpeQtral's upcoming quantum satellites, allowing users to quickly familiarise and test satellite QKD technology, prove out use cases and prepare for deploying and integrating QKD solutions into their institutions.

SpeQtral's Mobile Quantum-Optical Ground Station consists of modular quantum receiver unit, QKD control server and an optical telescope all contained within a standard 20-foot container, which can be easily transportable globally. This product uses standard data interfaces and enables users to

quickly deploy TarQis at selected locations to allow for long-distance satellite QKD connectivity. It will serve as an access point to SpeQtral's upcoming quantum satellites, offering a plug-and-play solution for interested users in the government and defence, telco, financial services and data centre segments to deploy and test satellite QKD solutions. TarQis can be located at a user's secure premises to allow direct access to satellite QKD solutions, or can serve as a node within a metropolitan fibre-QKD network to enable long distance QKD connectivity to other metropolitan QKD networks. While there is an appreciable interest in securing data with quantum keys, current solutions require a significant infrastructural investment as well



This demonstration offering has been conceptualised and fine-tuned through feedback from users across the financial services, government and defence market segments. TarQis has garnered significant interest from stakeholders during pre-launch engagements, and the official launch marks a quantum leap towards the adoption of satellite QKD technologies within an organisation's communication infrastructure and applications. SpeQtral takes pride in offering bespoke quantum-secure solutions for various use cases, and is committed to realizing a global quantum-secure communication network. Organizations eager to explore the capabilities of satellite QKD technologies are invited to contact us at info@speqtral.com. Join SpeQtral on this quantum

journey, where innovation converges with simplicity, shaping the future of secure data transmission and confidentiality. About SpeQtral SpeQtral is a pioneer in quantum communications, with a vision to build and deploy global quantum networks. SpeQtral develops quantum-secure products and services designed to protect sovereign and enterprise telecommunication networks against classical, as well as future quantum-based cyber-attacks on cryptography. Combining both terrestrial and space-based solutions, SpeQtral aims to secure the world's networks against the threats posed by the imminent quantum revolution and drive innovation in quantum communications that will serve as the building blocks for the future quantum internet. For more information, visit: <https://speqtralquantum.com/>

Japan loses its position as the world's third-largest economy to Germany



Japan has slipped to the world's fourth-largest economy as it fell behind the size of Germany's in 2023, says Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities. Japan's nominal GDP totalled \$4.2 trillion last year, or about 591 trillion yen. Germany's, announced last month, was \$4.4 trillion, or \$4.5 trillion, depending on the currency conversion, he added. For the latest October-December quarter, the Japanese economy shrank at an annual rate of 0.4 per cent, and minus 0.1 per cent from the previous quarter, according to Cabinet Office data on real GDP. For the year, real GDP grew 1.9 per cent from the previous year, he said. This follows a 3.3 per cent contraction in the third quarter. Two consecutive quarters of contraction are widely considered a technical recession, he added. Japan has unexpectedly fallen into a recession after its economy shrank for two quarters in a row, BBC reported. The country's gross domestic product (GDP) contracted by a worse-than-expected 0.4% in the last three months of

2023, compared to a year earlier.

It came after the economy shrank by 3.3 per cent in the previous quarter.

The figures from Japan's Cabinet Office also indicate that the country may have also lost its position as the world's third-largest economy to Germany, BBC reported.

Economists had expected the new data to show that Japan's GDP grew by more than 1% in the fourth quarter of last year.

In October, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecast that Germany was likely to overtake Japan as the world's third-largest economy when measured in US dollars, BBC reported.

The IMF will only declare a change in its rankings once both countries have published the final versions of their economic growth figures. It began publishing data comparing economies in 1980.

Economist Neil Newman told the BBC that the latest figures show that Japan's economy was worth about \$4.2tn (£3.3tn) in 2023, while Germany's was \$4.4tn. This was due to the weakness of the Japanese currency against the dollar and that if the yen recovers, the country could regain the number three spot, Newman added, BBC reported. At a press conference in Tokyo this month, the IMF's deputy head, Gita Gopinath, also said an important reason for Japan potentially slipping in the rankings was the yen falling by about 9 per cent against the US dollar last year.

Heavy selling by FIIs neutralised by domestic funds buying



A significant feature of a bull market is its ability to bounce back from a steep fall. This was evident on February 14 when Nifty bounced back by around 300 points from the lows, says V.K. Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services. The heavy selling by FIIs, which was expected in response to the spike in US bond yields, didn't impact the market since it was neutralised by DII and individual investor buying, he said.

A significant feature of the market now is the change in leadership. Reliance has emerged as the leader of the rally and is supported by ICICI Bank and SBI. The

strength of these fundamentally strong stocks augurs well for the bulls, he said. The valuation gap between large-caps and the broader market continues to be an area of concern, he added.

Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities said equities in Asia opened higher on Thursday after Wall Street resumed a rally as robust earnings helped overcome worries about persistent inflation. Nifty ended on a positive note in a highly volatile market on February 14 post recovery from morning lows aided by recovery in Bank stocks. BSE Sensex is trading at 71,824.98 points, up 2.15 points. M&M is up 3 per cent.

Bots are some DoorDash and Walmart Spark delivery gig workers' dirty secret

Last summer, a driver for DoorDash in Indiana heard from a fellow gig worker about an app that supposedly could show him a valuable detail about each order on the platform.

"It would tell me if I'm getting a tip or not," the driver told Business Insider. "DoorDash would never do that."

Drivers only see base pay when they are offered an order from DoorDash, which can run as low as \$2. Being able to accept just orders with high tips — and increase his overall earnings — convinced the gig worker to pay to download the app to his phone.

Frustrated by falling pay and intensifying competition on delivery apps, some gig workers are turning to "bots" — apps and other programs that claim to help them optimize their earnings. While using bots violates the delivery apps' policies, some drivers say they're worth it, or even necessary, to make enough money as a gig worker.

Some bots are relatively simple. "Batch grabbers," for instance, claim orders on a delivery app faster than any human can tap them on a phone screen. Often, they also allow users to accept orders with certain characteristics, such as high pay or short driving time. Others, like the one that the Indiana DoorDash driver used, promise users otherwise unseen information about the orders, such as



how much a customer tipped. This app, called Para, was built by a former Uber employee and launched for download in 2021, according to the New York Times. Para's website says that it can reveal "hidden trip details" and help users capture higher-paying orders on apps like Uber, Grubhub, and Lyft.

For a few days, Para worked well, the DoorDash driver said. After that, the app stopped displaying tips and asked him to log in several times over the course of a day. Eventually, the driver stopped using it because of the problems.

Bots can "negatively impact other drivers"

Using a bot violates the delivery apps' terms for workers, the companies told Business Insider.

It "can negatively impact other drivers," a Walmart spokesperson told BI. "We are very proactive in identifying and preventing this type of activity, and we investigate all reports of specific driver bot use. If substantiated, the driver's account is deactivated." The spokesperson also pointed to steps it has taken to address bots. "We have several teams dedicated to preventing any illicit or fraudulent third-party apps from violating our terms of service," an Instacart spokesperson said,

which have successfully blocked access to these sorts of services. "Any shopper found to be engaging in fraudulent activity or otherwise violating their contract will be removed from our platform."

DoorDash's policy "explicitly prohibits Dashers from sharing their account information with anyone — including third parties," a DoorDash spokesperson said. "Anyone found violating our rules faces removal."

Uber and Para did not respond to requests for comment from BI.

Other bots than Para's exist, including for specific apps. One called "Spark Ninjas" supposedly captures orders automatically on Walmart's Spark delivery platform. Subscribers can tell the bot which orders to take based on the expected payout, according to its website. Spark Ninja didn't respond to messages or a call from BI.

Bots are undermining the true gig economy — and can rip off workers

Bots aren't unique to gig work apps, with similar codes being used to grab top-selling products on apps and websites for years. For instance, sneaker resellers use bots to snap up pairs of shoes from limited-edition drops by brands like Nike. Nike has responded by improving its technology and coming up with new ways to make sure customers themselves have a fair shot at getting the sneakers.

WHITESTONE
Real Estate
Serving Community Since 2009

WE SPECIALIZE
IN OFF MARKET,
INCOME PRODUCING &
INVESTMENT PROPERTIES

WE HELP YOU BUY BANK FORECLOSURES, SHORT SALES, AUCTIONS

SHARANJIT THIND SINGH
REAL ESTATE BROKER

PHONE : 646 875 8495
Email : whitestone1979@gmail.com

Honesty * Intergerty * Experince * Knowledge

STI CONSULTANTS
COMMERCIAL FINANCE

RAVI CHOPRA
CEO STI Consultants
Office: 718-886-8517
CELL: 917-705-7708
ravi@sticonsultants.com

COMMERCIAL MORTGAGE
FINANCING
SIZE : \$500,000 TO \$500 MILLION

SPECIALIZE IN

HOTELS • MOTELS • CONSTRUCTION LOANS
GAS STATIONS • OFFICE BUILDINGS
MIX USE PROPERTIES • CHURCH LOAN
HARD MONEY LOAN • APARTMENT
BUILDINGS • BUSINESS LINE OF CREDIT

All Kinds of Commercial Financing All Over USA

OFFICES: 43-39 2nd Floor Main Street, Flushing, NY, 11355
508 HUMBOLDT STREET, BROOKLYN NY 11222 NEW JERSEY - CHICAGO

Hillary Clinton's longtime aide Huma Abedin, 47, reveals she is dating George Soros' billionaire playboy son Alex



© Getty Images

Disgraced politician Anthony Weiner's ex-wife Huma Abedin has seemingly revealed she is dating billionaire George Soros' son Alex - who is almost ten years her junior.

