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U.S.-Russian Relations Will Only Get Worse

Even Good Diplomacy Can't Smooth a Clash of Interests



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It's hard to imagine that U.S.-Russian relations could get much worse, but sadly, they are unlikely to get better anytime soon. Over the past two decades, Russian President Vladimir Putin has defined his country's interests in ways that are incompatible with the interests of the United States and its European allies. The latter believe that democracy, the rule of law, and the provision of

security to eastern European countries enhance stability; Putin, meanwhile, considers the spread of democracy to be a threat to his regime and believes that having vulnerable neighbors enhances Russian security. Any sustained improvement of relations between the United States and Russia beyond progress on arms control (such as the recent extension of the New START treaty) would

require one of two concessions: either the United States shelves its foundational support for democracy and formally recognizes a Russian-privileged sphere of influence in the former Soviet Union or the Russian president decides his interests are not threatened by greater democracy in the region or by having fully sovereign neighbors. Neither is likely to materialize in the near future.



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Indian-Origin Husband Of Ex-Amazon Employee Jailed For Securities Fraud In US

Viky Bohra, who had pleaded guilty to insider trading charges last year, has been sentenced to 26 months in prison for securities fraud.

(News Agencies)-The Indian-origin husband of a former Amazon employee has been sentenced to 26 months in prison by a US court for securities fraud and illegally making a profit of USD 1.4 million by using inside trading information from his wife. Viky Bohra, 37, from Bothell, Washington state, pleaded guilty in November 2020, admitting that between 2016 and 2018, he used Amazon inside information he obtained from his wife, an Amazon finance employee, to place trades in Amazon stock-making a profit of \$1.4 million, acting US Attorney Tessa M Gorman said. Mr Bohra was sentenced on June 10 in US District Court in Seattle to 26 months in prison for securities fraud due to his insider trading activity, the US Department of Justice said in a press release.

At the sentencing hearing, US District Judge James L Robart noted that Bohra had turned his wife and father into criminals and added "I firmly believe white collar crime deserves equal treatment to what we call street crime."

"This defendant and his wife were earning hundreds of thousands of dollars in salary and bonuses from their jobs in tech -- but he was not content with that -- greedily scheming to illegally profit by trading Amazon stock," said US Attorney Tessa M Gorman.

"This case should stand as a warning to those who try to game the markets with insider trading: there is a heavy price to pay with a felony conviction and prison sentence."

According to records filed in the case, Mr Bohra's wife had

access to confidential information regarding Amazon revenue and expenses. Because of that work, Mr Bohra and his wife were subject to blackout periods during which no Amazon stock could be traded.

Mr Bohra's wife was advised of insider trading policies making it clear the responsibility to safeguard confidential financial information. Despite those warnings, Mr Bohra obtained his wife's confidential information and traded in Amazon stock and options in accounts tied to him and his father.

Trades occurred during blackout periods and, from 2016 to 2018, relied in part on information from his wife to make successful trades in advance of Amazon earnings announcements.

"(Mr) Bohra knew exactly what he was doing and was driven



solely by greed," said Donald M Voiret, FBI Special Agent in Charge of the Seattle Field Office. "With his nearly unlimited access and knowledge of securities trading, he undermined public trust in our financial markets."

In asking for a 33-month sentence, prosecutors wrote to the court, "over two and a half years, (Mr) Bohra, using information provided by his wife, made over USD 1.4 million by making illegal stock and options trades. (Mr) Bohra's conduct was not an isolated incident,

limited to trading before one Amazon earnings statement. Rather, (Mr) Bohra engaged in illegal insider trading in advance of 11 straight earnings announcements." On September 28, 2020, Mr Bohra was charged by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) in a civil insider trading case. He and his family members have paid USD 2,652,899 in disgorgement, interest and penalties. Based upon these payments, the United States is not seeking forfeiture in this case, the press release said.

British Council Creative Economy Scholarship: Indian Students Can Apply Till June 30



(Insider Bureau)- Registrations for the Creative Economy Scholarship offered by the British Council of India will end on June 30, 2021.

Ten scholarships worth a total of over 149,000 pound are on offer for Indian students and young professionals who want to pursue postgraduate studies in the area of Culture Policy and Arts Management at four universities in the United Kingdom (UK).

Birmingham City University, Goldsmiths University of London, King's College London and University of Glasgow are participating in the scholarship

scheme. Interested students can directly apply at the university websites.

Creative Economy Scholarship is for resident Indian citizens with "relevant work experience or proven interest in their subject area," the council said. "Applicants should be able to take up full-time course of study in the UK for the academic year from September/October 2021 - 2022 and are also required to have an undergraduate degree - in any field - to enable access onto one of the pre-selected postgraduate courses at one of the four UK universities," the council said.




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"My Second Life," Says Indian Man Freed From Death Row In UAE



Becks Krishnan was sentenced to death by the UAE Supreme Court after he was found guilty of killing a young Sudanese boy when he recklessly drove and rammed his car into a group of children in September 2012.

His wife Veena and son Advait, along with other relatives and friends, received him at the airport. "I was relieved when I heard that Yusuff Ali had intervened... This is my second life."

"I am thankful to Yusuff Ali. He was holding discussions with the victim's family for many months," Becks Krishnan told the media. Meanwhile, Mr Ali in a statement, said he had deposited 500,000 Dirhams in January at the Abu Dhabi court after convincing the Sudanese boy's family to pardon Becks Krishnan. "We had to convince both the parents and the

negotiations went on for several months. "It was difficult initially because the boy's mother wanted the law to take its own course."

"Convincing them to pardon Becks Krishnan was the difficult part," Mr Ali said in a statement.

Becks Krishnan was sentenced to death by the UAE Supreme Court after he was found guilty of killing a young Sudanese boy when he recklessly drove and rammed his car into a group of children in September 2012.

Ever since, his family and friends had been trying hard for Becks

Krishnan's release without any success, especially as the victim's family had already gone back and settled in Sudan, putting an end to any discussion or pardon.

The Becks Krishnan family then approached Yusuff Ali, Chairman of the Lulu Group, who went about getting the details of the case and got in touch with all stakeholders. Ultimately in January 2021, the victim's family in Sudan agreed to pardon Becks Krishnan. Subsequently, Yusuff Ali paid 500,000 Dirhams (Rs 1 crore approximately) as compensation in the court to secure the man's release.

(Insider Bureau)-The 45-year-old Indian recently freed from death row in the UAE after an NRI businessman paid "blood money" arrived on Wednesday and said his release was a "second life" for him.

Becks Krishnan, who was on death row in the United Arab Emirates for killing a young

Sudanese boy in a road accident in 2012, was freed after a prominent NRI businessman and philanthropist MA Yusuff Ali helped pay his "blood money" amounting to nearly ₹1 crore.

The Thrissur resident arrived at the international airport early on Wednesday morning from Abu Dhabi.

2 Charged For Racial Social Media Post Against Indian-Origin UK Minister Priti Patel

The charges against Jake Henderson, 28, and Robert Cumming, 26, followed complaints about the video attacking Priti Patel.

(Insider Bureau)-Two men were charged on Wednesday with sending a grossly offensive message related to a racist social media video targeting UK Home Secretary Priti Patel.

The UK's Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) said the charges against Jake Henderson, 28, and Robert Cumming, 26, followed complaints about the video directed at the senior 49-year-old Indian-origin Cabinet minister in January this year. The duo were summonsed to court on May 29

and are next due to appear at Mansfield Magistrates' Court in Nottinghamshire, East Midlands region of England, on June 29.

"Following complaints in relation to a video targeted at Home Secretary Priti Patel and posted on social media in January 2021, the CPS has authorised Nottinghamshire Police to charge Jake Henderson and Robert Cumming with sending a grossly offensive message by a public communication network," said Janine Smith, Chief Crown

Prosecutor for CPS East Midlands. "The function of the CPS is not to decide whether a person is guilty of a criminal offence, but to make fair, independent and objective assessments about whether it is appropriate to present charges to a court to consider," Janine Smith said.

She said the proceedings against Henderson and Cumming are active and nothing should be published or shared online that could in any way jeopardise the defendants' right to a fair trial.



UAE Upholds Extradition Deal With South Africa Amid Hunt For Gupta Family

(Insider Bureau)-The United Arab Emirates has ratified a 2018 extradition treaty with South Africa, its embassy in Pretoria said on Wednesday, a move that President Cyril Ramaphosa's government hopes will lead to the return of the Gupta brothers to face corruption charges.

South Africa signed the treaty with the UAE in late 2018, part of Ramaphosa's effort to crack down on those accused of corruption and influence peddling under his predecessor, Jacob Zuma. It was ratified in April, UAE's embassy said in a statement.

The Gupta brothers - Atul, Ajay and Rajesh Gupta - are accused of using connections with Zuma to



win contracts, misappropriate state assets, inappropriately influence cabinet appointments and siphon off billions of rand in state funds.

The Indian-born brothers, who have repeatedly denied wrongdoing, are believed to be in Dubai where they own property and businesses.

"These agreements have been and remain key to the UAE in promoting judicial and legal cooperation with South Africa and strengthening bilateral relations between law enforcement institutions and partners on both sides," the UAE's ambassador to South Africa, Mahash Alhameli, said in the statement.



Geeta Saxena

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"Actively Working": US Diplomat On Indian Student Visa

The American diplomat said that US-bound students will not require any proof of COVID-19 vaccination to enter the country. They will need a negative report of their COVID-19 test taken within 72 hours prior to their departure.

(Insider Bureau)-The US mission in India is "actively working" to accommodate as many student visa applicants as possible in July and August, and facilitating their legitimate travel remained a top priority for it, a senior American diplomat said on Sunday.

Don Heflin, the Minister Counselor for Consular Affairs at the US embassy, also said that the US-bound students will not require any proof of COVID-19 vaccination to enter the country. They will need a negative report of their COVID-19 test taken within 72 hours prior to their departure.

There has been growing anxiety among a sizeable number of Indian students aspiring to fly to the US for higher studies in view of certain restrictions in getting visa appointments due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The embassy will start giving visa interview slots for Indian students from Monday.

"We recognise the stress and anxiety this has caused to students and their families, and we are actively working to accommodate as many student visa applicants as possible in July and August. Facilitating legitimate student travel to the United States remains a top priority for the US Mission to India," Heflin told PTI in an interview.

The official was asked about the rising uncertainty among the Indian students wanting to travel to the US, which had imposed fresh travel restrictions in May. "Students returning to academic programmes that resume on or after August 1 may travel to the United States up to 30 days before the programme resumes. There is no National Interest

Exception required in this situation," he said. "We recommend continuing students discuss their specific resumption plans with their respective universities to develop a travel timeline," Heflin said.

The National Interest Exceptions (NIE) allow travel to the US for persons whose entry is considered of national interest.

"We intend to start an intensive two months of interviewing student visa applicants on July 1. We will plan to open as many appointments as we can safely accommodate, based on local pandemic conditions across India," Heflin said.

"Student visa applicants do not need an expedited appointment to schedule their visa interview. On June 14, we will open July and August appointments for



students," he added. Asked about apprehensions relating to vaccination, the official said proof of vaccination is not required to enter the United States.

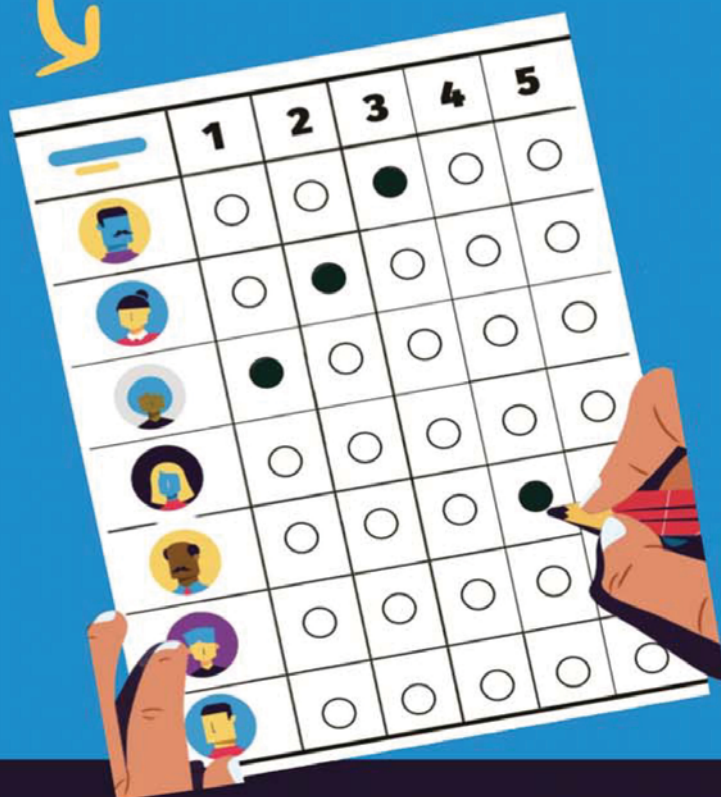
"Please note that proof of a negative COVID-19 test result, taken within 72 hours of your flight's departure, is required to board a flight and for entry into the United States.

"While proof of vaccination is not required to enter the United States, individual schools or institutions may

set their own requirements. The US education system operates independently from the federal government, and students should consult closely with their host institution to ensure compliance with individual vaccination requirements," he added. Heflin said there are more than 4,500 accredited universities in the US that operate autonomously, and the policy adopted by one school for its students and teaching community may not be the same as that for another one.

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IIT Madras Alumni Contribute \$2M For Covid Relief Efforts

IIT Madras Alumni in India and abroad have donated more than US\$ 2 Million towards Covid relief efforts in India.

(Insider Bureau)-Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras Alumni in India and abroad have donated more than US\$ 2 Million towards Covid relief efforts in India that are being coordinated by their Alma Mater. IIT Madras is using a phased approach for deployment to ensure a high impact.

The fundraising was coordinated by the office of Alumni and Corporate Relations (ACR), IIT Madras, in association with IIT Madras Alumni Association of North America and IITM Foundation in the US.

Elaborating about these efforts

from IIT Madras Alumni, Anand Rajaraman, a partner at a Silicon Valley-based Venture Capital firm Rocketship VC and an IIT Madras alumnus, said, "It is the duty of the Indian diaspora to rally and help the country get through these darkest hours. As a Chennai boy, I am grateful and proud that the IIT Madras Alumni network has mobilized to help Chennai and Tamil Nadu with medical equipment and supplies to fill critical gaps and save thousands of lives."

Professor Bhaskar Ramamurthi, Director, IIT Madras, handed over 200 Oxygen concentrators.

Further, Dr Jane Prasad,

Registrar, IIT Madras, handed over 74 BiPAP Units to Chennai Corporation Officials recently.

IIT Madras Alumni have also donated 200 Oxygen Concentrators (5 litres each) to the Telangana government.

Elaborating on their efforts, Kamal Duggirala, Chairman IITM Foundation-US, said, "It has been an amazing experience to contribute to this campaign with fellow alumni from IIT Madras. So many people stepped forward to source equipment, raise funds and ensure delivery of the equipment. It is gratifying to know that we could make a difference at a very challenging



time in India." N Alamelu, Secretary, IIT Madras Alumni Charitable Trust, Chennai, added, "Through this donation, our (IIT Madras) Alumni would like to say that 'while we may be separated by physical distance, our thoughts and support are always with you. We are with you'." Besides these efforts, IIT

Madras has formed a Covid Relief Fund to support students and faculty who are in distress due to the medical exigencies caused by the pandemic. In the last financial year, IIT Madras raised as much as Rs 96 lakh to cater to the Covid relief requirements of students and employees of IIT Madras.

Rise Of Modern Africa A "Long Awaited Expectation": S Jaishankar



S Jaishankar made the comments during the inauguration of the renovated Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Library in the prestigious University of Nairobi.

(Insider Bureau)-The rise of modern Africa is a "long awaited expectation", External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Monday, underlining that the decisions made by the international community will be really global only when the

continent's voice is adequately heard and reform made in the leading bodies like the UN Security Council.

S Jaishankar said that both as solidarity and a strategy, India stands with Africa. "Within our capacities, we have partnered

with as much a large heart as with an open mind. Your priorities guide our initiatives," he said.

S Jaishankar made the comments during the inauguration of the renovated Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Library in the prestigious University of Nairobi. He arrived in Kenya on Saturday on a three-day visit to strengthen India's relations with the major East African country.

"The rise of modern Africa is not just a noble sentiment, it is a

long-awaited expectation, even a profound calculation. It is only when this continent of more than a billion people takes its rightful place, that a full diversity of our planet will find proper expression. "It is then that we can justifiably declare that the world is truly multi polar. Decisions made by the international community will be really global only when Africa's voice is adequately heard. And that must happen most of all by reform in leading bodies like the UN Security

Council where today India and Kenya have seats as non-permanent members for two years," he said.

"As UNSC members currently serving together, we have taken our closeness onto the larger global stage," S Jaishankar said in a tweet. During the event, S Jaishankar said that this is also a time to reflect on the larger significance of the relationship between India and Kenya. "Real partnerships are those that promote development and build capacities. India's record speaks for itself," he tweeted, adding that the post-Covid era warrants deeper cooperation.

"India's association with this university goes back decades and the very memory of Mahatma Gandhi was meant to underline our strong solidarity. It also reminds us of the Kenyans with Indian heritage who have contributed so much for this university's growth and success," he said. The minister said that the sentiment has not diminished in the decades that have passed but has taken the form of practical South-South cooperation of which this project is one small example.

Objectionable Content Relating To Hindu Gods Removed: Instagram Tells High Court

(Insider Bureau)-Instagram has informed the Delhi High Court that it removed certain objectionable content relating to Hindu gods and goddesses posted by a user on its platform. Justice Rekha Palli also issued notice and sought response of Facebook and Instagram on a plea seeking direction to implement Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Ethics Code) Rules 2021

in its true letter and spirit. The court was informed by senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, representing Facebook which owns Instagram, that the content has already been removed and assured that keeping in view the grievance raised by the petitioner, the respondents will not disseminate the copies of the petition to any unrelated third party. He also submitted that a Grievance Officer has already

been appointed by Facebook under the new IT Rules, and the person concerned will also function in the same capacity for Instagram. The court also issued notice and sought response of the Centre on a prayer that the government and the social media networks be directed to discharge their executive, statutory and all other obligations in relation to the IT Rules without any delay and listed the matter for further

hearing on August 16 before the regular bench. Petitioner Aditya Singh Deshwal submitted that while using Instagram, he found highly obnoxious or objectionable posts put up by a user named as 'Islam Ki Sherni' and that the content uploaded showed abusive language written about Hindu gods and goddesses along with their vulgar representation in the form of cartoons and graphics.

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Amit Shah Meets MPs Amid Cabinet Expansion Buzz. Feedback, Say Sources

Amit Shah had met MPs from Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujarat and some other states on Saturday and Sunday at his residence.

(News Agencies)-Union home minister Amit Shah's meeting with groups of BJP MPs, which generated speculation about a cabinet expansion, was part of an ongoing feedback exercise on the work of the government, Covid situation and other issues, sources said. Over the last five days, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had also held meetings with the ministers along with BJP chief JP Nadda.

Mr Shah had met MPs from Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujarat and some other states on Saturday and Sunday at his residence. Around

30 MPs and some ministers had visited him over the weekend.

Sources said political activities and physical meetings have resumed as the second wave of Covid has receded. The focus of the meetings this time is on the situation in the MPs' constituencies, the handling of Covid and their performance during the pandemic, and the grievances of the people. Also any reshuffle in the ministry is usually preceded by appraisal and stock taking.

Over the last weeks, there has been talk of cabinet expansion with 28 berths remaining vacant. One was vacated by the death

of Lok Janshakti Party chief Ram Vilas Paswan, who was in charge of the Food and Public Distribution portfolio.

At present, there are 21 Cabinet ministers, nine ministers of state with independent charge, and 23 ministers of state besides PM Modi.

An expansion is also expected to settle political tensions within the allies and giving due importance to states where the BJP came to power in assembly elections over the last two years. From Bihar, Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal United is expecting a cabinet berth. Another seat in the Council of Ministers should



go to Mr Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party. Rewards are also expected in Madhya Pradesh, which came into BJP grasp after the churn in the Congress and changing of camp by Jyotiraditya Scindia with a chunk of his followers. Mr Scindia has already been given a Rajya Sabha seat, but there is speculation about a cabinet berth for him as well. The exception could be Bengal,

where the BJP, while failing to oust Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee from power, won nearly a third of the assembly seats. There is speculation that Bengal BJP chief Dilip Ghosh might get a cabinet berth. Sources said whenever the expansion takes place, Bengal will be given more representation to send a message that it is top on the BJP's priority list.

8 Of "Fraud-To-Phone" Gang Arrested, 300 Phones Seized: Officials

The officials said that 900 mobile phones, 1,000 bank accounts and hundreds of unified payment interface (UPI) and e-commerce IDs of the gang are under the radar.



(News Agencies)-A pan-India "fraud-to-phone" network has been busted by security agencies, which have also arrested eight people and seized nearly 300 new mobile phones bought with stolen funds, officials

said on Tuesday. Moreover, 900 mobile phones, 1,000 bank accounts and hundreds of unified payment interface (UPI) and e-commerce IDs of this gang have been identified and are under investigation.

Nearly 100 bank accounts, and debit and credit cards have been frozen by the security agencies so far, officials said.

In all, eight "fraud-to-phone" (F2P) gang masterminds, including four from Jharkhand, two each from Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, have been arrested and nearly 300 new mobile phones bought with stolen funds seized, a home ministry official said. The operation against the gang has covered 18 states, involving 350 people.

It was carried out by the Union home ministry's cyber safety wing FCORD, the Madhya Pradesh Police and police forces of several other states on specific information.

An official said that a case of cyber fraud of ₹ 6.5 lakh was reported on June 11 by a 78-year-old Udaipur resident on the CyberSafe app run by the home ministry. The F2P caller was operating from Jharkhand.

During investigation, it came to light that funds were directly

credited to three SBI cards, which were used to buy 33 China-made Xiaomi POCO M3 mobile phones from Flipkart.

Within minutes, the addresses of where these were delivered in Balaghat in Madhya Pradesh were identified, and the superintendent of police of Balaghat was informed.

The Madhya Pradesh Police detained the mastermind and all 33 new phones and several more were seized from him, another official said.

Prashant Kishor Out, His Team Gets Mamata Banerjee Contract Till 2026

(News Agencies)-The Trinamool Congress has extended its contract with election strategists I-PAC, or Indian Political Action Committee, to 2026 after a successful partnership saw Mamata Banerjee sweep the April-May Assembly polls and return as Chief Minister of Bengal for a third straight term.

This version of I-PAC, however, will not be led in day-to-day operations by master strategist Prashant Kishor, who guided the Trinamool (and, in Tamil Nadu, the DMK-Congress alliance) to

victory over the BJP (and its southern ally, the AIADMK) and then told NDTV he wanted to "quit".

It will be interesting to see how well I-PAC and its new nine-member leadership team can function without Mr Kishor, and how efficiently it can win elections for Trinamool and its other clients.

The new contract says I-PAC will be involved in all state elections - panchayat and local body.

The contract extension will run till the next round of Assembly

elections in Bengal, by which time key states, including UP, Gujarat and Karnataka, and the country would have also held elections.

It comes a little over a week after senior Trinamool leader Partha Chatterjee told reporters the Trinamool is planning on "expanding the organisation outside Bengal".

The party's new General Secretary - Abhishek Banerjee - made similar comments after his promotion; Mr Banerjee, who is Chief Minister Mamata

Banerjee's nephew, was key in bringing Mr Kishor on board to mastermind the Trinamool's Bengal campaign.

The contract also follows a meeting between Prashant Kishor and NCP chief Sharad Pawar in Mumbai last week. Officially it was a trip to thank Mr Pawar for supporting Ms Banerjee. There was speculation the meeting had a larger context - one related to the 2024 election and talk of an opposition leader - buzz suggests Ms Banerjee - challenging Prime Minister

Narendra Modi. Backed by Mr Kishor and the I-PAC, Ms Banerjee won 213 of 292 seats despite the BJP mounting a no-holds barred, and often vitriolic campaign, to win power in a state it has never ruled.

The Chief Minister hailed her latest win, telling NDTV it meant "the BJP can be defeated. At the end of the day it is a democracy and it is people's choice that matter." She was, however, more reserved about the possibility of emerging as that joint opposition candidate.

Chirag Paswan Removed As Party Chief By Rebels. He Makes It LJP vs LJP

(News Agencies)-Soon after his removal, Chirag Paswana retaliated by "expelling" uncle Pashupati Kumar Paras and four other MPs who have revolted against him, making it a fight between two factions of the LJP.

Chirag Paswan, isolated in his party by a coup led by his uncle, was removed as Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) president today in an "emergency meeting" of rebel MPs who are now calling the shots. Soon after the announcement, he retaliated by "expelling" uncle Pashupati Kumar Paras and four other MPs who have revolted against him, making it a fight between two

factions of the LJP. Chirag Paswan's supporters blackened posters at the LJP office in Delhi, which doubles up as Pashupati Paras's home, and tried to take over the building.

Chirag Paswan was removed as national president of LJP on the principle of "One Man, One Post", said the rebels, adding that he held three. According to sources, the rebels intend to strip him of every position of power he has held since he took over from his father and LJP founder Ram Vilas Paswan.

According to the Paras group, Suraj Bhan will function as working president until a new president is elected and by the

end of this week, Pashupati Kumar Paras's takeover of his brother's party will be complete. Chirag Paswan will find tougher than his uncle, given that five of the six LJP Lok Sabha MPs have revolted and he is the sixth.

Yesterday, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla accepted Pashupati Paras as the new leader of the LJP in the house, virtually giving a seal of approval on his accession. If the feud goes to court, the Speaker's endorsement will strengthen the rebels' claim.

Mr Paras, the younger brother of Ram Vilas Paswan and the lead player in the coup launched with help from Bihar Chief Minister



Nitish Kumar and the BJP, had earlier snubbed his nephew's attempts at reconciliation. Yesterday, he refused to meet Chirag Paswan, who waited at his doorstep for an hour and 45 minutes. Paswan Junior posted an emotional tweet today and

shared a letter he had written to his uncle in March. I tried very hard to keep the party formed by my father and my family united, but I failed. Party is like a mother and we must never betray our mother. People are above all else in a democracy.

Court Seeks Police Statement In Lakshadweep Filmmaker's Bail Plea In Sedition Case

An FIR was registered against filmmaker Aisha Sultana on sedition charges based on a complaint that she said in a TV debate that the Centre deployed COVID as a "bio weapon" against people of Lakshadweep.



(News Agencies)-The Kerala High Court on Tuesday directed the Kavaratti Police of Lakshadweep to file a statement in the anticipatory bail petition filed by filmmaker Aisha Sultana in the sedition case against her.

Justice Ashok Menon heard the matter today and posted it for further hearing on June 17.

An FIR was registered against the filmmaker by the Kavaratti police on sedition charges based on a complaint by BJP's

Lakshadweep unit president C Abdul Khader Haji against Ms Sultana for stating in a TV debate that the Centre deployed COVID as a "bio weapon" against people of Lakshadweep.

The bail plea states, "I made the "bio-weapon" remark in the context of criticizing the administration relaxing the COVID-19 protocol, which led to a sharp increase of pandemic cases in the island, where there had been not even a single COVID case till January 2021.

Lakshadweep is seeing an exponential rise in COVID-19 cases due to the relaxations in the quarantine protocol, and it is in this context that the alleged remarks were made."

The plea further said that the criticism on political issues does not constitute the offence of sedition under Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). "The applicant had only intended to say that it was due to the apathetic approach and

reforms of the new administrator that serious threat is being caused to the lives of the people of the Island and had absolutely no intention of exciting disaffection towards the Government," the plea reads.

The plea said that the offences under section 153B of IPC also will not stand against the applicant as the words spoken is not prejudicial to national integration or causing disharmony or feelings of enmity or hatred or ill-will.

Priyanka Gandhi Writes To Yogi Adityanath, Demands CBI Probe In Journalist Death

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra told Yogi Adityanath that journalist Sulabh Srivastava died under "mysterious circumstances" on the night of June 13 in Pratapgarh district while he was returning home after news coverage.

(News Agencies)-Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Tuesday wrote to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to demand a CBI probe into the "mysterious" death of a journalist who had recently reported on the liquor mafia.

The Congress general secretary also demanded that action be taken against the "nexus of liquor mafia and administration" which she said had taken root across the state.

Journalist Sulabh Srivastava died under "mysterious circumstances" on the night of

June 13 in Pratapgarh district while he was returning home after news coverage, Priyanka Gandhi told Adityanath.

A day earlier, on June 12, Srivastava had written a letter to the additional director general of police, Prayagraj zone, expressing concern about his and his family's safety and stating that the local liquor mafia was angry with his news report on illicit liquor, she said.

In her letter in Hindi, she also appealed for immediate financial help to Srivastava's family. On Monday, Uttar Pradesh police

registered a case of murder in the case. Srivastava, who working for a private news channel and had recently reported on the liquor mafia, died in what appeared to be a road accident. According to reports, he was found dead near a brick kiln and had severe injury marks on his head, said the Congress general secretary in-charge of Uttar Pradesh. "I request you to get a CBI inquiry done in this matter. Action should be taken against the nexus of liquor mafia and administration which has taken roots across the state," Priyanka Gandhi said in her letter to the Chief



Minister. There have been reports of deaths due to spurious liquor from many places in Uttar Pradesh. From Aligarh to Pratapgarh, scores have died due to its

consumption, she said. In such a situation, the fact that a journalist fears the liquor mafia suggests that the rule of law in the state has lost its supremacy, Priyanka Gandhi alleged.

Sukhbir Badal Detained Amid Huge Protest Outside Amarinder Singh's House

Sukhbir Singh Badal Detained: The BSP's Punjab president Jasvir Singh Garhi also joined the massive demonstration, days after the two parties forged an alliance for the state elections due next year.

(News Agencies)- Shiromani Akali Dal chief Sukhbir Singh Badal was detained this afternoon as he led a huge protest outside Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh's home in Mohali to demand the sacking of Balbir Singh Sidhu, the state's Health Minister.

The BSP's Punjab president Jasvir Singh Garhi also joined the massive demonstration, days after the two parties forged

an alliance for the state elections due next year.

High political drama unfolded as hundreds of protesters - carrying party flags - marched together despite heavy police barricading. Water cannons were also used on demonstrators. Former Punjab minister and Akali Dal leader Bikram Singh Majithia was also detained.

The Akali Dal chief, 58, has sought a CBI probe into the

alleged irregularities in the sale of vaccines and procurement of medical kits for COVID-19 patients.

The opposition is targeting the Amarinder Singh government over various issues just months ahead of the assembly elections.

Mayawati on Saturday said the alliance between her party and the SAD, a former BJP ally, will "start a new chapter" in the state's politics as the two parties joined hands after 27 years. Attacking Amarinder Singh, she said, "While most people are suffering due to the corrupt rule of the Congress, women, Dalits and farmers are the worst-hit. To free all of them, it's important to make this alliance a success."

The Akali Dal broke ties with the BJP last year over the



contentious farm laws, which led to massive protests. The BSP will contest the seats earlier assigned to the BJP. Sukhbir Badal has been relentlessly attacking the state government.

Earlier this month, he demanded a high court probe into the "diversion of vaccines to private players at hefty margins to create artificial shortage", calling it a "scam".

Later, Punjab government

withdrew an order providing "one-time limited vaccine doses to 18-44 age group population through private hospitals".

The protests also come at a time when the Congress is handling infighting in the state. A panel last week recommended that Navjot Singh Sidhu, Amarinder Singh's challenger, should be suitably accommodated even though Captain Singh should continue to lead

Ashok Gehlot Demands Probe Into Alleged Land Deal Scam In Ayodhya



(News Agencies)- Stating that the news of the alleged embezzlement of donations collected for the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya has shaken the faith of people, Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Tuesday demanded that the Centre should investigate the matter and punish the guilty. In a series of tweets, Mr Gehlot stated that the people of Rajasthan had contributed the most to the construction of the temple, and devotees across the country are deeply hurt by the "financial manipulation by the trust" formed for its construction.

"The people of Rajasthan had contributed the most in the construction of Ram temple with faith, but the news of embezzlement of donations at the very beginning of the construction work has shaken the faith of the common man. No one is able to believe how the land price went from ? 2 crore to ? 18 crore in minutes," he tweeted the Rajasthan Chief

Minister. He further said, "Pink stone was being sent to Ram temple after illegal mining from Banshi Paharpur in the state. Received legality in a legal way, which we are satisfied with."

"But in this holy work, devotees across the country are deeply hurt by the immoral activities of financial manipulation by the trust formed for the construction of the temple. No one could have imagined that even in a holy work like temple construction, people would start committing scams," said Mr Gehlot in another tweet.

"The central government should immediately get this matter investigated so that the faith and trust of the people are maintained and the culprits of playing with the faith of the countrymen can be punished," he added.

Mr Gehlot's remarks came a day after the Congress demanded a Supreme Court-monitored probe into the matter of alleged irregularity in the purchase of land at Ayodhya by the Ram temple trust.

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Sorry, Biden. Putin Honestly Could Not Care Less. Drone capacity of Pakistan and China alarms India

For a while, it wasn't clear that this week's meeting in Geneva between President Vladimir Putin of Russia and President Biden would go ahead. Mr. Biden, seeking his first encounter as president with Mr. Putin, made the invitation in mid-April; but it took until the end of May for the summit to be confirmed.

Despite Mr. Putin's experience with American presidents - he's dealt with four, across two decades - the Kremlin, Russian officials said, was considering the risk that Mr. Biden would use the meeting to publicly lecture his Russian counterpart on democracy and human rights. The caution seemed reasonable. After all, the new American administration, especially by comparison with its predecessor, devotes considerable attention to promoting human rights across the globe. And Mr. Biden set out his stall when he agreed in an interview in March that Mr. Putin is a "killer." Yet the Kremlin eventually accepted the invitation. Why? Besides the chance to de-escalate tensions, there's one very good reason: Mr. Putin has nothing to fear from Mr. Biden. Enduringly popular and freshly buoyed by the quashing of the opposition, Russia's president has ample cause to feel secure.

Whatever the American president might say in Geneva - or his administration do, by way of sanctions - will not affect Mr. Putin's rule in Russia. The first impediment for Mr. Biden is straightforward: His message will not get a good airing. Television, dominated by channels run or controlled by the state, remains the main source of news for three-quarters of Russians, so most people in Russia will see the American president through the Kremlin's eyes. Independent media, recently curtailed by the authorities declaring several prominent outlets to be "foreign agents," won't be able to redress the imbalance.

Yet even without this media filter, Mr. Putin has no reason to fear any aspersions Mr. Biden might cast his way. Though the president's popularity has waned a touch since its peak in 2014, he retains the trust and approval of over 60 percent of Russians, according to Levada Center, an independent and highly respected polling organization.

This might be more inertia and apathy than a conscious political affiliation, but the result is the same. The opposition can only dream about such ratings: Support for the most prominent opposition leader, Aleksei Navalny, doesn't rise above 20 percent. The blame for that can't be placed squarely on the Kremlin. Though the opposition is hampered by a range of state restrictions, the fact remains that opposition rallies do not attract significant numbers of participants. The last big protest in support of Mr. Navalny - one of the largest displays of dissent in the past decade - brought between 51,000 and 120,000 people to 109 cities across the country on April 21, according to

opposition outlets. But even if you take the higher number, that amounts to less than 0.1 percent of the country's population. Protesting is a minority interest.

And that's not just because Russian authorities have repeatedly demonstrated their willingness to brutally suppress gatherings. Many people unhappy with life in Russia stay away from protests because they don't associate themselves with the organizers and don't believe they can bring about change from the street. In a recent survey by the Levada Center, only 21 percent of respondents said they would consider going to a rally in support of economic demands, and even fewer, 16 percent, said they'd go in support of political demands. There are demographic divides - young people are generally more eager to protest - but that doesn't really change the picture. What's more, those ready to actively challenge Mr. Putin's rule have been repressed.

Mr. Navalny, who returned to the country in January in the hope of setting off a substantive movement to oppose Mr. Putin, was imprisoned with a two-and-a-half-year sentence. Many of his allies were jailed, while others fled the country. And last week, his organization, the Anti-Corruption Foundation, whose activities were already suspended, was officially labeled "extremist" - effectively preventing its activists from running in future elections and further intimidating supporters. It's not just Mr. Navalny. Another opposition network - Open Russia, founded by a former oil tycoon and now exiled Kremlin critic, Mikhail Khodorkovsky - recently announced its closure, hoping to protect its coordinators. That didn't stop the arrest on May 31 of one of the group's executives, Andrey Pivovarov, who now faces up to six years in prison. Fearing the same fate, another prominent opposition figure, Dmitry Gudkov, fled to Ukraine in early June.

Ahead of September's legislative elections, the authorities have disbanded the opposition and docked the media, closing down the space for dissent. But a majority of Russians, consumed by the concerns of everyday life and long inured to Mr. Putin's rule, don't seem to care much. With them, Mr. Biden's message about the inviolability of human rights and the sanctity of democracy - both of which are slipping away in Russia, to no general uproar - is likely to ring hollow. Even among Russians who actively support democracy, the rule of law and human rights, Mr. Biden won't find much support. Over the past decades, many Russian liberals have become disillusioned with the West, especially the United States. For some, America's image started to crack with the bombing of Yugoslavia and the war in Iraq.

For others, it was the revelations of WikiLeaks and Edward Snowden, which brought to light a host of America's covert operations and dirty dealings, that soured feelings of admiration.

India's relationship with its neighbours - Pakistan and China has been confrontational for decades now. The ongoing conflicts with these countries have kept the Indian military officials concerned.

Moreover, the drone strength of these two neighbouring countries has made India worried. If and when the unmanned surveillance capabilities of these two countries increase, it can prove it to be a major threat. There is enough reason for India and its allies to be alarmed by this development. The employment of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or drones is a revolution in the making. Drone warfare is one of the most critical combat-strategy developments of this century. Compared to traditional warfare, drones are now considered as a powerful, effective and low-cost alternative weapon. Consequently, countries worldwide are in a race to acquire the most advanced armed drone fleet.

After the 9/11 attacks, the US was the first country to deploy Predator armed drones in Afghanistan. Since then, many countries like Israel, Turkey and China have been producing and exporting drones and UAVs. Pakistan has expressed deep interest in acquiring TB2 drones from Turkey. It has already received 50 Wing Loong II armed drones from China. The Bayraktar TB2 armed drones from Turkey are now purchased by countries like Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Qatar and Libya.

The substantial Turkish Bayraktar TB2 and Israeli Kamikaze drones have allowed Azerbaijan to decimate the Armenian ground forces and Russian air defence

systems. China is a significant player in the global drone market and exports its drones to other countries for military purposes. India's neighbour, Pakistan is now being armed by China with advanced attack drones. There are reports of the two countries negotiating on joint production of some models. There are now several instances of Pakistani drones entering Indian airspace.

The incidents are going to increase with time for sure. In the war between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh, we have clearly seen the decisive advantage attack drones could bring at any battlefield. Drone strikes by Azerbaijan targeted Armenian troops, destroying military installations and tanks. The air defence systems and artillery tilted the balance of the war in favour of the Turkey-backed country.

The battle over Nagorno-Karabakh was unequivocal proof of the strategic advantage provided by armed drones to the militaries possessing them. India is seriously concerned about China supplying arms to its neighbours. China has provided Pakistan with a range of weapons, which include weaponized UAVs. India has signed two critical pacts with the US - COMCASA in 2018 and BECA in 2020 to lease or buy advanced attack drones from the US. The Indian Navy has also equipped itself with two Predator drones leased from the American firm General Atomics. The MQ-9B Sea Guardian drones will be deployed for long-range missions over the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal.



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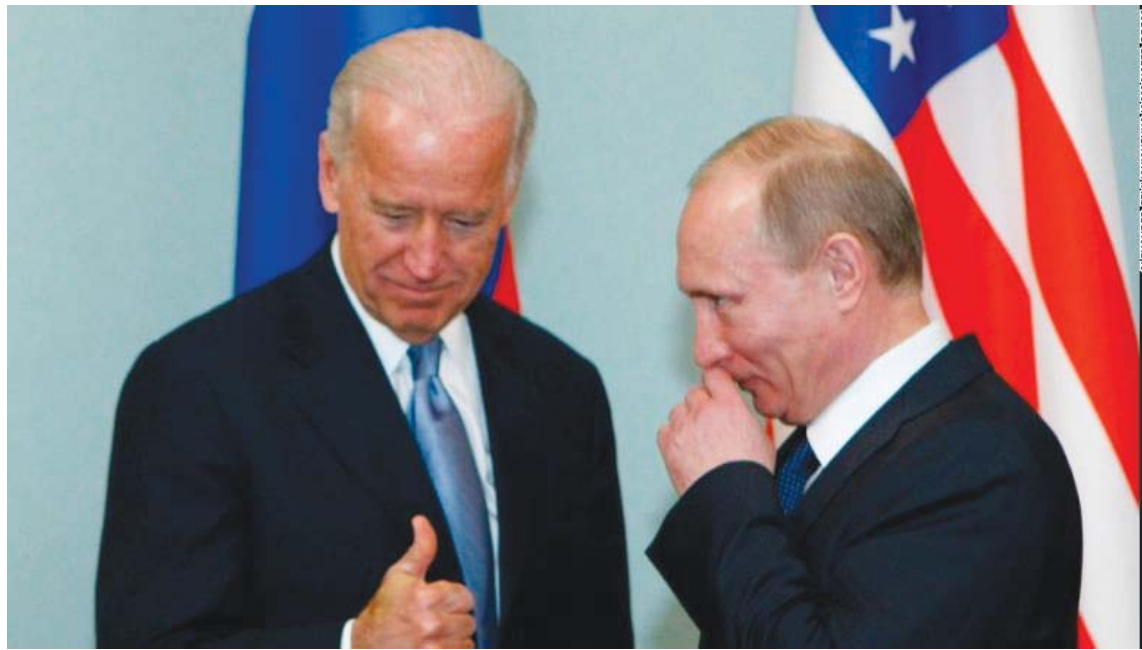
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Biden's historic opportunity with Putin

Over the past several weeks, many Americans have become intimately familiar with the national security threat of ransomware. The Colonial Pipeline hack knocked out a major pipeline that supplies fuel to nearly half of the East Coast, sparking panic-buying across the country, and the JBS hack brought down the world's largest meat supplier, driving up meat prices. This was a wake-up call for many Americans -- if our gas stations and grocery stores aren't safe from international cybergangs, what else is vulnerable? How much worse can these ransomware attacks get? The answer -- much worse. And it comes with potentially deadly consequences. What if the next target is a natural gas pipeline in the dead of winter? Or hackers manage to infiltrate our electrical grid or threaten our water supply?