The longtime aide to Hillary Clinton appeared to take her romance public on Wednesday when she shared a photo of herself and Alex enjoying a Valentine's Day date at a restaurant in Paris.

In the image - which was posted on Instagram Stories by both Huma, 47, and Alex, 38 - shows the pair cuddling up in a corner booth behind a table strewn with red roses and gifts, with the billionaire playboy adding a 'Happy Valentine's Day' message above their heads. The romance between the pair comes seven years after Huma divorced her former husband Weiner, whom she was married to for seven years - during which time the pair weathered multiple high-profile scandals. However her new boyfriend is also no stranger to life in the public eye - nor is he unfamiliar with causing a few controversial headlines.

For much of his life, Alex was known as a playboy heir who threw lavish parties in the Hamptons and attended many a red

carpet event - until last year when he was named as the official heir to his father's \$25 billion Open Society Foundations (OSF) empire in a shock decision that saw him usurp his older brother Jonathan in a corporate battle that many likened to the HBO series *Succession*.

When the announcement was made in June 2023, Alex vowed that he would use his father's fortune to finance more far-left causes - including abortion rights and gender equality - telling the *Wall Street Journal* that he was 'more political' than George and planned to reflect that in his business dealings.

Speaking about his goals, Alex said he was concerned about the possibility of Republican Donald Trump returning to the White House - suggesting his family would contribute greatly to Democrats in the 2024 presidential election.

'As much as I would love to get money out of politics, as long as the other side is doing it, we will have to do it, too,' he said.

Those words will no doubt have come as music to Huma's ears given that she has spent years serving at the right hand of former Presidential candidate Clinton, and

was by her side when she lost the 2016 election to Trump.

Clinton's election loss was the latest in a line of personal blows for Huma, whose then-husband Anthony had just weeks earlier been exposed by *DailyMail.com* for carrying on a months-long online relationship with a 15-year-old girl, with

friend, actor Bradley Cooper - with reports suggesting that the duo had dated for several months after being paired up by the editor-turned-'matchmaker'.

However the romance with Alex is the first time that Huma herself has shared a new update about her love life with the public - having kept much of her life under wraps

in the years since her divorce from Weiner. The former Clinton aide has not been quite so reluctant to share her plans for the future however, revealing in October 2022 that she 'wouldn't rule out' a potential move into politics.

'I am in that phase of my life where I say, 'Never say never,' Huma said during an appearance on *Cats Roundtable*. 'But I don't see it.

'I was married for a long time to one of, I think, the most dynamic politicians out there - and successful. And I worked for another politician - these were next level public servants in terms of the work that they did,' she said of her ex-husband Weiner and former boss Hillary.

Before turning his attentions to running his father's hedge fund empire, Alex a regular fixture on

whom he sent multiple sordid sexts.

This came just two years after Anthony - who shares a son with Huma - had been forced to resign from his job as a New York City congressman when a photo of him in his underwear was posted to his personal Twitter account. However it was during Hillary's failed 2016 run that Huma may well have first been connected to the Soros family - when George was revealed as one of five mega-donors responsible for one in every \$17 that had been spent on her campaign.

Indeed, Huma's name has previously been linked with the Soros clan when it was revealed in 2016 that she had exchanged emails with another member of Hillary's campaign team about a dinner that the then-Presidential candidate was having with George.

In the email, Huma asked Robby Mook, who would eventually go on to run Hillary's campaign, how she should proceed if George asked Hillary to appear at a fundraiser for America Votes, a progressive organization that he supported heavily. Robby then replied: 'I would only do this for political reasons (ie to make Soros happy).' In the years since Hillary's failed campaign, Huma has continued to work closely with her - while also forming several other very high-profile friendships, including with *Vogue* Editor-in-Chief Anna Wintour. In 2022, it was even rumored that Anna had attempted to set Huma up with her close

the red carpet - and he was often seen rubbing shoulders with an array of A-listers, including supermodels like Chanel Iman and music stars like Usher.

But in recent years, the billionaire philanthropist has attempted to put that image behind him, instead turning his hand to business and diving into politics - with White House logs revealing last year that he had visited 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue 14 times in just over 12 months. Meanwhile his Instagram account veered away from shots of Alex posing with models and celebrities, instead focusing on snaps of him spending time with politicians like Barack Obama, Nancy Pelosi, and Chuck Schumer.

His very public persona is at odds with his father, who took a much more private stance on business dealings and politics. However, George's name has been dragged into the headlines of late after he became embroiled in the fall-out surrounding Trump's arrest.

George became a target of Trump and his allies over conspiracy theories that he funded New York District Attorney Alvin Bragg - rumors that he has vehemently denied. 'As for Alvin Bragg, as a matter of fact I did not contribute to his campaign and I don't know him,' George said of the speculation. 'I think some on the right would rather focus on far-fetched conspiracy theories than on serious charges against the former president.'