Cyberexperts estimate that the US suffered 65,000 ransomware attacks last year. FBI Director Chris Wray compared the recent spate of ransomware attacks to 9/11, and the Justice Department is now elevating the investigation of ransomware to the level of terrorism.

According to statements by US officials, the criminals who targeted Colonial Pipeline and JBS are likely operating from



inside Russia (Editor's Note: The Kremlin has denied any responsibility). Ultimately, President Vladimir Putin needs to be held responsible, since we know that nothing significant happens in Russia without the former KGB officer's knowledge. As such, President Joe Biden must use Wednesday's summit with Putin to confront this dire national security challenge head-on by making ransomware a priority item on his agenda. Biden must make it clear to Putin that responsible states do not allow criminal gangs to operate freely from their soil. International law is unambiguous -- nations have a responsibility to police the

criminal hackers using their networks. At best, Putin and his cronies continue to willfully turn a blind eye to these attacks. At worst, these ransomware gangs operate with the explicit blessing of the Kremlin. Either is unacceptable.

Biden's message must be simple and straightforward. If cybercriminals continue to extort our schools, hospitals, food supply chains and energy systems, we will find them. And if countries continue to shelter rogue hackers, they will pay the price.

These hacks cannot become our new normal.

If Putin does not take decisive action to stop these

ransomware attacks immediately, Biden must lay out the concrete steps the United States and our allies are prepared to take in response, such as shutting off access to the international financial system for Russian companies that facilitate ransomware. After all, Russian cybercriminals rely on Russian financiers, Russian telecommunications companies and Russian IT firms to carry out their campaigns of destruction. The United States must lead an effort in close coordination with our allies to update -- and enforce -- norms in cyberspace, including a norm against letting one's territory and infrastructure be used to conduct criminal

activity.

We are at our strongest when we work in concert with our allies. To begin shifting the Russians' calculus, Biden should rally a coalition of like-minded states, who seek to shape international behavior in cyberspace, deny benefits to cybercriminals and impose costs on the states that host them. The G7's Carbis Bay Communiqué, which specifically called on Russia "to identify, disrupt, and hold to account those within its borders who conduct ransomware attacks," is a good start, but we need to start hitting back to show Putin that we mean business.

We are working to empower the State Department to fulfill this vision by passing the Cyber Diplomacy Act to create a US cyber ambassador to restore our leadership on the world stage. Only with a broad, far reaching international coalition can we put an end to these devastating crimes against our homeland.

Biden has a historic opportunity this week to take a stand against the hackers that continue to torment our nation. We need to address the ransomware crisis before it's too late.

Our national security depends on it.

Galwan: One year later

There is greater strategic clarity about China, but tactical ambiguity doesn't help. Galwan is a reminder that India cannot let its guard down on its northern borders.

June 15 marks a year of the Galwan clash, the bloodiest encounter between India and China at the border in over four decades. 20 Indian armed forces personnel, and an unknown number of People's Liberation Army (PLA) personnel were killed as India bravely sought to repel Chinese encroachment. China had already breached all border-related understandings between the two countries when it crossed the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in May. But with Galwan, the entire framework of maintenance of peace and tranquility at the border was

shattered. The understanding that India and China would proceed to deepen other elements of their bilateral relationship, and agree to disagree on the border, broke down comprehensively. There was renewed nationalist consciousness on the question of Chinese aggression, with the Indian street and the Indian State realising that it was time to confront the question of China's designs. Galwan introduced strategic clarity in India. To be sure, China is a close neighbour. India wants friendly relations, not a conflict. There remains room

for deep developmental cooperation, equitable economic exchange, even political cooperation. And New Delhi's establishment is acutely conscious of the power asymmetry that exists between the two countries and has no desire to be a frontline State in a new geopolitical battle. But Galwan showed harmony cannot come at the cost of territorial integrity and sovereignty. India attempted a mix of four measures - economic restrictions on Chinese companies; international opinion-building and diplomatic mobilisation about



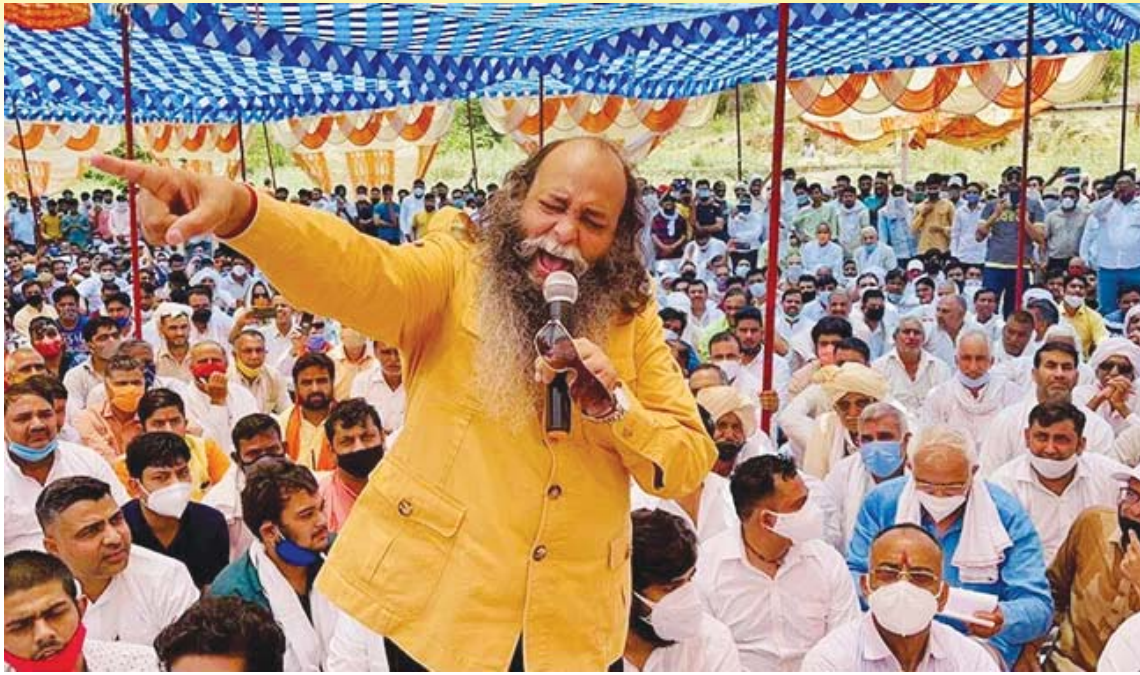
China's actions, including giving momentum to Quad; acquiring a military edge by occupying the Kailash heights (in August 2020); and constant bilateral negotiations with Beijing across the military and diplomatic domain - to drive home the message that restoring status quo ante was essential. This strategy partially succeeded

when China agreed to pull back in the Pangong Tso area, and there was both a degree of de-escalation and demobilisation. But while there is greater strategic clarity, it has not translated into consistent policy. There have been attempts to underplay the extent of Chinese aggression, especially at the political level.

To Counter Haryana Farmer Anger, Hate Politics At Mahasabha

On June 11, the BJP in Haryana, under the signature of Pradesh General Secretary Advocate Ved Pal, released the list of party spokespersons for the state. Third on the list was the name of Karni Sena President Suraj Pal Amu. Just ten days earlier, on May 30, this gentleman had organised a "Hindu Mahapanchayat" at Indri village in Nuh. Its declared purpose was to demand the release of "innocents" arrested for the murder of a young Muslim called Asif in the neighbouring village. The meeting was in violation of prohibitory orders under Section 144 and the Disaster Management Act in force throughout the state on account of the pandemic. Amu led the plethora of hate speeches targeting the minority community made in the meeting. His speech is available on YouTube, provocative, justifying the murder and warning of further violence. He describes all Muslims as Pakistani agents and asks if it is a crime to murder them. The man should be in jail under the relevant clauses of the law; instead, he has been rewarded by the BJP with a post as party spokesman. Also present at the Mahapanchayat was a man called Naresh Kumar, the main accused in the lynching and murder of 15-year-old Junaid in 2017. It was a horrific case when four young men travelling on a local train from Delhi to Ballabgarh, identified through their appearance as being Muslim, were harassed, abused, beaten; then, one of them, Junaid, the youngest, was stabbed several times and thrown off the train. Naresh Kumar is out on bail granted by the Punjab and Haryana High Court. He made an equally toxic communal hate speech in which he said that whether those arrested in the Asif murder case are guilty or not, they must be defended as Hindus.

The BJP MLA from the neighbouring constituency of Sohna is on record defending the Mahapanchayat, whitewashing its open communal nature and describing it as a demand for justice against the arrest of innocents. In fact, our own findings, after we met Asif's family in their village, showed that his murder, unlike the



lynching of Junaid, was not a communally-driven hate crime. There had been earlier disputes between this gang and Asif which are on record. We also found that the gang has several criminal cases against it filed earlier on the complaints of villagers who are Hindus. The police acted on the identification of the murderers by an eyewitness, the victim's cousin, who was also badly beaten and left for dead. 12 of the 14 men named were arrested. So in the first instance, the police acted as they should.

The so-called Hindu Mahapanchayat was called in the wake of these arrests to strike many targets. The first was to get the accused released. The big mobilization,

the presence of men with important political connections, the backing of those in power had its effect. Within a few days of the Mahapanchayat, four of the arrested men, identified by the eyewitness as being among the killers, were discharged by the police. Tasneem, the grieving widow of Asif, said "What justice can we expect when even before the case goes to court, my husband's killers are released?" Many of the villagers from Hindu communities were sympathetic to Asif's family and had joined in their mourning. The only way to break this solidarity was to use the Hindu-Muslim communal card and this is what the Hindu Mahapanchayat aimed to do. The hate speeches had an

immediate effect. The solidarity visits to the family ceased. When we reached the house, the mourners were all Muslims.

The village itself has a mixture of castes and communities. It so happens that the accused all belong to one caste. The gang was powerful and feared by others. In a state where caste identities and alliances play a crucial role in political domination, the ruling party has been trying to build an overarching Hindu identity even while maintaining sub-identities based on caste. The Karni Sena itself started out as a platform for Rajputs. It shot into notoriety with its violent campaign against the film Padmaavat; its chief Suraj Pal Amu had declared a reward

for the beheading of the director and main actor of that film. The Sena has now adopted a cross-caste Hindu identity and the Mahapanchayat in Indri was part of this effort, clearly with the support of the ruling party.

The poster for the Mahapanchayat reads: "Pehle dharm ko bachao, jatiya apne aap bach jayenge" - first save religion, then castes will automatically get saved. This approach is of course intrinsic to the Hindutva project. But now this project has the dangerous dimension of bringing accused killers, who may belong to different castes, in crimes against the minority community, on to one platform to intensify communal polarisation. The accused in Junaid's murder belongs to a different caste from those arrested in Asif's case. His presence symbolizes this cynical new method adopted by the Hindutva organisations.

Last year there was another type of Mahapanchayat held in this region of Haryana - a Mahapanchayat not of Hindus, nor of Muslim, but of kisans. Across communities and castes, thousands of kisans had gathered, united in their opposition to the farm laws being imposed by the Modi Government. That struggle continues today. Elected leaders of the BJP, including the Chief Minister, have faced social boycotts and angry crowds of farmers.

From Bengal, a lesson in political mobilisation

On Friday, Mukul Roy - a formidable leader from the Trinamool Congress (TMC) who shifted to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and played a key role in the party's success in the 2019 elections in the state - returned home to his original party. Mr Roy had not been very active in the assembly elections, and there were murmurs about his discontent as other leaders, including his former party colleague Suvendu Adhikari, got more prominence. There were also whispers about a behind-the-scenes understanding with TMC even before the poll results. But irrespective of when Mr Roy began entertaining ideas of returning to the TMC, his exit is a lesson to all political parties which



attempt a fast track route to political power. Political mobilisation is hard. And it is particularly hard for political forces which may not have a strong base in a particular geography. In its expansion spree post-2014, one of the ways in which the BJP has sought to

offset this disadvantage is by recruiting leaders from entrenched political forces in that geography. This has succeeded in places such as Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur; the party has quickly risen to power in other states such as Tripura. But in larger complex states, importing

outsiders, either through persuasion or threats, comes with its own pitfalls. It adds to the challenge of accommodating these leaders and workers, at the cost of alienating others who may have been loyalists of the party for longer. This tension played out for the BJP in Bengal, where the old and new and very new collided, with an adverse impact on the party's electoral fortunes. The fact is that for political strength to be sustainable, it has to be organic and bottom-up. Otherwise, when the going is not good, those who may not be committed begin looking for alternatives. In its rush to win power across states, the BJP should heed the lesson from Bengal.



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Chirag Paswan Tried To Be Too Clever By Half



over the state. For the PM and his party, the BJP, this meant having two allies who were operating at cross-purposes. Or did it? Chirag Paswan's stand helped the BJP in two ways - it allowed the party more leverage in tough negotiations with Nitish Kumar as a partner; it also allowed BJP leaders who had not been chosen as candidates to seek shelter with Chirag Paswan and contest the election through his party. Overall, the BJP seemed to be in a sweet spot, rather than a tricky one. The fact that neither the PM nor his top aide, Amit Shah, publicly chastised Chirag Paswan in any serious form seemed to support this premise of a secret deal with Nitish Kumar as the target. Chirag Paswan exited the BJP's alliance in Bihar. In the Bihar election, the BJP for the first time in decades emerged as the largest player. Nitish Kumar placed second, but the BJP said it would not waver from its pre-election commitment to his serving as Chief Minister of the alliance. Nevertheless, it was clear Nitish Kumar would have a new boss now - and on a variety of controversies, he seemed to abandon his earlier stated stand in support of the BJP's. Chirag

Paswan won only one seat - and if his real role was to serve as a BJP proxy and cut the votes of Nitish Kumar, he was offered no reward for it by his ally, defying speculation that he would be made a cabinet minister for his contribution. Pashupati Paras has today been effusive in his praise for Nitish Kumar, declaring him a good leader and able administrator. After its Bihar misadventure, the LJP is reportedly refinding its spot in the BJP's national alliance at a time when there's talk of a cabinet reshuffle. The calculation is that Pashupati Paras could get a spot in the cabinet. Suddenly, the man whose career was vastly overshadowed by that of his older brother's stands to make big gains. In 2019, when Ram Vilas Paswan was unwell, he allocated his constituency of Hajipur to Pashupati Paras. Even then, supporters say, Ram Vilas saw Pashupati Paras as more pragmatic and patient than what his son allowed for. Pashupati Paras, supporters say, disapproved of Chirag Paswan's often arrogant behaviour with bureaucrats in his constituency, where his run-ins with officers were frequent. The hostility

between them peaked when, in October last year on a local channel, Pashupati Paras complimented Nitish Kumar on development projects. Chirag Paswan ordered his uncle to meet him at home and warned that his "suspension letter could be typed up immediately." The older man reportedly responded, "From today, your uncle is dead to you." After Pashupati Paras was sacked as Bihar president of the LJP in October, 2019 Prince Raj, who is his nephew and Chirag Paswan's cousin, was given the post. This after Prince Raj's mother, whose sister is married to Pashupati Paras, apparently complained that Chirag Paswan was treating them literally like poor cousins. It isn't just Pashupati Paras who comes out way ahead today. Or Nitish Kumar, who has got his revenge on Chirag Paswan who attacked him at every rally in the Bihar election. As ever, the BJP has managed a major advantage - its leaders say that by shrinking the status of Chirag Paswan, they have progressed in their mission to eventually have direct appeal with Bihar's 6% Paswan population, eliminating the need, in the longer term, for an ally to let them accrue this vote.

The damage report for Chirag Paswan is in - and it's leaving the 38-year-old looking awfully shaky. He's been displaced as the leader of his party by a disgruntled uncle who today reportedly refused to meet him in Delhi. Chirag Paswan is one of six Lok Sabha MPs from his party, the LJP, which was founded by his father, Ram Vilas Paswan. The other five have cast their lot with his uncle, Pashupati Kumar Paras. And have asked that he be recognized as the new leader of the party in parliament in place of Chirag Paswan. In a delicious sign of the online reflecting the offline crisis, the LJP's website was down today, with a message declaring "an internal error". To hand-deliver a new proposal, Chirag Paswan drove today to his uncle's house

in Delhi. A warm welcome was not on offer. He was kept waiting for just under two hours, and then told Pashupati Paras was not available. Chirag Paswan had hoped to sell this deal: that his mother, Reena Paswan, be made party president, and decide on next steps. It's a colossal reining in of Chirag Paswan by family members and party leaders who he allegedly marginalized as he tried to establish himself as a savvy seal-maker in the complex and often treacherous territory of Bihar politics. Late last year, when Bihar voted, he announced that though his allegiance to Prime Minister Narendra Modi was complete, he could not support Nitish Kumar's party, the JD(U). Chirag Paswan said he was putting up candidates against those of Nitish Kumar all

Shed fiscal policy rigidity

Inflation numbers for May - Consumer Price Index (CPI) has crossed the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) threshold of 6% and Wholesale Price Index (WPI) is at an all-time high - have underlined the precarious nature of the ongoing economic recovery

Inflation numbers for May - Consumer Price Index (CPI) has crossed the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) threshold of 6% and Wholesale Price Index (WPI) is at an all-time high - have underlined the precarious nature of the ongoing economic recovery. As the second wave ebbs, and restrictions are eased, economic activity is picking up. But there is a paradox here. The Nomura India Business Resumption Index (NIBRI) jumped to 76 in the week ending June 13. It posted the highest week-on-week increase of 8.1 last week. But consumer confidence continues to be low, especially among the less well-to-do. High inflation at this

moment will put a squeeze on household budgets and, therefore, demand. The burden will be especially severe for the non-rich. A spike in price of essentials hurts even in normal circumstances. These are far from normal times. Labour market conditions are weak. Employment and wage earnings have not recovered to even pre-second wave levels. A large health spending shock during the second wave has destroyed household balance sheets for millions of households. The fiscal policy response ever since the pandemic hit has been largely pro-cyclical. Provisional numbers from the ministry of finance show that gross tax

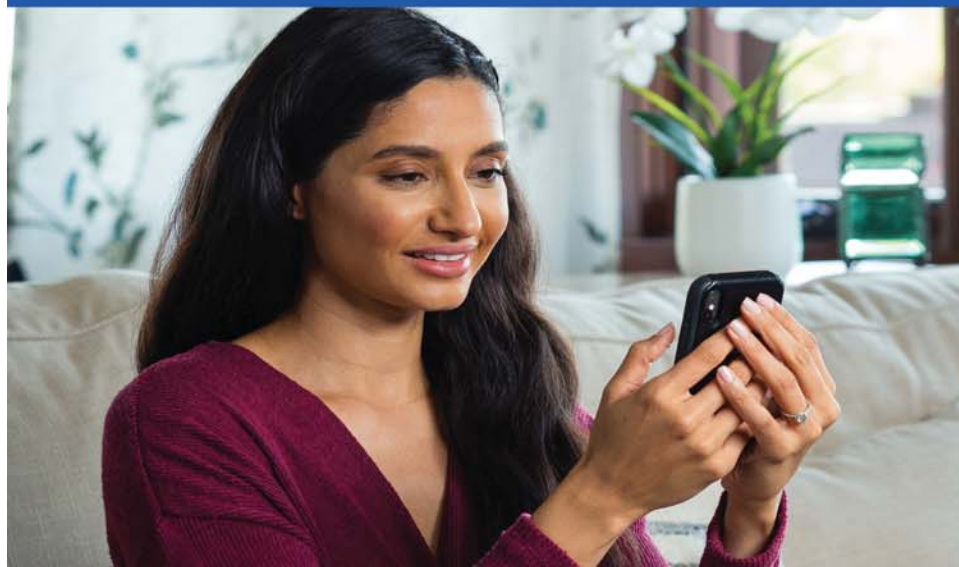
revenue went up in 2020-21 despite a GDP contraction. This was made possible by a sharp increase in taxes on petrol-diesel. Fuel inflation is driving both CPI and WPI, which grew at 11.6% and 37.6%, respectively, in May. Petrol-diesel prices were not as high as they are now, even when crude oil was trading above \$100 per barrel. Brent Crude closed at \$73 per barrel on June 14. The government has justified the continuation of higher duties on the ground that it is essential for revenue mobilisation. But it needs to realise that it is crowding out private spending. It appears that the fiscal policy managers are banking on



monetary policy to bail the economy out. While loan guarantees and cheap credit are instrumental in preventing destruction of productive capital, it cannot generate demand when consumer sentiment is low and companies are saddled with

excess capacity. As inflation rises, RBI will be forced to withdraw the monetary stimulus. It is important to realise that pursuit of fiscal prudence at the moment will only lead to stagflation - low growth and high inflation.