CBS New York Investigates: Illegal license plate covers, congestion pricing and the art of dodging tolls

CBS New York recently launched an investigation into license plate covers. You may have seen them on the road. Some drivers use them to dodge tolls and police cameras.

The sale of those plate covers was banned in the five boroughs. So why did Amazon send three to our Investigates Team?

Amazon says it restricts the sale of tinted plate covers in New York. But CBS New York has obtained three more examples of the challenges the city and state face as they move ahead with a congestion pricing plan that depends on readable license plates.

MTA Bridges and Tunnels officers recently stopped drivers on the RFK Bridge for violations ranging from a tinted plate cover to a fake plate covering up a real one. When asked if he has seen an uptick in that sort of thing, Richard Hildebrand, the agency's chief of operations, said, "We saw an uptick during the pandemic actually, and that continues today." MTA Bridges and Tunnels is the agency that will manage congestion pricing tolls. "Do you anticipate that will increase even more?" investigative reporter Tim McNicholas asked.



"That we don't know, but we have a robust set of tools, and we anticipate that will be used one way or another to enforce the same types of offenses for congestion pricing," Hildebrand said.

Those tools include cameras and scanners that read plates, sometimes even obstructed plates. But officers also watch with their own eyes because traffic cameras aren't perfect.

The New York City comptroller recently found the city's system, which is different than the MTA's, rejects more than 20% of the images due to fake or covered plates.

"This merchandise endangers New Yorkers," Corporation Counsel Sylvia O. Hinds-Radix

said. One step City Hall took was telling Amazon to stop selling tinted plate covers to New Yorkers, which the head of the city's Law Department explained early last year.

"Amazon complied with the city's demand to immediately stop selling these license plate covers to New York City residents," Hinds-Radix said. Amazon put up notices warning it wouldn't ship them to New York. But a few weeks ago, CBS New York found five listings for tinted covers on the site with no such notice. One even used a New York plate as an example. So we ordered three different covers and got them shipped to Manhattan within days.

"See, that's disturbing," City

Councilman Robert Holden said. McNicholas showed the covers to Holden, who created the 2021 law banning the sale of them.

"We're gonna get them fined. The Amazon platform is gonna have to pay, and it looks like I may even have to up the penalty," Holden said.

But some people try to cheat the system even without hiding their plate. That's one reason the MTA's sensors alert officers when a repeat toll dodger is detected nearby, which CBS New York saw in action. The MTA said a truck owned by a third-party delivery contractor for FedEx had more than \$1,000 in unpaid tolls. Workers had to empty out the truck before the MTA seized it. Officers said one day they

impounded 10 cars and gave 33 tickets connected to \$420,000 total in unpaid tolls and fees.

MTA Bridges and Tunnels officers say, last year, they recovered \$35 million from repeat toll dodgers.

"Your vehicle will be taken off the roads until you pay your fair share and become a good citizen of the city of New York," Hildebrand said.

Cameras and sensors have been around for years, and the MTA has been installing similar tools in Manhattan to prepare for congestion pricing.

But some New Yorkers wonder if it will be enough.

"People already use fake license plates. I can't see them trying not to find another loophole to get out of it," resident Kevin Meurer said.

"People will find a way to cover those license plates, easily," Sebastian Santana added.

But CBS New York made it a little less easy. Amazon removed those five listings from its site and thanked us for flagging them.

The company declined our request for an interview would not tell us why it didn't block the sale. If you have a story you'd like us to investigate, email us at cbs2investigates@cbs.com or call our tip line at 1-646-939-6095.

Meet world's richest woman ever. Owns more wealth than Musk, Arnault, Bezos, and Mark combined

Elon Musk, Bernard Arnault, Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckerberg, and others are frequently mentioned as the richest people in the world. However, history offers a person who topped today's billionaires combined in terms of wealth. This formidable historical figure is Wu Zetian, renowned as Empress Wu, who surpassed today's five richest individuals, including Elon Musk, Bernard Arnault, Jeff Bezos, Larry Ellison, and Mark Zuckerberg.

According to reports, Empress Wu, rumored to be hailing from the Tang dynasty, is regarded as the wealthiest woman of her era, with some historians even claiming that she is the richest woman in recorded history.

Her estimated net worth is an astounding USD 16 trillion, surpassing the combined wealth



of modern-day tycoons such as Elon Musk (USD 210 billion), Bernard Arnault (USD 206 billion), Jeff Bezos (USD 181 billion), Larry Ellison (USD 142 billion), Mark Zuckerberg (USD 141 billion) and others as of January 31. To put this in perspective, Empress Wu's wealth eclipses that of the contemporary business magnates, marking her as an

unparalleled figure in accumulated riches.