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Rahul Gandhi Has To Take The Job - Or Get Out Of The Way

Jitin Prasada leaving the Congress is good riddance. As good as Jyotiraditya Scindia's exit. They are princelings, born in modern royal political families with fame and privileges offered to them on a platter. Their positions and stature within the Congress were not because of their own talent but because of their fathers'. They take their status for granted; when faced with struggle, then they feel like fish out of water. To fight is not their dharma, to survive is their karma (endeavour), and for that they look for easy alternatives. The Congress now is in dire straits; it needs people from the grassroots who can fight to the finish, who don't owe their existence to their lineage, who are not recognised by their surnames and who are not called Maharaj-Ji by their peers and friends. The Congress lost its ground due to such 'rootless wonders'.

I have no quarrel with the Prasadas and the Scindias of the world. It is undoubtedly a boon to have a great surname, but it's a curse if there is a man like Modi at the helm, who has made it to the top with his personal brilliance, and who knows how to highlight these princelings as the weak spot in the Congress. After

becoming Prime Minister, Modi has methodically seen to it that "dynasty" becomes a condemned word, an abuse. "Hum toh kaamdaar hain, woh naamdaar hain (We are the proletariat, they are the royalty)," he says. The target is the Nehru-Gandhi family, but it attacks the



concept of dynasty. It attacks the feudal set-up of the Indian political system in which a privileged few are allowed to flourish.

The BJP proudly claims that people like Modi and others, climb to the top not because they belong to a particular family but because the BJP is a democratic party, where talent is the only currency. This makes the BJP an aspirational party, where a small worker with a very humble background can aspire to be the party President, Chief Minister, or even the Prime Minister. The

Congress and other regional parties, barring the Left, look different. It's not that 'commoners' have not risen in these parties, but their structure does not seem conducive to the pursuit of individual aspirations.

The Congress, since the demise of Mahatma Gandhi, has not

managed to extricate itself from the overwhelming influence of the Nehru-Gandhi family. After Nehru, the Congress opted for Lal Bahadur Shastri but even then, Nehru's daughter was breathing down his neck and ultimately, the mantle to run the government fell on her lap. During her lifetime, she did not allow others to run the show, and after her tragic death, despite many stalwarts in the party, Rajiv Gandhi was chosen to be Prime Minister. Non-family members like Narasimha Rao or Manmohan Singh took

charge because they had the blessings of the Nehru-Gandhi family. When Narasimha Rao decided to play solo, annoyance from the family was quick and he was removed by Sitaram Kesari, who was also ingloriously replaced by Sonia Gandhi herself. Manmohan Singh survived for ten years, but the secret of his success lay in his non-assertion which did not annoy the family. But that was the time when the BJP was growing, and Modi was not the party supremo.

Modi is not Atal or Advani; he has scant regard or respect for the Gandhis. He is also aware that for the BJP to rule, like the Congress did till the Ayodhya Movement, the Congress must be decimated, and for that, the political disappearance of the family is a necessity. Therefore, he employs all kinds of tricks, right or wrong, to discredit the Nehru-Gandhi brand. They are called anti-nationals, pro-Pakistani, not-rooted-in-India, corrupt and enemies of the Hindu community; criminal cases are thrust on them; the attempt is to portray Rahul as a Pappu, a dynast who is 'incompetent' to the core.

The problem with Rahul Gandhi is that he thinks he is giving Modi

a spirited fight on each and every issue, and that the Congress, sooner rather than later, will be the default choice. He forgets that India has changed, the default setting has been replaced by a new political algorithm. Capturing the mind space of the voter is not a weekend game but is 24x7 live streaming. Dynasts like Jitin Prasada and Scindia are happier in their cozy comfort. The surround sound of their hangers-on satisfies their false egos. Ideological commitment for them is more like candy floss, the flavour of which can be changed with the changing times and winning elections is like earning a blue tick from Twitter.

In contrast, Modi and the RSS are marathon men who want to win every 100-meter race; just being a verified account is not their destination, controlling the entire platform is their mission. To fight such formidable opponents, Rahul does not need Prasada and Scindia but gladiators. Personally, Rahul has to unlearn, he has to erase his memory. He must behave not like an entitled dynast but be ready for the long haul. He has to forget that he is the great grandson of Nehru and grandson of Indira Gandhi. Nehru and Indira Gandhi were born in a different India. In today's world, dominated by Modi and Shah, to be idealist is a bane, to win by hook or crook is the name of the game. Secondly, and very importantly he has to decide if he wants to lead the party. He has already committed the blunder of his life by resigning from the post of the party president after the humiliating defeat in 2019 parliamentary elections. Since then the party has been rudderless without a full-time captain. If this continues, the party won't survive long. The age of part-time politics is over. Twitter is a good game but to win the battle, Rahul Gandhi must hit the streets, be ready to be beaten, bandaged and hospitalised. He must be two steps ahead of his opponents. He has to create a perception that he is a fighter. Thirdly, if he does not want to lead, he should make it obvious in as many words. He should step aside, and the party should choose a new leader.

Confronting the past, honestly

The framework for publication of war histories is a good first step. The ministry of defence must now let the principle of truth, openness and transparency guide the implementation of the policy.

The ministry of defence (MoD) has come up with a new framework for the archiving, declassification and publication of war history. This entails all services under MoD to transfer their records, including war diaries, letters of proceedings, operational record books, to the ministry's history division, which, in turn, is to coordinate with all departments to compile, seek approval and publish history of wars and operations. The framework also envisages the constitution of an inter-ministerial committee led by an MoD joint secretary, with the participation of military historians, but only if required, for the task. The committee has to be set up within two years of

the completion of a war or operation, and within three years, it has to collect records, compile and disseminate the



material. All of this, the ministry said in a statement on Friday,

is in line with the recommendations of a range of expert committees and ministerial groups which have called for the timely compilation of authoritative war histories. All

nations must confront their past - and it is only by chronicling both achievements and lapses that institutions can learn and progress. This is particularly true for security and defence. While the instinctive response of the State is to bury secrets in the name of national security, precisely because the stakes are so high, the response has to be more openness. And it is only by knowing the truth of how India succeeded - and the Indian armed forces have an outstanding record across geographies - and how India faltered - for there have been either strategic or tactical errors which have cost lives - that both the State and citizens can evolve new approaches.

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Biden-Putin meeting - from cyber attacks to energy policy, president must stand up to Russia



American troops stationed in the United Kingdom, he recounted a story from his vice president days. He said the Joint Chiefs of Staff - the military's top generals - told him that "global warming" was "the greatest threat facing America."

Encouraging our warfighters to adopt this ridiculous mindset - one apparently shared by what are supposed to be some of America's most gifted military leaders - is extremely dangerous. It tells aggressors that our strategic priorities are out of whack, and we are ripe to be taken advantage of. Biden needs to make clear to Putin that our military places Russian aggression in the highest echelon of threats, and he will support our armed forces in deterring it.

Along the same lines, President Biden must make clear that climate change is absolutely not the only item Russia must address to make him happy. In fact, Biden must realize that Putin would love nothing more than to see the American left's Green New Deal come to fruition. Any promises Putin makes of tackling climate change together are hollow. Russia is a major

petroleum producing nation that will gain geopolitical leverage worldwide if America cuts back our oil and gas production. A Climate Change First agenda is foolish in more ways than one.

On the cyber front, Biden must tell Putin that cyberattacks will be addressed in no different a manner than other attacks on America from Russian soil. Last month, cybercriminals pulled off a ransomware attack targeting the Colonial pipeline - an essential energy artery transporting nearly half of the East Coast's fuel supply. The evidence points to those hackers operating inside Russia, just as many keyboard criminals seeking to extort and steal from Americans do.

President Trump's national security team coordinated to give the executive branch greater authority to respond to such attacks. Biden must use that latitude to hunt down and cripple these digital terrorists, and demand that Putin likewise refuse to let them operate with impunity inside Russia.

Biden should also threaten a merciless cyber response against Russia if government-

backed cyberattacks and meddling in our democracy continue - one that should strike at the heart of Russia's security apparatus and Putin's inner circle of kleptocrats, if necessary.

President Biden must make clear that he is prepared to reverse his hesitancy to unilaterally project American power. Biden showed rank hypocrisy in canceling the Keystone XL Pipeline while allowing Russia to complete the Nord Stream 2 pipeline supplying gas to Germany. This senseless move will cause America's allies to become more dependent on Russian energy.

The cronyism stinks, too. The CEO of Nord Stream, Matthias Warnig, was an agent in the East German secret police who reportedly worked with Putin when he was a KGB agent posted in Germany.

Biden should stop Nord Stream 2 dead in its tracks by imposing sanctions on entities involved in its financing and construction, including Gazprom, the Russian state-owned natural gas giant.

The people to be most seriously hurt by stopping the project are German elites corrupted by Moscow's money. ??

President Biden will meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin in the next 25 hours. Sadly, for American security, he shows up with a self-dealt weak hand that could have been much stronger.

We in the Trump administration created real leverage against Russia he could have used. Instead, he has chosen to abandon it. Even in just a few months in office, Biden has already signaled to Putin that he is timid and unprepared to confront the Russian challenge - a weakness that ex-KGB agent Putin surely senses.

I hope Biden will exercise the options available to him to right this ship and secure America from Russian malign activity.

The Trump administration was tougher on Russia than any other since the end of the Cold War - something you will never hear the media acknowledge. Whether imposing an unprecedented sanctions campaign against Russian entities, arming our friends in Ukraine with weapons of war to resist Russian aggression, convincing our NATO allies to pony up \$400 billion in new defense spending, or other measures, we reasserted American strength to thwart Putin's dream of a restored Russian empire.

But Biden has already begun squandering this leverage, in part by telegraphing climate change as his top national security priority. In remarks on this trip to

In Response To Ram Guha's View Of Rahul Gandhi

Ramachandra Guha is at it again: telling the world that we (the Congress) are incapacitating ourselves from dismantling the horrific, incompetent edifice of the Modi Government. For him, what stands between our version of perestroika and the present is the dynastic politics of the Congress. Who is to remind him that the two notable scions who left the Congress cannot shake off their family connections? Certainly, Guha is an honourable man and Mark Antony would said so about the distinguished historian. But he wears blinkers. No one questions his right to reject Rahul Gandhi as an alternative to the horrors we face. Thankfully, he concedes civility to the leader he dismisses because of his name and the sad coincidence of having arrived on the political stage when politics was going seriously wrong.

Reject anyone you wish, Mr. Historian, but surely you are not serious about Ms Mahua Moitra as an alternative, delightful, as her political demeanour and vocabulary might be.

I imagine that Guha could have marshalled many arguments to reject Rahul Gandhi and dismiss those of us who have the courage of our conviction in publicly standing by him. After all, many people reject PM Modi and the unthinking legions that support him despite the devastation we see around us. But must an honourable historian and intellectual twist words only to underscore a priori opinions? Taking objection to my tweet about the "once and future king of democracy" which was about Rahul Gandhi, he said it was in 'bad taste' and sought to instruct me (as a Senior Advocate, he underscored) that Republics do not have kings. But surely, he did

not have to edit my tweet by reducing it to 'once and future king', leaving out 'democracy'. Was he unable to persuade even himself that by using or including the expression 'democracy', he could still make a point? I am curious that the romance of Camelot, once used to describe late President John Kennedy by his widow, Jacqueline Kennedy, is unfamiliar to Guha. Or perhaps he does not think the lay reader deserves to dwell upon such erudition. He might have said 'king' and 'democracy' do not gel together just as 'king of tragedy', or, closer home to Guha, a 'king of spin' may be equally objectionable. If we are to win the war against propaganda experts and fake news purveyors, is falsehood the answer? It has been my experience in courts that a lawyer who feels nervous about the facts of her case tends to become economical with the



truth. Contemporary India is yearning for truth, and we must all accept the truth no matter how bitter it is. Of course, like with Guha, we may continue to disagree about what the truth is. The moment someone thinks there is but one truth, and that too, only what they believe to be true, we get the beginning of dictatorship. Many a self-opinionated person have unwittingly ushered in dictatorships but then I need not tell this to a historian. Guha is not

alone in making this mistake. Many powerful leaders are hoping to join hands to take on the might of the BJP. But as we have seen in recent times, they are reluctant to share space in their own region with the Congress whose reach is pan-India, despite the setbacks it has suffered. Sensible coalitions cannot be based on exploiting real or perceived weaknesses, but by exploring strengths that in cooperation and collaboration.



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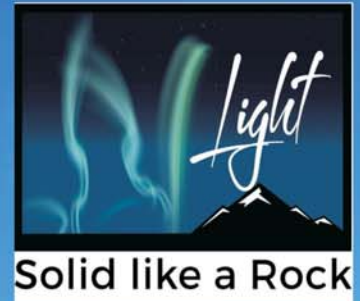
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AOC is the only honest Democrat on the border crisis

Is Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., the most honest Democrat in Washington? At least as far as the current border crisis goes the answer to that question increasingly seems to be yes. The progressive darling's spat with embattled Vice President Kamala Harris last week was instructive. Harris made a speech in Guatemala telling migrants not to come to the United States. AOC clapped back, as is so often her wont, asking who are we to tell denizens of Central American countries we meddled with not to seek refuge in our nation. So which is the true policy of the Democrats? Is it "Don't come" or is it come on in? Let's look back to a June 2019 Democratic presidential primary debate. At that time, every candidate, including Biden and Harris was asked if they support free health care for people in the country illegally. Every one of them snapped their arms up in the affirmative, except for the

current president; he kind of half raised his hand as if he wanted to make a more nuanced point. It was a microcosm of liberal immigration policy itself. The clear message was that the Zeitgeist of the party was on the side of open borders with swag bags full of taxpayer-funded goodies. It was only Biden, who we are supposed to believe is some kind of old school moderate that at least pretended to have reservations. But that is a minority position now, and after all it was Free Heath Care Harris who the administration put in charge of stemming the flow of illegal migrants. As the number of illegal border crossings surges to levels not seen in decades the proof of the president's priorities is in the pudding. Whatever policy Biden might want to pursue on the Mexican border, and who knows what that is, the direct result has been a massive influx of migrants straining the resources of border protection agencies and the

patience of Americans who live there. Given all of this isn't it clear now that AOC's version of dealing with illegal immigration is far closer to current Democrat orthodoxy than Harris' tepid and limp message of "Don't come?" Harris won't even visit the border but instead insists we must focus on "root causes." If the crisis can't be solved until Guatemala and Honduras have marvelous functioning governments and economies then the American people are going to be waiting quite a long time indeed. The advantage to Ocasio-Cortez saying the quiet part out loud on immigration is that at least it can be a place to begin on negotiations. Her Ellis Island era style approach to immigration that would let almost anyone enter the U.S. can be met with reasonable questions about entitlements. Guest worker programs and the like can be discussed. The Biden policy cannot be



negotiated because there is no Biden policy. Instead there is status quo that floods the border with no real plans for the future. Nobody believes that Biden or Harris have even the slightest intention of getting tough on the border. Fine. Just say so. Make that the policy of the Democratic Party so the country can have a real conversation about an issue that stretches back decades. Say what you will about Ocasio-Cortez but much like former President Trump she says what she means. We don't have to

read between the lines. Democrats want open borders. Kamala Harris knows it, AOC knows it, and the American people know it. So let's knock it off with Biden's pretend concern over the overrun border and talk like adults in the real world. The only thing that should be off the table right now is doing nothing, but nothing is exactly what Biden is doing. If AOC has real answers, even if they are the wrong ones, then she is the Democrat we should paying attention to in dealing with the border crisis.

By David Marcus

Biden, G-7 flunk China test - Hold Beijing accountable for COVID? Not a chance. Here's why



Think President Biden will convince the free world to get tough on China? Not a chance. In recent days, Joe Biden met with the leaders of the G-7 nations, America's most important allies. The meeting comes in the wake of the single greatest act of villainy the world has ever known - China's willful unleashing of a deadly virus on the globe, which caused millions of preventable deaths and untold trillions in economic harm. China must be made to pay; that was Biden's brief. Concluding their talks, the G-7

leaders have agreed to punish China by ... investing in third-world infrastructure. Yup, that's the plan. That's the penalty Beijing will bear for having lied about the virus, denied its easy transmission from human to human, suppressed whistle-blowers warning of its danger and - possibly -- for having created it in the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Biden has convinced his fellow heads of state that not only can the U.S. "Build Back Better," but that the collective group should promote a "Build Back Better

World" campaign aimed at narrowing the \$40 trillion infrastructure needs of the developing world. And guess who will end up shouldering most of that effort? As reported in the South China Post, "the United States will work with the U.S. Congress to supplement existing development financing." In other words, American taxpayers. Why else would French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, et al., flatter Biden by adopting his "Build Back Better" language? You could have seen this coming a mile away; Biden, happy as a clam to "be back," did not. The point of this "values-driven high-standard and transparent infrastructure partnership" is to counter Beijing's infamous Belt and Road initiative. Since 2013 China's government has brought 100 underdeveloped nations into its orbit by lending heavily to build out

those fragile countries' infrastructure, making countries like Pakistan indebted to China and logistically linked. China's Belt and Road push garnered bad reviews when it led to several countries' near bankruptcy and total subservience; President Xi Jinping, mindful of the optics, stopped boasting about the program, which nonetheless is ongoing. While Americans might have hoped the G-7 leaders would throw sanctions on Beijing officials, erect barriers to Chinese tech firms or eject China from the World Trade Organization, they will now watch our government direct billions in aid to jumpstart other countries' infrastructure repair. That will teach Xi Jinping! To be fair, the G-7 in its communique also calls for another WHO-backed study of COVID-19's origins, including "in China," the only reference to China in the entire 50-page

document. Elsewhere, "concern" about forced labor fails to mention the Uyghurs or Xinjiang Province. Why the tepid response to Beijing's criminality? To quote Rep. Ilhan Omar, D-Minn., "It's all about the Benjamins baby." Neither the Biden White House nor the G-7 (Germany especially) is willing to forgo China's money train - not even for a moment. The big U.S. corporations that supported Biden's campaign for president and their foreign rivals depend on Chinese sources and long for Chinese customers. That's who makes policy. To his credit, Biden appears to genuinely believe that the U.S. and other democratic countries can out-compete China for the favor and support of the developing world. He thinks that ladling money out to poor countries with no strings attached will resonate, since China tethers development aid not just with strings but with steel bars.

By Liz Peek

Millions of Pakistanis threatened with cell phone cut-off if they don't get a COVID vaccine



has done a poor job explaining that some symptoms are generally considered a sign that the vaccine is working. But, as is the case around the globe, the phenomenon of fake news has also contributed to widespread hesitancy in Pakistan, with social media and messaging services being the primary perpetrators of misinformation. In a country where the populace has remained broadly suspicious of vaccination campaigns for decades, the Punjab government's threat to penalize people for not getting the shot has been criticized as draconian. There's fear it could backfire, fueling mistrust in the government, and crucially, in the new vaccines. Pakistanis have been wary of vaccines for many years - long before the world knew the word coronavirus. Many here believe vaccinations in general are part of a government plan to either render people infertile for the purposes of population control, or a CIA conspiracy to microchip and monitor civilians.

only a vaccine can end the COVID-19 pandemic." The provincial government had hoped to be vaccinating 420,000 people per day, with the goal being to inoculate most of its population of 67 million by the end of the year. But only about 52,000 people per day have been coming forward to get a shot. Pakistanis are generally not well-informed about the importance of inoculation against the coronavirus, and many remain deeply worried about the side effects experienced by a lot of people who get the shot. The government

(News Agencies)- Pakistan's most populous province, Punjab, has decided to combat residents' COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy by threatening to block cell phone service to anyone who refuses inoculation. The decision to issue the threat came out of a meeting last week, led by provincial Health Minister Dr. Yasmin Rashid, as officials scrambled for ways to boost the province's dismal vaccination rate.

Rashid said protecting citizens from the coronavirus was the main priority for the Punjab government,

Pakistan allows AstraZeneca shot for under 40s to help its expatriates

Pakistan has lifted a rule barring the use of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine for people below 40 years old, in a bid to help inoculate people who need to travel for education or jobs abroad, particularly Saudi Arabia, a health official said. Pakistan, which relies heavily on

which is unaffordable for many, Faisal Sultan, a health adviser to the prime minister, said.

"From today, we have lifted the restriction for use of AstraZeneca for below 40 years," Sultan told private news channel Geo television on Tuesday.

Saudi Arabia has approved four COVID-19 vaccines for arrivals wanting to avoid quarantine, namely AstraZeneca, Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson and Johnson.

Pakistan has received 1.2 million doses of AstraZeneca under the COVAX fa-



remittances from its expatriate workers in Saudi Arabia, has primarily used Chinese vaccines - Sinopharm, CanSinoBio and Sinovac - in its inoculation drive and, till now, only used AstraZeneca for those above 40. The Saudi authorities have not approved the Chinese shots, so people with only those vaccinations still need to quarantine,

Sultan said the government was using diplomatic channels to see if Saudi Arabia would approve Chinese vaccines in future.

As of June 11, 1.3% of Pakistan's 220 million people had been fully vaccinated and 3.8% had received at least one dose, mostly Sinopharm or Sinovac, official figures show.

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



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How children are paying the price in Pakistan's mass HIV outbreak



(News Agencies)-Since his son was diagnosed with HIV during a mass outbreak among babies and children in Pakistan, Shahzad Shar has often been forced to choose between food and medicine. His five-year-old was one of the hundreds who tested positive in 2019 after a whistle-blower doctor uncovered a scandal involving the reuse of needles in southern Sindh province. The number of patients quickly swelled and two years later, the figure stands at more than 1,500,

according to data from the provincial health ministry. Pakistan's largest HIV testing and treatment centre was established in the rural town of Rota Dero in the wake of the disaster, dishing out life-saving antiretroviral drugs. But affected families must cover further costs arising from the illness themselves.

"They tell us to go for further tests in private hospitals, but we don't have sufficient money," Shar told the AFP news agency, describing how his son continues to suffer from regular fever, abdominal and

kidney pain.

About 30 other children are also HIV positive in their small village of Subhani Shar, just a few kilometres from Rato Dero.

Pakistan's public hospitals, located largely in cities, are often chaotic and inefficient, leaving rural families to rely on private clinics they can seldom afford that are often stuffed with unlicensed doctors.

At least 50 children have died since they were diagnosed, said paediatric specialist Fatima Mir, from Aga Khan University in Karachi, who has analysed the data.

Mir said she had expected the number to be higher given the malnutrition and poverty among families in the area.

Authorities blamed a single physician - a popular child specialist in Rato Dero - for causing the outbreak.

Muzaffar Ghangro is currently out on bail, with court hearings repeatedly pushed back, much to the anger of many families.

He denies the charges laid against him, saying other

doctors have pinned the outbreak on him because of his successful practice.

The doctor who first exposed Sindh's dirty needle scandal says little has changed since 2019. "Things are as bad as they were at the time of the outbreak," said whistle-blower Imran Akbar Arbani, who called malpractice in the country "ruthless".

Arbani took his data on the outbreak to local media after discovering an alarming number of babies with HIV in Rato Dero, where he has a private clinic. He said authorities were quick to react at the time, but that discipline has since slipped.

"In the first three months, quacks and unauthorised medical practitioners were banned and their clinics were sealed, but they obtained clearance later on," he said.

Rafiq Khanani, a doctor and the president of the Infectious Diseases Society of Pakistan, said regulations were ineffective or routinely ignored.

"The regulatory departments exist only on documents and in

offices... practically, they are ineffective."

In the wake of the scandal, the government banned the import of conventional syringes, insisting only on single-use auto-lock needles which cannot be re-deployed.

But a Sindh health official who did not want to be named told AFP that many doctors were circumventing the ban and still buying the cheaper models.

At Rato Dero's HIV testing and treatment centre, patients sit facing a television screen churning out healthcare advice in the local Sindhi language.

A frail 20-year-old man sits silently with his father, waiting for the results of a rapid HIV test.

Paediatric specialist Mir said successful mass testing helped to identify victims of the crisis and slow down onward transmissions. But Pakistan now has to go beyond the vital antiretrovirals and offer more rounded care to patients, Ayesha Isani Majeed, the head of the government's National AIDS Control Programme, told AFP.


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ਨੂੰ ਵਿਚੀ ਸਾਂਝੀ 700 ਮਿਲੀਅਨ ਡਾਲਰ ਦੀ ਅਦਾ ਨੂੰ 150 ਮਿਲੀਅਨ ਡਾਲਰ ਕਰ ਸਕਦਾ ਹੈ। ਇਸ ਰਾਖੀ ਨੂੰ ਰਾਸ਼ਟਰ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਵੀ ਯਾਜਿਸ਼ਟਰ ਨੂੰ ਕਰੀ ਸ਼ਰਾ ਦਾ ਧਮਤ ਕਰਨਾ ਦੇਵੇਗਾ। ਇਹ ਵੱਡਾ ਦੇਸ਼ਾ ਅਲਗ

ਲਗ ਲਗ ਹੋ ਸਕਦਾ ਹੈ। 2019 ਲਈ ਟੈਕਸਾਸ ਵਿੱਚ ਨੂੰ ਰਾਸ਼ਟਰਕਰੀ ਟਰੇਪ ਕਰੇ ਪਾਸ ਕਰਨਾ ਸਾਥੀ ਹੈ ਪਰ ਇਸ ਵਿੱਚ ਯਾਜਿਸ਼ਟਰ ਨੂੰ ਅੱਗੇ ਹੋਵੇਦਾ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਸਾਟ ਸਾਰੇ ਕਰੀ ਭਾਜ ਨੂੰ ਭੀਰੀ ਕਰੀ ਹੈ।

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

ਨਵੀਂ ਦਿੱਲੀ : ਸਿੱਖ ਨਸਲਕ ਵਿਚ ਮੋਹਰੀ ਭੂਮਿਕਾ ਨਿਭਾਉਣ ਵਾਲੇ ਭਾਈ ਰਾਮ ਸਿੰਘ ਨੇ ਸਾਥੀਆਂ ਨਾਲ ਮਿਲ ਕੇ ਭਾਈ ਰਾਮ ਸਿੰਘ ਨੇ ਮੋਹਰੀ ਸੇਵਾ ਵਿਚਲੇ ਸੇਵੀ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਦੂਰ ਬਥਾ ਕੇ ਰੱਖਿਆ ਜਾਵੇਗਾ। ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਾਸਨ ਦਾ ਕਹਿਣਾ ਕਿ ਸਿੱਖ ਨਸਲਕ 1984 ਵਿਚ ਹੋਏ ਸਿੱਖ ਕਤਲੇਆਮ ਵਿਚ ਸ਼ਾਮਲ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਸੇਵਾ ਵਿਚਲੇ ਸੇਵੀ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਦੂਰ ਬਥਾ ਕੇ ਰੱਖਿਆ ਜਾਵੇਗਾ।

મોડુ વિશે કોઈપણ વિગતો સાચામાં સાચામાં જાણ કરીને જ આવી પોલીસ સ્ટેશનમાં રહેવાનું કહેવાય છે. 14 વર્ષ પહેલાં કોઈના પોલીસ કામમાં ને - 1-2 સ્ટેશન 1984 ને રાજ્ય - પંજાબ વિભાગો વિશેના જાણ સમગ્ર વિષય વિશે ને મળતા પહેલાં કોઈપણ સંજોગ સાચા ને સાચા રાખી

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Sri Lanka grants bail to captain of cargo ship embroiled in one of its worst environmental disasters

(News Agencies)-The captain of a container ship that caught fire and partially sunk off the coast of Sri Lanka, causing one of the country's worst environmental disasters, was arrested Monday before being granted bail, local police said.

Russian captain Vitaly Tyutkalo appeared before the Colombo High Court for violating the country's Marine Pollution Prevention Act, which prohibits

unauthorized discharge of pollutants. He was not formally charged but is due back in court on July 1, according to police spokesperson Deputy Inspector General Ajith Rohana.

Bail was set at 2 million Sri Lankan rupees (\$10,000), Rohana said.

The fire-ravaged ship, MV X-Press Pearl, began sinking on June 2,

heightening fears of an oil and chemical spill that would threaten nearby lagoons, marine life and birds. The vessel was laden with chemicals such as nitric acid and carrying 350 metric tons of oil in its tanks.



The Singaporean-registered ship was sailing from India's Gujarat to Colombo when a fire broke out onboard on May 20, as it was nine nautical miles off the Sri Lankan coast. For 12 days, the Sri Lanka Navy and Indian Coast Guard tried to douse the flames and stop the ship from breaking apart or sinking.

As the fire ravaged the chemical-

laden container ship, Sri Lanka's western coastline became inundated with microplastic pollution. Billions of tiny plastic nurdles blanketed popular beaches over a 150 kilometer- (93 mile-) stretch near the capital,

according to environmental group Pearl Protectors, prompting a massive ongoing clean-up operation.

Images from the Sri Lanka Navy showed a large number of bags piled on the beach full of debris from the ship.

Fishing in the area was suspended and environmentalists warned birds and marine life could be threatened by the plastic and chemical pollution.

Local fisherman said the plastic pollution, which continues to move southwards with the current, has destroyed their livelihoods.

Cash-strapped Pakistan requests another year to pay back Chinese loans

(News Agencies)-June 14 (ANI): A debt-ridden Pakistan has requested its all-weather ally China that it needs another year to pay back a billion dollars Islamabad had borrowed from Beijing last year. According to The Frontier Post, Prime Minister Imran Khan has written a letter to Chinese Premier Li Keqiang on June 8 that July 23, 2021, was the date when Pakistan is supposed to return one billion dollars it had borrowed. Imran Khan further stated that due to this support by China,

"this deposit is contributing significantly easing pressure on our external account." He requested that another 12 months be given to Pakistan to pay back this loan at an interest rate of one per cent, according to The Frontier Post. Earlier, a bankrupt Pakistan's debt problems escalated when China

declined to restructure USD 3 billion in liabilities. Islamabad has requested Beijing to forgive debt liabilities owed to China-funded energy projects established under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Media reports suggest that China has refused to budge on



Islamabad's request to renegotiate the power purchase agreements, saying that any debt relief would require Chinese banks to amend the terms and conditions under which the credits

were extended. The banks, including China Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank of China, were not prepared to revise any of the clauses of the agreement reached earlier with the government, Beijing said in response to the request to renegotiate terms.

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Washington puts pressure on Sri Lankan government over Beijing-funded Colombo Port City

(News Agencies)-Last month, the Sri Lankan parliament passed the Rajapakse government's amended Colombo Port City (CPC) Economic Commission Act, which establishes a Special Economic Zone on reclaimed land near Colombo Harbour. The zone is being built by the China Communications Construction Company with a \$US1.4 billion loan from Beijing, the largest-ever single investment in Sri Lanka. The project is a major component of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a geo-strategic plan to ensure the free movement of its imports and exports via the Indian Ocean and Central Asia in response to the US-led efforts to militarily encircle China. The US, the European Union and India are hostile to the Rajapakse government's orientation to Beijing for loans and investments. Although these countries have not issued any official statements about the CPC bill, there are numerous indications that they are stepping

up their efforts to undermine Chinese influence in Colombo. In the US, Democratic Party congresswoman Deborah Ross, supported by Republican congressman Bill Johnson, introduced a resolution calling for an "effective international mechanism for accountability" over "grave human rights violations" in Sri Lanka. Presented on May 18, the resolution is now in the hands of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. It urges Washington to work with the United Nations' General Assembly, Security Council and Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to ramp up pressure on Colombo. While it is not clear whether the Foreign Affairs Committee will approve the resolution, the US is vehemently opposed to the Rajapakse government's growing relations with Beijing. The "grave crimes" referred to in the resolution include the killing of 40,000 civilians during the final weeks of the 26-year brutal communal war with the

separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the disappearance of hundreds of people who surrendered to the army, and many other violations cited by the UN. Then-President Mahinda Rajapakse resumed the war in 2006, with the bloody conflict ending after the defeat of the LTTE in May 2009. His younger brother and the current president, Gotabhaya Rajapakse, was defence secretary during this period. The US has already co-sponsored a resolution presented to the UNHRC by a group of countries led by the UK, Germany, France and Canada, which calls for an investigation into Colombo's war crimes, overseen by an international mechanism. Washington, which is guilty of committing numerous war crimes across the globe in the past three decades alone, is not concerned in the slightest over Colombo's human rights violations. It backed Mahinda Rajapakse's resumption of the



war in 2006, and his anti-democratic regime. Washington only began pressuring Colombo during the final years of the war, after China emerged as Sri Lanka's principal source of financial assistance and military hardware. The US initially brought a series of resolutions into the UNHRC calling for a human rights investigation to pressure Colombo. When these failed, Washington sponsored a regime-change operation in 2015 that ousted Mahinda Rajapakse as president and led to the installation of the pro-US Maithripala Sirisena.

Washington's actions were supported by the United National Party (UNP), the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). Denouncing Rajapakse's anti-democratic rule, a host of radicals, pseudo-left groups and unions rallied behind this operation, claiming that a Sirisena administration would establish "good governance." Washington responded to Gotabhaya Rajapakse's election as president in November 2019, and then to the appointment of Mahinda Rajapakse as prime minister, with repeated warnings about Colombo's ties to China.

UK aid cuts to Bangladesh NGO a 'gut punch', says charity head

(News Agencies)-The UK government's funding cuts to the world's largest international non-governmental organisation are a "gut punch" after a successful 10-year £450m partnership, according to a director. Asif Saleh, executive director of Brac Bangladesh, said the cuts will leave hundreds of thousands of girls without an education, millions of women and girls without access to family planning and hundreds of thousands of people in extreme poverty without support. Saleh's comments followed an announcement on Friday that the UK would spend an extra £430m on girls education in 90 countries over the next five years. The announcement, made at the G7 summit, prompted accusations of hypocrisy. Sarah Brown, chair of global children's charity Theirworld, called the funding a "drop in the ocean" compared to the scale of the global education crisis and in the face of "savage cuts to the international aid budget".

Evidence submitted by Brac to the international development committee's investigation into the aid cuts described the withdrawal of support as "catastrophic" for the tens of thousands in Bangladesh who live on under a dollar a day. "The dramatic fall is completely unexpected," Saleh said. "It's like a gut punch. We did not anticipate it would be a complete withdrawal from the partnership. From a commitment of £200m over five years to absolutely nothing - it's a mistake." About 16 million Bangladeshis have slipped into extreme poverty since the pandemic, and the World Bank estimates an additional 150 million people globally will be in extreme poverty by 2021 because of Covid-19. With British support, Brac ran the largest non-formal school programme in Bangladesh from which 12 million children have graduated. A world-renowned programme, the "graduation model", was also developed with the help of UK aid. It has lifted 2 million households out of

extreme poverty in the country and is used in Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Pakistan, Honduras and Peru. Saleh said that, while he expected a cut, Brac's alignment with the government's stated priorities - girls' education, poverty reduction and addressing the climate crisis - made him hope some of it would continue. Figures calculated by Save the Children estimate the aid cuts in education between 2019-20 and 2021-22 to be 36%, from £821m to £528m. Humanitarian assistance and water and sanitation will be reduced by an estimated 45% and 47% respectively. The Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) withdrawal from Brac strategic partnership arrangement (SPA) will mean a "dramatic scaling down" of programmes running since 2011. The SPA has helped 110 million people in Bangladesh, with 4 million children enrolled in its schools that actively seek girls and children with disabilities.



Brac's programmes have also been cut in other countries, Saleh said. "There have been programmes that have been shut down with 90 days notice," said Saleh. "We are trying to fill the gaps. Our health programme is continuing because of Covid. Our ultra-poor graduation programme, our education programme, is being scaled down. I'm having to make tough calls. When I'm not being able to start schools, when I'm having to stop programmes to reduce child marriage, to those people, it will be seen as a betrayal." Saleh said FCDO officials in Bangladesh had made

the case for "phase 3" of the partnership, with additional funding from Australia and Canada. But last month, Saleh was told nothing would be available for 2021-22. Chief economist for FCDO, Rachel Glennerster, considered the Brac model a "best buy" in terms of development, according to a report by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, in 2018. The report found that a consultation with partners "confirms progress in achieving results that align with UK priorities, at scale, in the right places and to the right target groups".

Criminal Cases Against Italian Marines, In 2012 Shooting, Closed By Supreme Court

Italian Marines' Case: The Supreme Court said Italy should carry out its probe and that India, Italy and Kerala must cooperate.

(News Agencies)-The Supreme Court today closed all criminal cases against two Italian marines who were accused of shooting dead two Indian fishermen off the Kerala coast in 2012.

Saying that Italy should carry out its probe and that India, Italy and Kerala must cooperate, the Supreme Court directed that the compensation of Rs.10 crore given by Italy must be transferred to the Kerala High Court.

The Centre had deposited this money with the Supreme Court Registry.

The Kerala government had told the court that out of ? 10 crore, ? 4 crore each will be paid to the two victims' families and ? 2 crore to the owner of the boat which was destroyed.

The Supreme Court asked the Kerala High Court to nominate a judge so that there is no misappropriation in the distribution of the compensation.

"We are satisfied with the compensation and the ex-gratia paid over and above earlier. This is a fit case to close all proceedings in India under Article 142 of the Constitution," the Supreme Court said today.

In the last hearing, the court had said that the cases would be closed only if the money is deposited with the Supreme Court Registry. The two Italian marines - Salvatore Girone and Massimiliano Latorre - were



accused of killing two unarmed Indian fishermen off the coast of Kerala on February 15, 2012. The marines had appealed in the Supreme Court against the Kerala High Court's decision that they could be prosecuted in Kerala.

"In Its Anxiety To Suppress Dissent...": Court's Sharp Words For Centre



Delhi Riots: Natasha Narwal, Devangana Kalita and Asif Tanha were arrested in May last year on conspiracy charges linked to violence over the citizenship law

"essential character of terrorism" and a "terrorist act", and that the law could not be "casually applied to criminal acts". Natasha Narwal and Devangana Kalita, who are members of women's rights group Pinjra Tod, and Jamia Millia Islamia student Asif Iqbal Tanha were arrested in May 2020. They were accused of being the "masterminds" of the February 2020 violence and denied regular bail by the trial court. This morning, in two

separate judgments, a High Court bench of Justices Siddharth Mridul and Anup Jairam Bhambhani set aside the lower court's orders and allowed bail on a personal bond and two sureties of ? 50,000 each, the surrender of passports and other conditions. "In its anxiety to suppress dissent, in the mind of the State, the line between constitutionally guaranteed right to protest and terrorist activity seems to be getting

(News Agencies)-There is a difference between the "constitutionally guaranteed right to protest" and terrorist activity, the Delhi High Court said Tuesday, as it granted bail to three activists arrested more than a year ago in connection with riots that followed protests against the controversial citizenship law. The High Court also said use of the anti-terror law UAPA (Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act) - which was invoked to file charges against the activists - must recognise the

For the BJP, the post-poll challenge

But while post-electoral disequilibrium is often understandable in a party, the way out is to go back to the roots, review the reasons for defeat, let an elected government function while remaining a vigilant opposition, and get its house in order. That may be a lesson for the BJP in the south and the east.

(News Agencies)-Electoral defeats are hard. During a campaign, a party invests all its energy, resources, networks and organisational might in securing victory, vote by vote, polling booth by polling booth, constituency by constituency. To keep up the morale of workers and to sustain a degree of motivation, a party also convinces itself that it is on the verge of victory. And that is why when the results are adverse, and a party confronts a loss or less-than-optimal performance, all equations get unsettled. There is a familiar

blame-game between units of the party. Top leaders are questioned on strategy and tactics. Others begin weighing their future prospects and shift allegiances. Workers worry about protection in politically competitive, even violent, settings. And the party in power, emboldened by victory, deploys all means to crush a party that is already bruised to be able to weaken a competitor when the time is ripe. This is a familiar story in Indian politics. And the prime example, nationally, is the Congress after its 2014 and 2019 losses. But



against the newly elected state government. But while post-electoral disequilibrium is often understandable in a party, the way out is to go back to the roots, review the reasons for defeat, let an elected government function while remaining a vigilant opposition, and get its house in order. That may be a lesson for the BJP in the south and the east.

The perilous journeys of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris

"Wailing in fear," the crew of Odysseus' boat row toward two "enormous crags." To starboard was the cave of Scylla, a "terrible, savage, wild" creature with 12 legs, six "long swaying necks, a hideous head on each ... barbed with a triple row of fangs." To port was "awesome Charybdis," a treacherous whirlpool. As the panicked sailors stare at the churning water, six of their number are snatched by the monster and swallowed up.

Homer's Odyssey bequeathed to us the model of a nightmare travel story -- along with the phrase "between Scylla and Charybdis" to vividly describe the dilemma of choosing between two dreadful alternatives.

No comparable terrors awaited President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris as they

set out on high-stakes, official trips this past week -- he to Europe and she to Latin America -- but there were indeed political dangers lurking amid their travels.

"No US President has ever left the nation's shores with democratic values under attack as broadly and systemically at home as they are abroad," observed CNN's Stephen Collinson.

David A. Andelman noted that Biden arrived in Britain, the first stop on his trip, with "a single, unified theme -- one he's enunciated at virtually every opportunity since his arrival and that he clearly intends to repeat at the G-7 summit this weekend and the NATO summit that will follow. That message? America's back. And you can count on us." First lady Jill Biden's "Love"

blazer -- a sharp contrast to Melania Trump's "I really don't care, do U?" jacket, which she wore on a trip to visit immigrant children in McAllen, Texas, in 2018 -- helped drive home the point.

Andelman, who conferred with some European diplomats, wrote that "it will take a lot to convince them that Biden represents a return to normalcy and not simply a peaceful interregnum before America snaps back to a toxic nationalism."

At the outset of the G-7 summit, Jill Biden and Catherine, the Duchess of Cambridge, met in Cornwall with experts on education, a subject in which both women have taken a special interest. "Early childhood care and education should be seen as among the defining, strategic issues of our time," they wrote



for CNN Opinion. "What would happen if we really followed the science of early childhood and started focusing on the things that would make the biggest difference for children and those who guide them? We could transform the prospects of an entire generation."