According to a South China Morning Post (SCMP) report, She was born in 624 AD in Shanxi Province, Empress Wu hailed from a privileged background as the daughter of a prosperous timber merchant. Her father's close association with Li Yuan, who eventually

ascended to become Emperor Gaozong of Tang, played a pivotal role in shaping her destiny.

Fueled by a passion for literature, Empress Wu embarked on a path of education and, at the tender age of 14, commenced her career as a secretary in the Tang Palace, working under Emperor Taizong. The emperor's passing in 649 AD triggered a customary practice of sending all women associated with him to a Buddhist monastery. However, an intriguing twist unfolded in Empress Wu's fate.

Despite this tradition, she was in a romantic relationship with Emperor Gaozong, the deceased emperor's son and successor. Within a year, Gaozong intervened in her monastic life, removing her from the convent and elevating her status to that of his concubine.

As Wu solidified her influence within the palace, a bitter rivalry unfolded between her and Empress Wang. According to Chinese sources, Wu, who had given birth to a daughter in 654 (who unfortunately passed away shortly after birth), cunningly shifted blame onto Empress Wang and orchestrated her downfall. Following the ousting of Empress Wang, Wu ascended to the throne as empress in the year 655. Over the next five years, Emperor Gaozong experienced debilitating migraine-like headaches and vision loss. In response to his ailing health, the king entrusted the governance of his realm to Wu, marking the commencement of her reign. Historical accounts depict Empress Wu as a highly astute ruler who employed various

Election Results Further Divide Pakistan, Expose Deep Rot and Fissures

Pakistan was already in a serious political, economic and social mess. The elections just held have deepened that mess. The functioning of all Pakistani institutions has been badly exposed and their credibility eroded further. Imran Khan defied the Pakistani military and has paid a price for that. The judiciary has pliantly played the game of the Pakistani military by sentencing Imran Khan to long periods of imprisonment for provoking violence against the army, leaking state secrets and profiting from the sale of gifts he received as Prime Minister from foreign dignitaries. His wife too has been given a prison sentence for an un-Islamic marriage with Imran Khan.

The Pakistani military is seen, and sees itself, as the saviour of last resort of Pakistan's survival as an ideological nation. The army, as known, has always exercised real power in Pakistan directly or indirectly. Imran Khan himself was put in power by the army as an alternative to the traditional political parties. Having fallen afoul of the army because he wanted to exercise his prime ministerial prerogative in military appointments, he was removed from power. The army then manoeuvred for Nawaz Sharif to return from London and replace Imran Khan. The judiciary cooperated by lifting the life-long election ban on Nawaz Sharif because of his criminal conviction for dishonest practices because, it ruled, that life bans "abridge the fundamental right of citizens to contest elections and vote for a candidate of their choice". The Election Commission of Pakistan decided to bar PTI — Imran Khan's party — from using its iconic cricket bat symbol to identify party candidates in the election on the grounds of irregularities in its internal party elections. The Pakistan Supreme Court upheld the decision of the Election Commission. Members of Imran Khan's party were barred from contesting the election under their party's name and were compelled to run as independents. It was speculated that while the Pakistani military would manoeuvre to make Nawaz



Sharif Prime Minister but will also ensure that no party gets a majority so that a coalition government that emerges is relatively weak and can be better controlled. In the event, the military's strategy hasn't worked as expected because despite all the bans and restrictions put on Imran Khan and the PTI, his followers standing as independents have won the largest number of seats, close to 93 or so (out of 101), with PML-N winning 75 seats, the PPP 54 seats, the MQM-P 17 seats and others 12. With the delay in announcing results, the closing down of the internet and telephone networks during the counting, the accusations of rigging seem credible. A coalition government is in the offing. Nawaz Sharif has made an appeal to all parties to come together to put crisis-ridden Pakistan back on the rails, and negotiations are being conducted with PPP and others. General Asim Munir has backed Nawaz Sharif's call in stating that "Pakistan's diverse polity and pluralism will be best represented by a unified government of all democratic forces imbued with national purpose". Depending on how hard the bargain is driven by Asif Ali Zardari with regard to the distribution of portfolios, it is not clear if Nawaz Sharif would eventually become the Prime Minister. In all this, the military as an institution has also taken a hit. The limits of its ability to

control the political process have been exposed. It is not the first time though that the military has received public rebuffs, but such is its core control of power and policy in the system that it recovers from setbacks. The fact that challenged openly and persistently by Imran Khan and General Munir's determination to crush him and the PTI, the former Prime Minister's youthful supporters have resisted and emerged as the largest group of independents in the election, shows that the military's role in Pakistani politics is being challenged. Some believe that this show of resistance to the military's political manipulation is a good augury for Pakistan's democracy. But then, Pakistan's political structure, the role of the

armed forces, the domination of Punjab in its polity, the radicalisation of its society, the country's ideological underpinnings, the limited base of its economy and the difficulties in revitalising it because of vested interests are issues that are deeply linked to the possible evolution of a more democratic Pakistan. Leaving aside the hurdles to any genuine democracy in Pakistan that its military represents, the political leaders of Pakistan have vied for power in the country without any genuine democratic convictions. Imran Khan's vision of Pakistan is not that of a modern democracy but of an Islamic welfare state based on moral and ethical principles — a Riyasat-i-Madina — that would transform

Pakistan. As for other leaders, those of PML-N and PPP, they have been in and out of power, in and out of jail, tainted by corruption. They have fought elections without seriously committing themselves to plant the roots of a stable democracy in Pakistan. Pakistan sees Turkey as a model to emulate, but Turkey itself has moved towards an Islamic state. So, what lesson is there for Pakistan in this?