Ahead for Joe Biden lies a politically volatile meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Switzerland, along with

potentially fraught sessions with US allies who differ with the US government's stances on Russia and China. Still, the trip has offered the President an opportunity to demonstrate international leadership amid the pandemic: In remarks from the seaside village of St. Ives in Cornwall on Thursday, Biden committed the US to donating to the world 500 million doses of the Pfizer vaccine against Covid-19.

Mehul Choksi "No Show" In Dominica Court Due To "Mental Stress": Lawyer



(News Agencies)- Fugitive diamantaire Mehul Choksi failed to appear in Magistrate's Court in Roseau, Dominica, on Monday for the

start of the trial against him over his illegal entry into the Caribbean country, because he was suffering from "mental stress" and he experienced high

blood pressure, his lawyers informed the court.

The case of Choksi, who has been accused of illegally entering the Caribbean nation, was heard by Chief Magistrate Candia Carette-George at the Magistrate's Court in Roseau. The prosecution, led by Dominica's Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) Sherma Dalrymple, told the court that it is "ready to proceed to trial", Antigua News Room reported. Mr Dalrymple also took the opportunity to introduce the addition of Indian lawyer Harpreet Giana to the state's team of prosecutors. However,

Mehul Choksi failed to appear in the court for the start of the trial. Instead, his lawyers presented a medical certificate signed by a doctor from the Dominica China Friendship Hospital where he has been undergoing treatment for the past two weeks.

The medical certificate says that Mehul Choksi was a "no show" in court since he was suffering from "mental stress" and experienced high blood pressure.

Chief Magistrate Carette-George later adjourned the matter. It will now be heard at 9 am (Caribbean time) on June 25.

The judge has also ordered for Choksi to be brought to court on June 17 for further remand. Mehul Choksi will remain under police guard as a patient at the Dominica China Friendship Hospital until the next date of the trial.

Choksi had gone missing from Antigua on May 23 after going out for dinner and was soon caught in Dominica. He was charged with illegal entry by the police in Dominica after he allegedly escaped from Antigua and Barbuda in a possible attempt to evade extradition to India.

A year of internal and external challenges

Irrespective of the reasons, the images of China in Ladakh and farmers at Delhi's borders have tested the State's strength and democratic credibility.

This week marks a year since India and China began formal military talks to resolve the standoff in eastern Ladakh. It has also been a year since the Centre promulgated three ordinances on agriculture. This means that it has been a year since India has been grappling with its most serious external security challenge in over two decades (since Kargil), and the most serious internal political mobilisation against the Centre in a decade (since the India Against Corruption movement, though the farm protests have much deeper social

roots). In both cases, a resolution remains elusive and India's capacity has



come under the scanner. Take the Ladakh situation first. After many rounds of

political, diplomatic, and military talks, there was a breakthrough with both sides disengaging in the Pangong Tso area. It was a testament to the Indian Army's ability to stand up to the People's Liberation Army, occupy strategic heights in the Kailash range, and the ability of diplomats to leverage it to push back China. But using the leverage has meant that India's ability to now force, or persuade, China to restore status quo ante in other areas - Hot Springs, Gogra,

Depsang - is limited. Status quo is extracting a military and strategic cost, but breaking the status quo won't be easy. The farm protests are a product of the Centre's unilateral push on a sensitive issue, and then a maximalist position adopted by farm leaders - which, then, resulted in protests during a pandemic, refusal to negotiate with a spirit of give-and-take, and unacceptable violence on January 26. Irrespective of the reasons, the images of China in Ladakh and farmers at Delhi's borders have tested the State's strength and democratic credibility.

We are not here to regulate content or invade privacy: Ravi Shankar Prasad

In an exclusive interview, the Union minister for electronics and information technology Ravi Shankar Prasad talks extensively about how the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines & Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, will impact the privacy and democratic rights of an Indian citizen in the virtual world. He also addresses concerns raised by social media intermediaries and claims that the only goal of these rules is to empower ordinary users and protect them from abuse on digital platforms.

Q. What will be the impact of these new guidelines on a regular internet user? Can the Union government categorically assure citizens that these rules will not curtail their privacy and freedom of speech?

As the Union IT minister, I offer categorical assurance that the privacy and freedom of speech of Indian citizens will never be compromised. I salute the social media platforms for having given ordinary Indians the power to raise issues and ask questions to the prime minister, the Union ministers or anyone in authority. But when a helpless mother

wants to complain to a social media platform about intimate photographs of her daughter being circulated on the platform, she doesn't know who she should approach. Should I tell her to go to America? Today, everyone—journalists, judges, businessmen—gets trolled on social media. Don't they need a forum to settle their grievances? These new guidelines offer the ordinary user that opportunity within the geography of India. These guidelines empower the ordinary user against abuse and provide an engagement mechanism between user and platform. We are not in the business of regulating content or invasion of privacy.

Q. A provision in the guidelines allows the government to force social media intermediaries to remove any content within 36 hours. The government can misuse it to flag any content critical of its functioning.

For that, I don't need to take recourse to these guidelines. The IT Act, 2000, passed by the UPA government, gives the government enough power to take such action. However, I don't foresee any misuse of these provisions as India has a robust judicial process. **Q. So, tomorrow, if a citizen criticises you or Prime Minister Narendra**



Modi, can you guarantee that social media platforms will not be asked to remove their post/tweet?

Yes, every citizen has that assurance. The prime minister has been criticised for the past two decades. That's what our democracy is all about.

Q. If that's the case, why did the Union government recently ask Twitter to take action against a cartoonist posting tweets critical of the government?

I will examine the case. Humour, cartoons, puns etc. are part of democracy. But the humour should be civil.

Q. WhatsApp claims the requirement to find the originator of a message will compromise its encryption policy and endanger the privacy of its users.

The traceability clause is applicable only in defined cases. For instance, if a viral message is causing riots or showing sexually explicit photographs, the intermediaries will be asked to explain who started the mischief. We are not asking them to decrypt content. This process will be initiated only when other intrusive methods fail. Ordinary users have nothing to worry as their personal conversations will remain encrypted.

Q. But several security experts

say available mechanisms to trace the origin of a message, without breaking the encryption, can make the user vulnerable to privacy breaches. How can an ordinary user be certain that neither the government nor rogue actors misuse such encryption-bypassing tools?

The problem of technology has to be resolved by technology. A platform has to find a mechanism to build traceability. In doing so, if it allows the apprehensions you have raised to become a reality—that user privacy has been breached—then it will lose clientele. The platform's sanctity is important and it is their job to protect that. And it was their responsibility to create an architecture of traceability-of course without violating privacy—so that these platforms are not misused. Don't see everything from a legal and technical perspective. There are larger social and moral obligations.

Q. You intervened when Twitter removed the blue tick—a verification mark—from the private account of vice-president M. Venkaiah Naidu...

We did not intervene, we just flagged it. If they operate in India, they have to be sensitive towards our constitutional authorities. If you have a norm for verifying/de-

must follow Indian laws and the Constitution. India will not compromise on digital sovereignty.

Q. But such confrontations also raise question about India's democratic credentials.

It's not about the image of India, it's about the image of a victim of abuse on social media. Indian democracy is too robust. We have an independent judiciary which can question the government on Covid management and also the application of sedition charges. An independent media constantly holds the government accountable for its actions. There is a transparent election machinery. These private companies sitting in America and making profits cannot lecture us on democracy. They must first respect their users' democratic right to grievance redressal. These guidelines seek to ensure that.



The Congress Party's Death Wish - by Ramachandra Guha

The first is Mahua Moitra. Raised in a middle-class, Bengali-speaking home in Assam, Moitra studied mathematics and economics at one of the best women's colleges in the United States. On graduating, she joined JP Morgan Chase, where she worked for a decade in New York and London. She could have lived on in a great Western city, rising up the corporate ladder. However, at the age of 35, she gave up a lucrative job overseas to enter public life in India by joining the Congress. Perhaps sensing that the party was going nowhere, she moved to the Trinamool Congress (TMC), where she has since done extremely well, her rise enabled by her own intelligence, commitment, and oratory.

After joining the TMC, Moitra patiently worked her way up the political hierarchy. Rather than lobby for a Rajya Sabha seat - the preferred pathway for well-educated professionals who join politics - she first fought, and won, an Assembly seat, before fighting, and winning, a Lok Sabha seat. In the few opportunities she got to speak in parliament, she made a considerable impression, as she did in her interviews to the press. In the recent Assembly elections in West Bengal, Moitra assiduously campaigned in many constituencies, playing her part in the TMC's resounding victory.

To know how and why the Congress finds itself in the sorry state it is, one need only contrast Mahua Moitra's political journey with that of Priyanka Gandhi's. For many years focused on her family and children, it was only in March 2019 that Priyanka formally joined the Congress, in the elevated post of General Secretary. She owed this spectacular high-level entry to her family name. As the sister of the incumbent Congress President and with both her parents having been Congress Presidents too, there was no question - the Congress being what it is - of Priyanka Gandhi ever having to prove herself as an ordinary party worker before being assigned wider responsibilities. In fact, she has had no reason to prove herself after becoming General Secretary either.

In the two years Priyanka Gandhi has been in charge of Uttar Pradesh, there has been no perceptible change in the Congress's political fortunes in that state.

That fifth-generation dynasts control the Congress Party is repugnant to many people, including this now elderly historian of Indian nationalism, who has spent much of his career researching how the party of the freedom struggle nurtured the idea of an independent, democratic, and non-sectarian Republic. However, one could suppress one's distaste if these



dynasts had a decent track record at winning elections, and could thus effectively thwart the ongoing dismantling of the Republic by Modi, Shah, and the Sangh Parivar. It is because they are so manifestly incompetent at retaining or regaining political power that so many people, appalled at the recent trajectory of Indian democracy, despair of the destructive stranglehold that Sonia Gandhi and her children have over the country's oldest political party.

The political incompetence of Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi was reflected in the recent Assembly elections. The Congress was wiped out in West Bengal, where they forged an alliance with the Left, rather than swallow their pride and fight - as they did in Tamil Nadu - as a junior partner of a popular regional party. (Afterwards, one prominent West Bengal Congressman commented that elections are not won on Twitter.) In Assam, the Congress lost for the second successive time. The most shocking result, however, was in Kerala - where, despite Rahul Gandhi himself being an MP from the state, for the first time in half-a-century, power did not alternate

between the Communists and the Congress.

The departure of Himanta Biswa Sarma and Jyotiraditya Scindia (less so Jitin Prasada) is another manifestation of the political incompetence of the Gandhi family. Denied a shot at the Chief Ministership of Assam, the ambitious Sarma moved over to a party he had attacked all his life, eventually being rewarded with the post he had so desperately wanted. Denied a Rajya Sabha seat by the Congress (which went to the old family loyalist Digvijaya Singh instead), Scindia moved over to

the BJP too. I hold no brief for either politician, and view with dismay their overnight conversion to Hindutva, but the fact remains that the Congress lost Assam to the BJP in good part because they could not keep Sarma, and lost MP to the BJP largely because they could not keep Scindia.

In May 2012, by which time it was blindingly evident that Rahul Gandhi was an indifferent politician, I wrote a column in the Financial Times entitled 'Congress Party Must Get Over the Gandhis'. I noted here that the 'country's greatest political party is in steady decline', and that this was 'connected to the declining charisma of its first family'. With two years to go before the next general election, I wrote that 'the prospects for the Congress appear dismal. Presently, Indians of talent and ambition are inhibited from joining or even voting for the Congress owing to its prevailing culture of deference and sycophancy.'

Back in May 2012, I argued that in order to facilitate a revival, the party should replace the ageing and weak Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, 'with a

younger, more focused Congress leader whose surname is not Gandhi'. This person could then lead the Congress into the general election, sending a message 'that competence is valued above genes or loyalty.' I continued: 'Realists or cynics will say the measure I propose is too radical for Ms [Sonia] Gandhi to contemplate. Yet it may be the only way to rescue India's oldest party from irrelevance'

I was, as it were, whistling in the dark, and Sonia Gandhi chose her son to front the 2014 campaign, to disastrous effect. Five years later, now as Congress President, and with his General Secretary sister alongside him, Sonia Gandhi's son led his party to another humiliating defeat. To his credit, Rahul Gandhi chose to resign, but the effect of that honourable decision was immediately nullified by his mother taking over as 'acting' President, a position she retains 22 months later, passively watching as her party loses a series of elections and leaders to other parties too.

Sonia Gandhi seems totally committed to family control of the Congress, and in this regard must be regarded as more culpable than her son. Some blame also accrues to her senior-most sycophants. When the 'G-23' letter briefly provoked an inner-party debate, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh chose to defend the family, putting personal loyalty over the long-term interests of the party. On Rajiv Gandhi's death anniversary, former Foreign Minister Salman Khurshid tweeted a photo of Rajiv and Rahul with the caption: 'Our once and future King', a gesture in extreme bad taste (a Republic does not have hereditary monarchs, as a Senior Advocate of the Supreme Court should know), but entirely reflective of the culture of Congress chamchagiri. This culture endures in the coterie that protects and 'advises' Rahul Gandhi, composed of cheerleaders with no political base or political credibility of their own, and apparently little political

intelligence either.

The continuing decline of the Congress under the Nehru-Gandhis should matter to every Indian who stands against the hateful and divisive politics of Hindutva, and who seeks a restoration of the social, economic and institutional fabric of the Republic, which have been so ravaged by the Modi regime. Compared to the men who now rule us, Rahul Gandhi comes across as someone with at least a modicum of civility. It is his lack of political focus and political judgment, his inability to speak Hindi fluently after three terms as an MP from UP, and the debilitating baggage he carries as a fifth-generation dynast, that are the problem.

Those who wish for a change of government in 2024 must surely recognize that the Congress is at present by far the weakest link in the Opposition. The TMC, the DMK, the CPI(M), the RJD, have an energy and political ambition that the Congress under its present leadership so evidently lacks. And even if popular among sections of the Anglophone Twitterati, Rahul is a proven failure at the hustings, and commands little respect among the leaders of those regional parties whose support shall be vital to the success of any Federal or United Front.

The Modi Government's mismanagement of the economy and their disastrous mishandling of the pandemic has caused deep distress across the country. The suffering has been so acute that the Supreme Court and even sections of the Hindi media have belatedly begun holding the government to account. Given their contempt for expertise, it is very unlikely that the Modi regime can set right the economy and adequately restore livelihoods and incomes. As 2024 approaches, the cards they are likely to play are Hindutva and more Hindutva, and the promotion of a Presidential contest. Nothing would suit the ruling party better than if, for the third time in a row, Rahul Gandhi is offered as the presumed alternative to Narendra Modi. That would be a juxtaposition that all those who oppose the BJP should seek to avoid.

By Ramachandra Guha
Courtesy NDTV.com

Malawi's landscape is clogged with plastic waste that could linger for 100 years. One woman has taken on plastic companies and won

Supreme Court upheld a national ban on the production, importation, distribution, and use of thin plastics in July 2019.

Majiga-Kamoto's fierce advocacy led to the shutting down of three plastic firms in 2020 by the Malawian government and as a result of her grassroots campaign, she has been awarded the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize for Africa. She is one of six global winners of the prestigious award, announced Tuesday morning, which honors grassroots environmental activists.

But the mother-of-one says her advocacy journey has sometimes taken a toll.

"You sometimes put your family at risk coming up against huge companies and people that are well connected politically. You always find there's a conflict of interest and you're stuck in the middle. It does feel a bit threatening and can also feel a bit scary," she told CNN.

Malawi could reach 'crisis levels'

An estimated 75,000 tons of plastic are produced in Malawi each year, a recent study commissioned by the government found, and at least 80% of those plastics are discarded after use, according to the study.

Malawi's plastic waste will require more than 100 years to decompose, but sustained manufacturing of throwaway plastics may lengthen this projection.

"Should production and distribution continue, chances are high that we will reach a crisis level," Yanira Ntupanyama, the principal secretary at Malawi's Ministry of Forestry and Natural Resources told CNN.

The findings of the government study also found that the East African nation produces more plastic waste per capita than any other country in sub-Saharan Africa - and this has greatly overwhelmed its waste disposal systems.

Majiga-Kamoto says she was spurred on to go against the plastic manufacturers after seeing how farmers and



livestock were struggling with plastic pollution.

"It became very personal for me after interacting with farmers," she says. "Some of them are losing their livestock because once the animals get into the field, which is so heavily polluted with single-use plastic, they consume these plastics, which kill them, thereby affecting the livelihood of their owners," she said.

In Mponela town, in Malawi's Central region, Majiga-Kamoto says around 40% of slaughtered livestock in the area were found to have ingested plastic fragments.

Nearly 80% of Malawi's plastic waste ends up in garbage dumps and natural surroundings, as the government study shows it may take more than 400 years for some plastics to decay.

Malawi's environment has also been adversely affected by plastic litter. Sanitation experts have blamed the "poor handling" of plastic waste in Malawi's capital, Lilongwe, for dangerous flooding, which has displaced thousands of people in the city.

"It is a problem. Plastics don't decay in the environment and may stay over 100 years... It's a nuisance to the environment; blocks drainage system[s], offers habitat for multiplication of disease-causing organisms and kills livestock when ingested," Ntupanyama told CNN.

A lengthy legal battle

Plastic ingestion poses an even greater threat to marine life. According to UNESCO figures

on marine pollution, plastic fragments kill more than a million seabirds yearly, and at least 100,000 marine mammals.

"A lot of plastic wastes that we are generating end up at open dumpsites and they slide right back into the communities, causing pollution in our streams and landscape," Majiga-Kamoto said.

The ban on thin plastics applies to plastics equal to or less than 60 microns in thickness-the equivalent of the thickness of plastic bags used in grocery stores for fruits and vegetables-and includes bags, sheeting, and packaging.

However, enforcement has been difficult as it was swiftly challenged by an association of plastic manufacturers, government officials said.

The manufacturers argued that

restrictions imposed on the production of thin plastics would affect jobs and create an economic instability in the country.

"Right from the beginning of the ban, plastic manufacturers were against the implementation of the regulations," Ntupanyama said. The group of plastic companies took the government to the High Court in 2016, which ruled in their favor. Three years later, the case then went to the Supreme Court, where the government won their fight.

However, implementation of the policy has stalled due to protracted litigation on the matter, said Ntupanyama.

Ntupanyama added that the government has plans to review the regulations "so that we have a complete ban of plastics in Malawi."

CNN was unable to reach the association of plastic producers ahead of publication. According to Plastic Waste Makers Index, more than 130 million metric tons of single-use plastics were disposed of globally in 2019 - most of which were either burned, buried in landfill, or discarded directly into the environment.

The manufacturing of single-use plastics is expected to rise by 30% worldwide in the next five years.

To tackle plastic pollution, 170 countries have agreed to "significantly reduce the use of throwaway plastics" by 2030, according to the United Nations Environment Programme.

Majiga-Kamoto worries about Malawi's inability to process recycled plastic waste.

"Malawi is very far behind. Recycling of waste requires technology and we do not have a lot of that technology," she said.

Beyond government action, Majiga-Kamoto believes that Malawians have a crucial role to play. "Plastic is quite a useful innovation, but the challenge is that we are using it unsustainably," she told CNN. "Individuals have to be aware of their own contribution to the mess. Malawians should make it easier for plastics to end up in the right place and to be potentially recycled," she said.

By Nimi Princewill
Courtesy CNN



Luxury And Hunger, The Two Faces Of An Unequal Pandemic

that India finds itself in today -- brisk sales of luxury cars and soaring net worth for billionaires amid widespread joblessness and depleted savings -- reflects a lack of fiscal imagination. The state's reluctance to do more could prove costly. Poor households ate less last year, and economists are warning of another wave of intense food deprivation.

Colleagues at Bloomberg News recently chronicled a story that's becoming all too familiar: Shoemaker Shyambabu Nigam had to sell his modest house to pay the \$8,230 medical bill from his wife's Covid-19 complications. One of his three leather-sewing machines is also gone. The debt-strapped couple is renting a room in a nearby village. Well-meaning initiatives, such as a government-backed emergency credit line that has been available to small businesses since last May, can't reach highly informal micro units like Nigam's.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has extended -- until November -- an existing program to make available fixed amounts of free

food grains to 800 million people. Additional wheat and rice entitlements did help the poor last year. Yet, in the absence of incomes, the bottom quartile of the population had to drastically



cut down expenditure on eggs, meat and fruit.

To avoid a second straight year of nutrition crisis, it's critical to provide poor households an immediate sustenance income: Say, slightly more than \$2 a day for at least three months. The proposal has come from a team of economists at the Bangalore-

based Azim Premji University. It will, the researchers argue, be of some help, though perhaps won't prove enough. "The proposed cash transfer is just equal to incomes lost last year by the

poorest 10% of households, leaving alone the second-wave impact." Officially, there's no word on such a cash transfer plan. Obsessed with keeping a lid on borrowing costs, the government is making things worse for the common man by its regressive consumption taxes, including on gasoline and life-saving Covid-19

drugs, and by a very high dependence on cheap money from the central bank. Excess liquidity, reflected in elevated asset prices, is creating what on paper looks like an oasis of opulence in a desert of despair. Economic power flowing from workers and small enterprises toward large firms -- uncontested, if not aided, by India's fiscal policy -- is boosting their valuations. It's helping create the wealth that's powering sales of Maybach SUVs and a lot else besides.