With this election, the disarray in Pakistan is likely to become worse. The coalition government that is formed will appear to lack legitimacy. The PTI, as independents, will be a powerful opposition, galvanised by their jailed leader. All this at a time when Pakistan's economy is in dire straits, relations with Afghanistan are tense because of the activities from its soil by the Pakistan Taliban (TPP) against Pakistan and the forced repatriation of over 400,000 Afghan refugees, the insurgency in Balochistan, and the exchange of military strikes between Pakistan and Iran. Ties with India are frozen. General Munir has made several antagonistic statements towards India, calling it a threat to regional peace and has sought action by the international community against India on Jammu and Kashmir. The terrorist threat to India from Pakistan remains alive. The likelihood of any forward movement in relations with India is minimal.



Tibetan Independence Day: How China's Claim Over Tibet Stands Contested



February 13, 2024, marked 111 years of Tibetan Independence Day celebrated mostly by Tibetans living in exile around the world. The People's Republic of China (PRC) which maintains the position that Tibet has historically been an integral part of China denounces this day as 'fabricated'. The contestation with respect to sovereignty is essentially rooted in Tibetan history, which is interpreted differently by the Tibetans and the PRC.

Historians and scholars tend to differ on the question of Tibet's sovereignty prior to 1912, the year of the fall of the Qing dynasty in China. While some believe that Tibet did not possess complete sovereignty, others are of the opinion that Tibet remained independent with foreign entities such as Mongols, British, Chinese and Nepalese retaining occasional suzerainty over Tibet in different periods. The history texts however highlight that when Tibet was under the spiritual leadership of the 13th Dalai Lama (also known as Thubten Gyasto), it witnessed two invasions; first, by the British expedition forces in 1904 and second, by the Manchus (Qing) in 1910. Both times, the 13th Dalai Lama was forced to flee Lhasa (Tibet) to seek exile in Mongolia and the British protectorate in India respectively. A Treaty of Convention between Britain and Tibet was subsequently signed following the

1904 invasion whereby the former ensured non-intervention by any foreign powers in Tibetan affairs without the consent of the British government and confirmed Tibet's boundary and trading rights, among other things. Two years later, Britain signed another Treaty of Convention with China respecting Tibet whereby the former agreed to not annex Tibetan territory or interfere in its administration, while the latter undertook to not permit interference of any other foreign state in Tibetan territory or in its internal administration. These two conventions are significant as they both reiterate Tibet's existence as a sovereign entity and China's suzerainty over Tibet, contested by the PRC after 1950. During his second exile, the Dalai Lama was proclaimed deposed by the Qing rule in 1910. Presently, Tibetan Independence Day is observed as the day the 13th Dalai Lama proclaimed the independence of Tibet in 1913 following his return to Lhasa from his exile in India the previous year. In this declaration, the Dalai Lama stated, "Tibet is an independent nation living in peace and in accordance with its religion. We are a small, religious and independent nation." He further claimed that historically, Tibet had no Qing (Manchu) or Chinese authority in the region, a clear indication of Tibet's complete sovereignty to have existed historically. The Qing dynasty, who were not Chinese rulers, exercised only political

control over Tibet as a protectorate state, which de facto ended with the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1912.

As per historical records, the Republic of China was established in 1912 with the fall of the Qing dynasty, ending China's last imperial dynasty following the Xinhai Revolution of 1911. The new head of the Chinese State sought to establish cordial relations with Tibet and offered to restore the Dalai Lama to his previous position. However, the Dalai Lama refused the title, declared Tibet independent in 1913 and standardised the Tibetan flag in its present form, seen to be in use by the Tibetan government-in-exile (in Dharamshala, India).

The Mongol-Tibet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance was

concluded the same year which mentions their freedom from the Qing dynasty, their separation from China and the formation of their own independent states. The treaty's authenticity is contested by the PRC, claiming it to be a tool for Russian intervention in Tibet and therefore, considers it to be invalid. However, the treaty was proclaimed by Tibetans as another indication of Tibet's sovereignty before 1951 which witnessed the assimilation of Tibet into China as per the Seventeen-Point Agreement.

The return of the Dalai Lama witnessed him assuming political as well as spiritual leadership of Tibet that the independent reign continued for four decades till 1951. The modernisation of Tibet was initiated under his reign which saw an independent Tibet

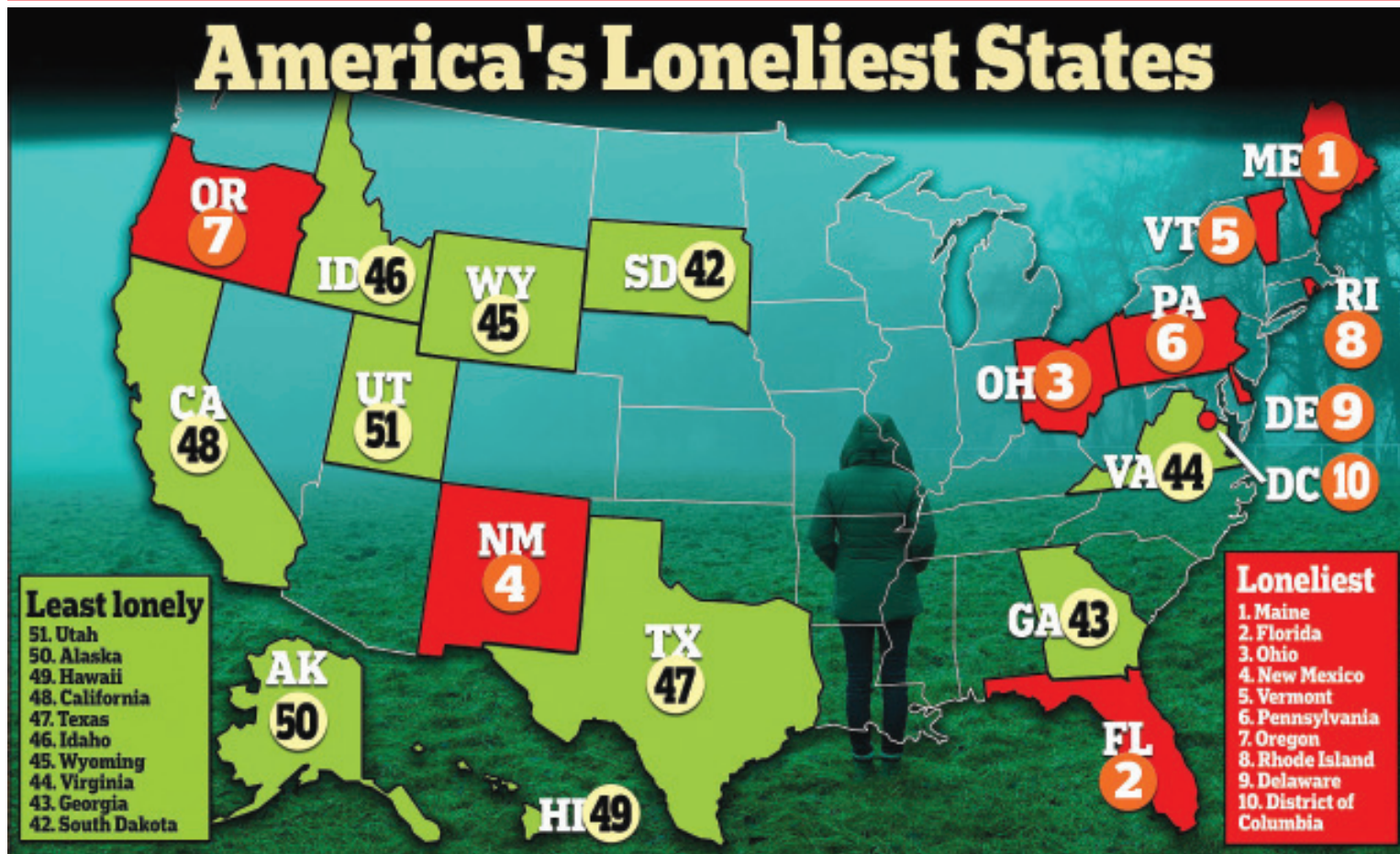
maintaining its own army and government, use of its own language and currency, trade missions with foreign countries and regulated movement across borders. The 13th Dalai Lama is also recognised to be the first one to make formal international agreements as a sovereign nation. However, the assimilation of Tibet under China after 1951 is the result of China's aggressive policy as witnessed in the Battle of Chamdo (1950), the Seventeen-Point Agreement (1951) later renounced by the 14th and current Dalai Lama, claiming to be signed under duress, as PRC broke its promise of respecting Tibet's autonomy. The agreement remains to be the only one concluded by the PRC with a minority group. Post 1950, China or PRC, interprets history differently in an effort to claim its 'historical' assertion over Tibetan land. According to the PRC, Tibet has historically been part of China, coming under the jurisdiction of the Central government since the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368).