A \$43 billion surge in Gautam Adani's wealth this year has catapulted the tycoon from PM Modi's home state of Gujarat to take his spot behind fellow Indian businessman Mukesh Ambani as the second-richest person in Asia. Billionaire investor Radhakishan Damani bought a \$137 million mansion in Mumbai in April, the priciest-ever property transaction in the country.

Mid-size and small steelmakers are struggling with sub-optimal 62% capacity utilization, while five large producers, which raised their market share by 5

percentage points to 58% in just one year, are using their "blockbuster profit" to pay down debt, according to Crisil, an affiliate of S&P Global Inc.

When the government closes its annual accounts next March, the budget deficit will likely exceed its \$206 billion target. This shortfall, which under normal circumstances would have been 6.8% of gross domestic product, may be higher now because of the deadly surge in infections in April and May, the first two months of India's financial year. Output growth will be slower, and tax collections lower, than expected. When the government collects less in taxes than it spends, more money is staying in private hands. But are they the right hands? Probably not.

Securing and administering vaccines should have been the obvious expenditure priority for this year. Even at a high per-dose cost of \$10, adding 0.8% of GDP to the fiscal deficit would be money well spent, says University of British Columbia economist Amartya Lahiri.

Milkha Singh dies of Covid-19 related complications, five days after wife Nirmal Kaur's death

Milkha Singh ji could not be retrieved from his critical condition and after a brave fight, he left for his heavenly abode at 11.30 pm on 18th June 2021 here at PGIMER," Prof. Jagat Ram, Director PGIMER expressed his deepest condolences on the sad demise of this 'most revered' sporting icon, who will be remembered for his exceptional accomplishments on and off the field and his endearing and humane personality. Milkha Singh was admitted to the ICU at the Covid-19 Hospital of Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER) in Chandigarh due to dipping oxygen

levels on June 3. The admission came just 4 days after he was discharged from a Mohali hospital at the request of his family members.

Milkha, a former Commonwealth Games gold medalist, was in stable condition when he was discharged from the Mohali hospital last month. His 85-year-old wife, Nirmal Milkha Singh had tested positive for Covid-19 last month and was also in the

ICU at a private hospital in Chandigarh.

The hospital authorities said earlier this week that Nirmal's health had worsened. She was being treated with fluctuating oxygen levels. Notably, Milkha Singh was also admitted to the same facility



last month but his condition has been improving. Milkha Singh was a four-time Asian Games gold medallist and 1958 Commonwealth Games champion but his greatest performance was the fourth-place finish in the 400m final at the 1960 Rome. He also represented India in the 1956 and 1964 Olympics and was bestowed the Padma Shri in 1959.

Bull.....Frustrations boil after U.S., Canada extend border closure for at least another month

OTTAWA — Canada and the United States are extending pandemic-related restrictions at their land border for at least another month in a move that's fueling frustrations on both sides of the frontier.

The Trudeau government announced Friday that both countries agreed to keep the crossings closed to nonessential travel until July 21. The governments are facing intensifying pressure to loosen the measures and taking heat over the lack of a clear, detailed reopening plan. "I get people's impatience," Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told reporters later Friday when asked about the extension. "But from the very beginning we as a government have been there for Canadians and that means doing what's necessary to keep them safe."

The explanation: With vaccination rates rising in both countries, Canadian and U.S. lawmakers, business leaders, and families separated from loved ones for more than a year

have been urging Trudeau and President Joe Biden to start easing restrictions. Trudeau said the decision to keep the frontier sealed for another month to foreign travelers, including Americans, was largely due to the government's concerns that fully vaccinated individuals may still be able to transmit Covid-19. He said Canada had yet to reach a high enough threshold of second-dose vaccination. "Even a fully vaccinated individual can pass on Covid-19 to someone who is not vaccinated," Trudeau said, referring to the guidance driving Canada's "phased" reopening approach. Trudeau reiterated the need for Canada to reach its vaccination targets before it can start peeling back restrictions. He wants at least 75 percent of the population to have had their first Covid vaccine doses and 20 percent to be fully vaccinated. The frustration: The decision drew swift disapproval from those demanding a reopening.



Biden to Putin: Help me help you

In a summit of self-interest, the U.S. president tried to make Putin understand that it's in Russia's interest to play nice with the United States.

More than once on Wednesday, as President Joe Biden described his meeting with Vladimir Putin, he tried to make it sound like he was doing the Russian leader a favor by simply giving him some good advice. America has significant cyber capabilities, Biden pointed out. Surely, Putin wouldn't want to do anything on the cyber front to make his country the recipient of U.S. wrath. Does Putin really want to improve Russia's trade status like he says? Maybe he shouldn't detain American businesspeople. And what happens if Putin and his country keep interfering in the elections of other countries? "His credibility worldwide shrinks," Biden said. Of course, Biden's message also could be read as a series of semi-veiled threats to the long-ruling Russian autocrat. Biden, however, insisted that while it was not a "kumbaya" meeting, there "were no threats" and that what he was saying wasn't simply about what works best for America.

"This is not about just our self-interest," the U.S. president said. "It's about a mutual self-interest." Whether Putin will follow Biden's

advice is far from clear, as is the true impact of Wednesday's much-hyped summit between the two leaders. Both men used words like "constructive" and "positive" to describe the roughly four-hour gathering. But, as expected, little emerged from the talks - at least as far as was conveyed to the public - except agreements to keep talking about issues ranging from nuclear weapons to the war in Ukraine. Still, that alone is a win, some analysts said, given the poor state and downward trajectory of the U.S.-Russian relationship. "Biden set the bar appropriately low for this meeting, and the result - agreeing to talk about the hard but necessary issues of strategic stability, arms control, risk reduction - more than met that bar," said Matthew Rojansky, director of the Wilson Center's Kennan Institute. "The way the two presidents described the tone and tenor of their meeting suggests they did exactly what needed to be done, which was to clarify where there is potential for progress, where there is no such potential, and how each side sees things."

The Biden-Putin meeting was

held in Geneva, Switzerland, after Biden attended a series of summits with European allies in Britain and Belgium. Aides to the U.S. president had warned in advance not to expect any groundbreaking agreements. They stressed that, above all, it was a chance for Biden to tell Putin face-to-face what he wants from the relationship, and what Russia can expect if it crosses him.

The meeting began with hand shakes, brief smiles and poses for the cameras before the doors were closed for the private sessions. Afterward, Putin held a news conference first, followed by a separate one from Biden. Biden said he'd given Putin a list of 16 entities - drawn from everything from the energy sector to water systems - that should be off limits to cyberattacks. Biden stressed that Putin needs to take action against cybercriminals on his soil who carry out such attacks, including the use of ransomware, even if the Kremlin had nothing to do with it. He indicated he hoped the two countries could come to some sort of cybersecurity arrangement.

"Responsible countries need to take action against criminals that conduct ransomware activities on their territory," Biden said. "So we agreed to task experts in both our countries to work on specific understandings about what is off-limits and to follow-up on specific cases that originate in other countries, and that's either of our countries."

Biden said he'd discussed the recent ransomware attack on a major energy pipeline in the United States, whose culprits are suspected of ties to Russia, though not necessarily the government there.

"When I talked about the pipeline that ransomware hit in the United States, I looked at him and said, 'How would you feel if ransomware took on the pipelines from your oil fields?'" Biden said of Putin. "He said 'it would matter.'"

But when reporters pressed Putin on alleged Russian cyber campaigns against the United States, he largely deflected the questions, claiming that America was the world's top source of cyberattacks. It was a typical Putin tactic, using "whataboutism" to deflect blame

by pointing to others' flaws.

Putin was also pushed on human rights in Russia, where he is accused of cracking down on political opponents. Russia's most prominent opposition leader, Alexei Navalny, is currently in prison after having survived a poisoning alleged to be the work of the Kremlin.

Putin insisted he was simply holding accountable people who were breaking Russian laws. He said Navalny, whose name he would not utter, had "consciously ignored the requirements of the law" when he sought treatment for poisoning abroad. Putin did not mention Navalny had been in a coma when taken to Germany. "The gentleman in question went abroad for treatment. His registration was not asked for," Putin said. "As soon as he got to the hospital, he shared his videos on the internet, but he ignored the demands of the laws. And knowing about that, he came back to Russia. And so I take it that he wanted consciously to break the law."

Putin also used the occasion to slam the United States for everything from the mistreatment of Black people to the continued

operation of the Guantanamo Bay military prison. Putin further cast the charges being brought against the people who participated in the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection as the U.S. persecuting people for their political beliefs.

Biden, meanwhile, played up Putin's agreement to a "bilateral Strategic Stability Dialogue." Those future discussions are intended to "lay the groundwork for future arms control and risk reduction measures," according to a joint statement from Biden and Putin released by the White House. "Strategic stability" typically refers to nuclear arms control issues.

The U.S. president noted that it could be six months or more before there's a sense on either side as to whether the discussions on strategic stability yield anything. He indicated the U.S. also would keep talking to Russia on other issues, including

freeing detained Americans and the future security of war-torn Libya, Syria and Afghanistan.

Biden and Putin also agreed that their countries' ambassadors, both of whom had returned home in recent weeks, would resume their posts in each other's capitals, according to Putin. It was not clear exactly when the envoys would go back.

Biden spent significant time at the top of his appearance stressing his belief in the importance of protecting human rights, likely in response to Putin's allegations during his news conference.

Asked about Putin's mention of the Jan. 6 rioters, Biden dismissed the idea that there was any equivalence. "My response is what I communicated, and that's a ridiculous comparison," Biden said, arguing that the rioters damaged the Capitol and caused the death of a security official. When asked what would

happen if Navalny were to die in prison, Biden was blunt. "I made it clear to [Putin] that I believe the consequences of that would be devastating for Russia," Biden said.

Those devastating consequences, Biden explained, would include an erosion of Russia's reputation on the global stage as other nations realize that, whether through poisoning dissidents or other means, Moscow won't abide by international norms.

"It's about their ability to influence other nations in a positive way," Biden said of Russia.

Biden noted that when it came to trade, "I don't have any problem with doing business with Russia as long as we do it based on the international norms. It's in our interest to see the Russian people do well economically." But he alluded to the controversial case of Michael Calvey, an American investor

whom Russia had put under house arrest, as the type of situation that damages Russia's ability to engage in trade.

"American businessmen, they are not ready to show up," Biden said. "They don't want to hang around in Moscow."

Putin had a different view on this, arguing that there's tremendous interest from U.S. business leaders in Russia, but that U.S. sanctions on Russia were damaging Americans' ability to do business there.

Earlier this year, when asked if he thought Putin was a "killer," Biden agreed with that description. In his news conference, Putin said he was satisfied with an explanation Biden gave of what he had meant. When Biden was asked to share his side during his news conference, he declined.

"He's satisfied," Biden said of Putin. "Why would I bring it up

again?" Toward the end of his news conference, Biden grew exasperated by questions about how much confidence he had that Putin would listen to him and change his ways.

"I'm not confident he's going to change his behavior. What the hell? What do you do all the time?" the president told one reporter. (He later apologized to the press pool for being "a wise guy.")

Even as he described trying to convince Putin that it was in his own interest to take a different approach to Washington, Biden nonetheless stressed that he would never take Putin's word for it.

"This is not about trust," Biden said. "This is about self-interest and verification of self-interest." Overall, Biden expressed confidence in his performance Wednesday. "I did what I came to do," he said.

US-Russia relations: Adversary or potential partner?

For the first time since Joe Biden took office as US president, he will meet in person with Russian leader Vladimir Putin on Wednesday.

The summit in Geneva, Switzerland, comes as both sides have acknowledged relations are at a new low.

Here's what three young Americans and three young Russians told us about the other country.

An independent who strongly aligns with progressive values, Connor is a college student who has been "very pleased" with his vote for President Biden so far.

Do you view Russia as an adversary or potential partner?

I view the Russian government as an adversary and I believe certain conditions should be met in order for the United States to consider partnering with Putin's Russia. These conditions should require that Russia cease the imprisonment of journalists and opposition leaders. Additionally, Russia must agree to cease aggression with their southern and western neighbours.

What do you think the two countries could work together on?

With Russia and the United States having the first and second largest nuclear weapon stockpiles in the world, more joint denuclearisation treaties would be fantastic. I believe this joint



mission is very important because it reduces the likelihood of accidents and creates an atmosphere of mutual trust.

In the realm of trade, as the North Pole continues to melt, this opens an extremely fast new sea route. It would be great to see the US and Russia jointly ensure the safe passage of trade vessels.

Is there anything about Russia you admire that the US doesn't have?

I greatly admire the spirit of the Russian people. They have withstood a dark and strenuous 150 years and have persevered throughout, despite all the while contending with despotic national leadership.

Americans and Russians are bonded by a history of revolution, social unrest, and vast technological progress. I hope our shared history can allow us to come to a greater understanding of one another and bring about an era of reconciliation rather than escalation.

A final year student at Moscow State University, Viktor has aspirations of working as an interpreter in the future. He believes the two countries should be working together on a range of issues.

Do you view the US as an adversary or potential partner? Unfortunately, right now Russia and the US are seen mostly as foes. But I am convinced that our

countries can and should become friends. They are two large nuclear powers, who have huge influence over their respective continents. Their cooperation and peaceful coexistence is in the interest of the whole world.

What do you think the two countries could work together on?

Russia and the US should be cooperating in as many areas as possible. The most important ones, in my view, are military security, arms control and fighting terrorism. But also in education, academic exchange programmes, technology and innovations, and fighting infectious diseases.

Is there anything about the US you admire that Russia doesn't have?

I most admire about the US their attitude towards protecting their nature - their national parks, as well as support of internal tourism and creating infrastructure to strengthen it. I also admire how they develop international contacts in the academic sphere and how skilled they are at attracting talent and investment from other countries. Do you view Russia as an adversary or potential partner?

Point blank, Russia and Vladimir Putin are intense adversaries of the United States. The global order is stronger if Russia is fiercely committed to liberal democracy, but it has proved time and time again that is not the case. Instead, it has consistently preyed upon Nato tensions and is looking to expand Russian occupation of Ukraine and the Balkans.

Continuous cyberattacks, undermining confidence in elections and acts of aggression have proven that Russia has no interest in protecting or working with any country.

What do you think the two countries could work together on?

Given the role of Russia as a leading natural gas producer, it is vital that the United States and Russia strive to work together on

clean and alternative energy sources. Steps must be taken towards transition for the future wellbeing of both countries and their economies.

Over reliance on oil is both a national and regional security threat, emphasising the need for global investment and partnership on alternative clean energy sources for continued global prosperity.

Is there anything about Russia you admire that the US doesn't have?

While its citizens remain fiercely committed to democracy and freedom, the government consistently undermines them. I admire the fire and want for freedom and prosperity of the Russian people, and fiercely condemn the actions and corruption of the Russian government.

Alena organises media

campaigns for charities. She believes Russia and the US should be partners but is sceptical of whether it is possible at present, given the tension between the two countries.

Do you view the US as an adversary or potential partner?

I am a pacifist and I'm against the escalation of geopolitical tensions, so I would say the US is a friend. If we, Russia, work at building friendly contacts with the US, and they do the same towards us, then our mutual cooperation will at the very least decrease international tension.

What do you think the two countries could work together on?

First of all, on nuclear disarmament, on the development of technology and on cooperation in space, but also in science and education.

Is there anything about the US you admire that Russia doesn't have?

I can't answer this very easily, as I follow European politics and the countries of the EU more closely. Gordon is an aerospace engineer in Salt Lake City and a conservative voter who says he feels optimistic about the state of American politics.

Do you view Russia as an adversary or potential partner?

Currently, I see Russia more as an adversary, largely because of President Putin. It's hard to completely decipher what has been specifically ordered by President Putin and what he chooses to allow adversarial third parties within Russia to do. In either case, he bears much of the responsibility.

The recent cyber attacks, thought to originate from Russian groups, have only increased tensions.

What do you think the two countries could work together on?

I think just about the only thing the two countries can work on together is a new nuclear arms treaty that will include other nuclear powers such as China.

There seems to be some willingness on that front from both sides. The difficult thing is that both countries have very different goals and allies, which often puts them at odds with each other.

Is there anything about Russia you admire that the US doesn't have?

I love the Russian culture and people. They have a rich history and still are a major influence in Europe and around the world.

A professional photographer and self-described pacifist, Katya says the two countries need to

focus on fighting Covid-19 together even though they are enemies.

Do you view the US as an adversary or potential partner?

I think that Russia considers the US a foe, but the US isn't concerned about this as it has its own problems and concerns. And you can hardly have friends in politics.

What do you think the two countries could work together on?

Right now, I would say the most important thing is cooperation in fighting the coronavirus pandemic and in restoring the global economy.

Is there anything about the US you admire that Russia doesn't have?

I am attracted to the people's openness to each other and their tolerance. But I'm not saying that is completely universal in the US.

Biden and Putin conclude high-stakes diplomacy at Geneva summit

One of the most highly anticipated political events of the year drew to a close earlier than expected Wednesday, with Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Joe Biden ending their historic meeting at a summit in Geneva after less than four hours.

Biden and Putin first met in a small, face-to-face session and then expanded their talks to a wider meeting with other officials. They were set to hold separate press conferences after the summit.

The two leaders shook hands as they greeted each other at Villa La Grange in Switzerland, chosen as the location for the summit due to its history of political neutrality.

On meeting his U.S. counterpart, Putin said he hoped the meeting would be productive.

"Mr. President, I'd like to thank you for your initiative to meet today," Putin said, sitting next to Biden and accompanied by their respective foreign ministers. "It is always better to meet face to face," Biden responded, Reuters reported.

The summit had been expected to last up to five hours. It included an initial meeting between the presidents and their closest officials, and then talks between the wider Russia and U.S.

delegations.

Global media attention on the summit was intense and there were scuffles between Russian and American reporters at the entrance of the summit venue.

The summit began with a first meeting between Biden and



Putin accompanied by Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russia Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, as well as translators.

After this initial meeting a wider delegation met for several sessions before the press conferences, with Putin going first.

The agenda

The Putin-Biden summit was closely watched around the world as U.S.-Russia relations remain tense following a slew of geopolitical clashes and international sanctions in recent years.

The agenda for the presidents' meeting was expected to include "strategic stability," climate change as well as nuclear stability, arms control and cybersecurity and potentially a range of other topics including the fate of jailed opposition leader

Alexei Navalny, Ukraine, Belarus and the outlook for Russian and U.S. nationals imprisoned in each other's countries. Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 got it suspended from the then-Group of Eight and earned it international sanctions. Since then Russia has been accused of 2016 U.S. election meddling, two nerve agent attacks (in the U.K. in 2018 and allegedly on Navalny in 2020) as well as involvement in cyberattacks and human rights abuses. Russia has always denied the

multiple accusations leveled against it, saying it is a victim of anti-Russian sentiment in the West.

The summit came hot on the heels of a flurry of American diplomacy with its allies in Europe and beyond. Biden visited the U.K. for the Group of Seven summit last weekend, then a NATO summit in Brussels on Monday and then an EU-U.S. summit on Tuesday, giving the U.S. leader plenty of food for thought for his meeting with Putin.

No 'big set of deliverables'

On Tuesday, a senior White House official said the Biden administration was "not expecting a big set of deliverables out of this meeting" but three basic things.

"First, a clear set of taskings about areas where working together can advance our national interest and make the world safer. Second, a clear laydown of the areas of America's vital national interests, where Russian activities that run counter to those interests will be met with a response," he said. "And third, a clear explication of the President's vision for American values and our national priorities," he said. The official added that, as for talking points with Putin, "for the

American President, nothing is off the table."

Given the adversarial nature of the U.S. and Russia's relationship in recent years, analysts see little chance of "breakthrough" moments at the Geneva summit.

Still, the meeting was seen as a chance to calm relations and introduce some much needed stability into affairs.

"This is an attempt to stabilize the situation," Ian Bond, director of foreign policy at the Centre for European Reform, told CNBC Wednesday. "The slogan from the Americans has been that they want predictability and stability in the relationship and it has been on a downward spiral, things have been getting worse."

Still, Bond did not think that there would be a return to "business as usual" with Putin unlikely to change, particularly given domestic pressures due to the Covid crisis and its impact on the Russian economy and living standards.

"It makes sense for him (Putin) to try and keep his adversaries off balance and guessing what his next move will be," Bond noted. "The Americans will try and impose more framework on this relationship but I'm not sure they will necessarily succeed."



Biden fears what 'best friends' Xi and Putin could do together

As President Joe Biden meets Russian leader Vladimir Putin, he and his aides are paying close attention to the Moscow-Beijing dynamic.

Earlier this month, Russian and Chinese officials celebrated an anniversary - while offering up a veiled challenge to the United States.

Twenty years after signing the "Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness, Friendship and Cooperation," the Chinese-Russian relationship has achieved new heights and is poised to reach a "larger scale, broader field, and deeper level," Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said in a video message to a think tank forum, according to a readout from the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

In his video speech to the forum, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov declared, according to a Russian readout, that "Moscow and Beijing are consistent supporters of the formation of a more just, democratic and therefore stable polycentric system of world order."