Post 1950, Chinese annexation of Tibet paved the way for its aggressive onslaught on Tibetans, leading to mass exile and persecution, occupation of naïve land, exploitation of resources and imposition of Sinicization in its effort to erode Tibet's unique cultural, linguistic and religious identity.

While Beijing denounces marking of Tibetan Independence Day as a 'farce', the very observation and celebration of this day among the Tibetan community living in exile, 111 years since its declaration, speak volumes of Tibetans' assertion of keeping their identity alive and rejection of China's ongoing attempts at eroding Tibetan's sovereign existence.



As Silicon Valley announces loneliness 'public health emergency,' we reveal which state is actually the most isolated, according to research



Silicon Valley may have just declared a public health emergency over its loneliness crisis, pledging to promote social interaction, but the tech epicenter isn't the place people feel most isolated.

Americans are more likely to be lonely if they live in the state of Maine, a report suggests.

Health experts at AginginPlace analyzed factors in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, including the amount of single-person households and the number of divorces - which both can raise the risk of loneliness - to determine where in the country people were lacking the most social connection. The researchers then scored each state and calculated an average figure for comparison.

They found the Pine Tree state, which has one of the highest divorce rates in the country, was the loneliest - with a score of 7.6 out of 10. Florida and Ohio ranked closely behind, taking second and third place with scores of 7 and 6.68 out of 10, respectively, which experts suggest could be due to large retired populations and high searches for friendship apps like Bumble BFF.

Utah, meanwhile, was dubbed the least lonely state, as its large Mormon population has led to a low percentage of divorces and single-person households.



The findings come as San Mateo County in California's Silicon Valley became the first in the US to declare loneliness a public health emergency this week.

The US surgeon general has warned America is facing a loneliness epidemic, which health authorities have said is as deadly as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

The AginginPlace researchers wrote: 'We are particularly concerned with the physical and mental wellbeing of those who are vulnerable, so we wanted to find out where in the US struggles the most with loneliness, and where people are maintaining social connections the best.'

The team looked at US Census

data and national surveys to determine where states ranked in the following categories: population, percentage of single-person households, number of people widowed, number of people divorced, and searches for dating and friendship apps.

Each state was then given a score out of 10 based on how they ranked in each category, and the researchers took an average.

Maine was deemed the loneliest state and was tied with Nevada for the highest divorce rate - 14 percent.

The Pine Tree state also has one of the lowest state populations in the US, with just 1.3 million residents. And 31 percent of those live in single-

person households, raising the risk of loneliness.

Additionally, the state saw the third-highest number of searches for dating apps with 425,000 per year - equal to about 3,125 per 10,000 people. Florida came in second place, scoring seven out of 10. The researchers stated because the Sunshine State has a large older retired community, this raises the likelihood residents are divorced or widowed.

According to the findings, seven percent of Florida residents are widowed, which puts it in the top five most-widowed states. Additionally, 13 percent of residents are divorced, and 29 percent live alone.

Ohio came in third place with

percent - and second highest for the number of dating app searches, at 3,167 per 10,000 people.

Meanwhile, Utah was deemed the least-lonely state in the country, scoring just 0.72 out of 10. Utah had the lowest amount of single-person households - 19.2 percent - and was tied with several other states for the least amount of divorced residents - nine percent. 'The state has a huge Mormon community with more than half of Utahns identifying themselves as Mormons,' the researchers wrote.

'This may contribute to the low numbers of divorce and single-person households.'

Alaska followed closely behind with a score of 2.32.

Though the state has one of the lowest populations in the US, with 724,000 residents, the researchers found the Last Frontier state had the lowest amount of residents who had lost a spouse - 3.8 percent. Hawaii was deemed the third least-lonely state, scoring 2.56 out of 10.

The researchers said its low score could be due to its 'spectacular beaches and weather to enjoy,' which can encourage people to get outdoors more and socialize.

And despite San Mateo county declaring loneliness a public health emergency, the researchers found it is in the top five least-lonely states.

California, the most populated US state with 39.6 million residents, ranked 48th loneliest, though its residents had the second highest number of searches for friendship apps. Last year, US Surgeon General Dr Vivek Murthy declared loneliness the next big public health crisis, claiming social isolation was as bad as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Dr Murthy said social isolation had 'profound health and societal consequences,' including a 30 percent higher chance of suffering from heart disease. He said: 'We have an obligation to make the same investments in rebuilding the social fabric of society that we have made in addressing other global health concerns, such as tobacco use, obesity, and the addiction crisis.'

WORKING CAPITAL R US

EIDL/PPP Money Gone?

**Talk to us for
Funding Options
for your Business**

SOLUTIONS

SBA FINANCING

ASSET BASED LOANS

EQUIPMENT FINANCING

ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLES

BUSINESS LINES OF CREDIT

We look forward to your valued inquiry
for our Business Solutions.



Call (646) 897 3016

info@workingcapitalrus.com
www.workingcapitalrus.com