Hyperbole? To some degree, yes.

Hypocrisy? On some fronts, for sure. But to the Biden administration, such lovey-dovey rhetoric between Moscow and Beijing cannot be ignored.

In fact, U.S. wariness over the Russia-China relationship has grown to the point where high-level American strategists are weighing how to factor it in as they try to orient U.S. foreign policy to focus more on a rising China. President Joe Biden is expected to discuss Moscow's ties to Beijing during his Wednesday meeting with Russian leader Vladimir Putin, whom China's leader, Xi Jinping, has called his "best friend."

For many years, the relationship between China and Russia appeared to be limited to tactical cooperation or temporary partnerships of convenience, a senior Biden administration official told POLITICO in an interview. More recently, however,

it seems to be transforming into something more sustained and strategic.

"What we've seen over the course of the last decade is something much deeper and, frankly, more concerning," the senior official said. "I think you'd have to say that on some level that this operates as almost a quasi-alliance."

Biden has been briefed on the topic of Chinese-Russian relations and has delved into intelligence about it, the senior official said. The issue also was the topic of a briefing specifically requested by Secretary of State Antony Blinken, a State Department official confirmed.

But at this early stage in Biden's tenure, with many key positions unfilled, the administration still needs to work out the best mechanisms to monitor the Beijing-Moscow dynamic, the senior official said.

"It's going to be incumbent on us to sort of rethink our overall strategy," the senior official said.

"Do you contain and deeply, negatively engage both? Do you try to differentiate in your approach to try to improve relations with Moscow? These are all incredibly difficult things."

The Moscow-Beijing relationship has had many ups and downs. What was then the Soviet Union quickly recognized the People's Republic of China upon its establishment in October 1949. In the 1950s, the two countries had economic ties and gave military support to North Korea in its war with U.S.-backed South Korea.

But relations cooled considerably in the 1960s as the two fought for dominance in the communist sphere, with Soviet and Chinese troops even clashing along their shared border. In 1980, China joined the boycott of the Moscow

Olympics. By the end of that decade, however, the two had agreed to normalize relations.

In more recent years, China and Russia have often worked in tandem on the diplomatic front, especially at multilateral institutions like the United Nations. The countries typically follow each other's lead on issues of import to the other. On Syria policy, for example, China often sides with Russia, which has troops in the war-torn Middle Eastern country.

Bilateral trade between the two countries is on the rise, having crossed the \$100 billion mark. Moscow and Beijing want to double that by 2024.

Perhaps most striking and of greatest concern to the United States is what appears to be increasing military and technological cooperation between Russia and China.

Asked for examples, the senior

Biden administration official ticked off several: "Advanced fighter airplanes, hypersonic technologies, very effective radars ... battle integration systems that link different services more effectively, nuclear propulsion with respect to submarines, night vision - I mean, I could go on and on. Those are all areas that Russia and China have worked closely on together. Analysts Andrea Kendall-Taylor and David Shullman recently pointed out in Foreign Affairs that Russia and China have been conducting joint military exercises "of increasing frequency and complexity." The countries' technological cooperation, they wrote, "might eventually allow them to innovate faster together than the United States can on its own."

Other analysts have also tried to draw the Biden administration's attention to the Moscow-Beijing connection.

"As they draw closer

economically, technologically, militarily and diplomatically, and their cooperation in each of these spheres crosses new thresholds, their combined weight in East Asia and across Central Eurasia swells the challenge far beyond that posed by either alone," Thomas Graham and Robert Legvold wrote in POLITICO Magazine earlier this year.

Some former U.S. officials warn against overhyping China-Russia ties. They note, for instance, that the two still do not cooperate seamlessly, and that there's plenty of distrust.

Russia has in recent years accused China of stealing its military technology. Moscow also is suspicious of Beijing's intentions when it comes to energy and other initiatives in the Arctic circle. The two also could find themselves at odds over India. Russia, a major arms supplier to India, has generally had solid relations with New

Delhi. China's relations with India are tense, with the two countries engaging in border skirmishes as recently as this year.

There's also the likelihood of Russia feeling increasingly like the junior partner in its relationship with China, and getting resentful. That's especially the case as China expands its economic ties to countries in Central Asia and beyond, places Russia has long considered its turf.

When it comes to Russia's economic relationship with China, the latter is far more dominant and dynamic. China is Russia's top trading partner, but Russia doesn't even crack Beijing's top 10 trading partners. China also is simply a much bigger player in global trade overall: the value of its exports to the United States alone is bigger than the value of Russia's exports to the whole world.

"I don't think we should invest a lot of time in trying to erode [the

relationship]," said David Stilwell, who served as assistant secretary of State for East Asian affairs under former President Donald Trump. "That will happen on its own as Beijing intrudes into Moscow's spheres of influence." Putin is well aware of the imbalance of power Russia faces with China. Some analysts even wonder if recent Russian actions, such as increasing its troop presence along the border with Ukraine, is meant to remind the United States that Russia can't be ignored, even as Biden has made it clear his top geopolitical concern is China.

"Really, no country has played a weak hand more effectively than Putin has, just across the board," the senior Biden administration official said.

The senior official added that any U.S. attempt to capitalize on divisions between Moscow and Beijing has to be extremely subtle and careful. America's relationship with both countries

already is fraught enough.

"Both sides are highly attentive to efforts to create tension or to split them, and they are very focused on what I think both perceive is the larger, menacing problem, and that is the United States," the senior official said. The Biden-Putin meeting is a key step toward exchanging views on China, though that will be one of many topics on the agenda. Biden has paid close attention to the issue in briefings with aides and has "a very nuanced understanding" of the Moscow-Beijing nexus, the senior official said. That being said, it's the type of dilemma that cannot be solved quickly, if at all, and requires some serious prioritization.

"We also face the situation that in the short term, the things that are really concerning at an immediate level often emanate from Russia," the senior official said. "But it's the long-term challenges of China that are most concerning."

At Geneva summit, US-Russia relations heat up under a fiery sun

U.S. President Joe Biden looked relaxed, smiling, legs crossed, hands in his lap. Vladimir Putin seemed just a bit more serious, feet planted, legs apart but not too much, leaning back in his chair.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken took notes - it wasn't quite clear on what - as Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov sat across from him looking bored, as is his way.

Putin thanked Biden for his initiative in their meeting. "I know that you have had a long trip, a lot of work," he said. "Nevertheless, many issues have accumulated in Russian-American relations that require discussion at the highest level, and I hope our meeting will be productive."

Biden returned the thanks, and said: "It's always better to meet face to face."

If Biden was relaxed, so it seems was the White House press operation. The Kremlin quickly published a transcript of the two leaders' opening remarks, but there was no immediate way to verify it with White House officials.

Among the leaders, the scene in

a library at the start of hours of talks was sober and cordial enough - offering little body language to interpret, and just a scant few words.

But as the leaders settled in, a melee nearly broke out among reporters and photographers. Journalists pushed and shoved, yelling at each other to move but no one did. After just a minute or two, Russian security pulled the red rope separating the media from the leaders back to try to keep them away from the presidents.

Russian security hollered at journalists to get out and began pushing them - a common tactic in Russia where the media is routinely rough-handed. Journalists and White House officials hollered back that the Russian security should keep their hands off the press - touching is generally verboten in the U.S. In the confusion, some reporters nearly fell to the ground. The road to the U.S.-Russia summit was similarly ugly.

It was hard to imagine relations between Washington and Moscow could possibly get

worse than the moment in December 2012 when Vladimir Putin signed a law banning Americans from adopting Russian orphans.

Suddenly, innocent children were being held hostage - literally, in group homes - in retaliation for U.S. President Barack Obama signing the Magnitsky Act, a law cracking down on human rights abuses in Russia.

But over the next few years, relations indeed got worse - much worse.

In 2014, Russia invaded and annexed Crimea, after accusing the U.S., falsely, of fomenting revolution in Ukraine. In 2016, Russia stuck its cyber-fingers into the U.S. presidential election, stirring chaos and hoping to tilt the outcome against Hillary Clinton, much despised in the Kremlin from her days as Obama's secretary of state.

The election of Donald Trump and his efforts to forge a bond with Putin, siding with the Russian president over the U.S. intelligence services, for example, at their summit in Helsinki in July 2018, only soured relations further. And that was followed by the attempted

assassination in the U.K. of Sergei Skripal, a former Russian military intelligence officer, and a similar attempted poisoning of the Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny.

Navalny recovered only to be arrested on his return to Russia and sentenced to more than two years in prison for allegedly violating parole while in Germany for medical treatment that Putin himself had authorized.

By April of this year, the countries' respective ambassadors had returned home for consultations. Crucial treaties, including the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty and the Treaty on Open Skies, have collapsed. Only the 2010 New START accord was spared, extended in February for five years just two days before it was due to expire.

The governments have set low expectations for today's talks - an outlook shared by experts, who say the summit will likely yield only plans for further discussions, and perhaps a return of the ambassadors to their posts.

"The fact of the meeting signals some stabilization and even

predictability, which were Biden's stated goals," said Matthew Rojansky, director of the Kennan Institute, a Washington think tank. "They planned a meeting in April, and now it is happening as planned. It seems like a low bar but think about everything that has happened and that could have happened in those two months to derail this."

As for the outcome, Rojansky said: "I do think the central takeaway is going to be on strategic stability, a process not an agreement. But through that process the hope is we can address not only what comes after New START, but cyber and other difficult issues."

Samuel Charap, senior political scientist at the Rand Corporation, said the Biden administration was indeed looking beyond New START, but also to find ways to prevent Russia from being a nettlesome distraction. "They want stability," Charap said. "They want Russia problems not to be dominating the agenda. They have bigger fish to fry - having a Russian problem spiraling out of control is not how they want to be spending their time."

National AANHPI Press Briefing on COVID-19 Vaccines

Speaker Bios

Vivek H. Murthy, MD, MBA
Vice Admiral, Surgeon General
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
Washington, DC

Dr. Vivek H. Murthy was confirmed by the U.S. Senate in March 2021 to serve as the 21st Surgeon General of the United States as a returning role. As the Nation's Doctor, the Surgeon General's mission is to restore trust by relying on the best scientific information available, providing clear, consistent guidance and resources for the public, and ensuring that we reach our most vulnerable communities. As the Vice Admiral of the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, Dr. Murthy commands a uniformed service of 6,000 dedicated public health officers, serving the most underserved and vulnerable populations domestically and abroad.

Adelaida M. Rosario, PhD
Lieutenant, Surgeon General's Office
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Dr. Adelaida M. Rosario studies



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Purvi Parikh, MD is an allergist and immunologist at Allergy and Asthma Associates of Murray Hill. She is currently on faculty as Clinical Assistant Professor in both departments of Medicine and Pediatrics at New York University School of Medicine. Dr. Parikh has published articles in allergy, asthma, and immunodeficiency syndromes in various peer reviewed journals and textbooks. She is a spokesperson for the Allergy and Asthma Network which is the leading patient advocacy group for patients and their families who suffer from life threatening allergic and immunologic conditions. She frequently makes appearance as a medical contributor on their behalf to NBC, FOX, CNN, Wallstreet Journal, CNBC and CBS. She has her own monthly column in Us News and World report. During the pandemic, in addition to taking care of patients, she is an investigator/researcher in three (Pfizer, Astra Zeneca and Sanofi) of the Covid-19 vaccine trials at NYU Langone Health's vaccine center.

the connections between behaviors and social and cultural determinants and how these factors affect health disparities for different minority communities. She has worked with Hispanic and Pacific Islander populations to study how these factors relate to early childhood development, mental health, risk behaviors, HIV/AIDS prevention, and substance abuse. Dr. Rosario is involved in numerous efforts and collaborations to increase diversity in the biomedical and federal workforce. Dr. Rosario earned her Ph.D. in Social Welfare from Florida International University (FIU), M.A. in Pacific Micronesian Studies from the University of Guam, and a B.A. in Psychology with a minor in Religious Studies from FIU.

Tim Wang
Founder & Principal
TDW+Co
Seattle, WA

Tim Wang is Founder & Principal of TDW+Co, a mission-driven communications agency dedicated to creating meaningful dialogue that inspires positive and social impact within diverse communities. Tim serves as chief strategist, creative, and rainmaker providing vision and direction on overall agency business and growth leading a team of over 30 across strategy, creative, media and client services within his three offices in Seattle, LA and NY. He has led hundreds of campaigns that leverage community-based insights to bring to life impactful campaign work spanning across the country in 18 languages. His

multicultural communications and outreach campaigns have garnered national recognition across numerous industry creative award competitions, winning at 3AF, Effies, ANA Multicultural, and many others. Today, Tim continues his passion for building a strong and sustainable organizational culture and ensuring that TDW+Co is consistently living out its mission, vision, and values. He enjoys spending time with his 4-year-old son, Elijah, and remains active as an avid hoopster after having played his college basketball for his alma mater, Pacific Lutheran University.

Purvi Parikh, MD
Allergist & Immunologist
Allergy and Asthma Associates of Murray Hill

U.S. Surgeon General and Medical Experts on COVID-19 Vaccine Progress: "We Can Do This"

Dr. Vivek Murthy, Dr. Adelaida Rosario, and Dr. Purvi Parikh share messages about COVID-19 vaccine safety with the South Asian community

By: Staff Writer

In support of the Biden-Harris Administration's We Can Do This public education campaign to increase confidence in the COVID-19 vaccines and encourage vaccination, TDW+Co, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, hosted a virtual press briefing for Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) media on Thursday, June 10.

During the virtual event, medical experts from various states provided their pandemic experiences, as well as up-to-date, trusted COVID-19 vaccine information. Special speakers included: Vice Admiral Vivek H. Murthy, MD, Surgeon General, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services; Lieutenant Adelaida M. Rosario, PhD, Office of the Surgeon General, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; and local doctors including Purvi Parikh, MD,

Allergist & Immunologist, Allergy and Asthma Associates of Murray Hill and Vaccine Researcher, NYU Langone Health based in New York. In the live Q&A session, the medical experts answered questions about the safety and efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccines, health inequities for AANHPIs, and how to stay safe and protected from the coronavirus to prevent further spread.

COVID-19 has caused tremendous suffering for millions of Americans, but vaccines are giving many families and communities hope. As of June 10, the CDC reported 172 million people living in the United States are now fully vaccinated. Among this number, at least 6.1% of Asians (non-Hispanic) and 0.3% Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander groups have had at least one vaccination, which is an estimated 6.26 million people. "More than 300 million doses of

the vaccine have been administered in the United States alone. That constitutes a tremendous amount of experience with the vaccine," said Dr. Murthy. "And what we've seen is two things from all this experience. One, the vaccines remain remarkably effective in preventing COVID. And two, they also retain a very strong safety profile."

AANHPI communities face unique challenges during the pandemic, including obtaining information about COVID-19 and the availability of the vaccines due to language barriers, a low level of familiarity with computer technology, misinformation, and a misunderstanding of the vaccines or the science behind the vaccines.

"As a scientist, the lack of disaggregated data about AANHPI populations concerns me the most," said Dr. Rosario. "The lack of data specific to our diverse populations hide some

inequities caused by socioeconomic, health, and access. As a result, our communities are unaccounted for and feel invisible."

"The good news is South Asians overwhelmingly want to get vaccinated and do get vaccinated," said Dr. Parikh. "So many healthcare workers are South Asian, so we've seen firsthand the death and destruction from this virus. And remember, South Asians are at higher risk for severe COVID-19 and deaths from severe COVID-19 because we have higher rates of diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, and those are all big risk factors." The medical experts agreed following the CDC guidelines and your own physicians' guidance to get vaccinated as soon as you can to protect your family, loved ones, and community. Everyone 12 years of age and older is now eligible to get a

COVID-19 vaccination. "Children should get the vaccine because they are not immune or protected like we first thought in the early days of the pandemic," said Dr. Parikh. "One in five coronavirus infections are in pediatrics. And as kids go back to school, we don't want them to fall ill or be compromised. They should get vaccinated so that we can protect them from getting sick and inadvertently passing the infection on to one of their older family members who may be more vulnerable."

The doctors shared that it is normal for people to have questions about the vaccines. However, the vaccines have been proven to be safe and effective. The doctors encouraged having a trusted conversation with those you trust. When asked about those who have only received the first dose of the vaccine, Dr. Parikh strongly recommends they get the second shot.

California is turning the page.' Reopening celebrated with dancing after midnight and baseball bobblehead giveaway



California's Occupational Safety and Health Standards Board initially said masks would still be required unless everyone in the same room had been vaccinated. However, last week, the board reversed itself and said fully vaccinated workers do not need to wear masks or physically distance, regardless of others' vaccination status.

Gov. Gavin Newsom indicated he will sign an executive order later this week on workplace mask usage "to clear up any ambiguity."

Public health measures will remain only for mega events with 5,000 or more people indoors or 10,000 attendees outdoors, with vaccine verification required or at least recommended, according to the revised health order.

California also will stop limiting capacity and enforcing physical distancing at all venues, and the color-coded tier system for each county will be retired, Newsom said in a news release Friday.

"California is turning the page on this pandemic, thanks to swift action by the state and the work of Californians who followed public health guidelines and got vaccinated to protect themselves and their communities," said Newsom. "With nearly 40 million vaccines administered and among the lowest case rates in the nation, we are lifting the orders that impact Californians on a day-to-day basis while remaining vigilant to protect public health and safety as the pandemic persists." California businesses are already adjusting to the

changes in ways big and small. Just after midnight, the Abbey Food & Bar in West Hollywood brought back dancing, DJs and sitting at the bar for a party to celebrate the end of restrictions. Major League Baseball's Los Angeles Dodgers are holding a "Reopening Day" promo, with 25,000 Justin Turner bobbleheads, to welcome back a full capacity home crowd.

On Tuesday morning, several residents who spoke to CNN on the streets of San Francisco said they were happy with the lifting of restrictions. "I'm very happy about it. I think as long as we're safe, it's great," Jim Bloedau said. "Go out and get vaccinated. It's safe and everybody should take care of themselves and take care of each other."

(News Agencies)- California lifted most of its Covid-19 restrictions Tuesday as part of a grand reopening in which the state ended capacity limits, physical distancing and -- at least for those vaccinated -- mask requirements.

The new health order went into effect and allows vaccinated

people to go without a face covering in most situations, putting the state in line with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Masks are still required on public transportation, in hospitals and jails, as well as at schools and child care centers, pending updated guidance from the CDC.

Georgia authorities identify a grocery store cashier killed after a face mask dispute

(News Agencies)- Georgia authorities have identified a grocery store cashier killed during a face mask dispute and the man accused of shooting her.

DeKalb County police said Laquitta Willis, 41, was the victim in Monday's shooting at Big Bear grocery store in Decatur, just outside of Atlanta. Willis was killed after an argument over a face mask, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation said.

The GBI said Victor Lee Tucker Jr., 30, of Palmetto, Georgia, entered the store shortly after 1 p.m. and "got into an argument

with a cashier about his face mask" during checkout.

Tucker left the store without making a purchase but immediately returned, the GBI said. He walked directly up to the cashier, later identified as Willis, pulled out a handgun and shot her, authorities said.

Tucker then exchanged gunfire with a DeKalb County sheriff's deputy who was working security at the store, the GBI said.

DeKalb County Sheriff Melody Maddox said the reserve deputy was a 30-year veteran of the force prior to retiring and joining the reserve unit.

Tucker was arrested by two responding DeKalb County police officers "as he was attempting to crawl out the front door of the supermarket," according to the GBI.

The deputy and Tucker were wounded and taken to hospitals, the GBI said.

The deputy was in stable condition at Atlanta Medical Center and the suspect was in stable condition at Grady Memorial Hospital, the agency said. A second cashier was grazed by a bullet and treated at the scene, the GBI said. "Our hearts and prayers go out to the Willis family, the injured sheriff's



deputy and everyone impacted by yesterday's senseless incident," DeKalb County police spokesperson Michaela N. Vincent said in a statement Tuesday. The GBI said DeKalb County police will issue arrest

warrants for Tucker. The suspect faces charges including murder and two counts of aggravated assault, Vincent said. It was not clear Tuesday whether Tucker has an attorney.

Suspect in workplace shooting that killed 2 found dead from self-inflicted gunshot wound, police say



(News Agencies)-The suspect in an overnight shooting that killed two employees at a Mueller Co. facility in Alabama was later found dead from an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound, police said Tuesday.

Two other employees were injured in the shooting.

The suspect, identified as Andreas Deon Horton, 34, was also an employee of Mueller Co., said Albertville Police Chief Jamie Smith. Smith said that shortly after 2:30 a.m. Tuesday,

Horton began firing "an unknown amount of rounds" from a handgun at fellow employees.

Smith said there were victims "in two or three locations."

He said the majority of the shooting took place inside the plant during the middle of a shift.

"It's tough. No bones about it. Loss of life anytime is terrible whether it's at the hands of a gunman, natural causes, car accident, name it," said Smith.

The police chief said Michael Lee Dobbins and David Lee Horton were fatally wounded. Casey Sampson and Isaac Byrd were injured. They were taken to Marshall Medical

Center South in Boaz before being airlifted to Erlanger Hospital in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Smith said that while the suspect and one of the victims share a last name, they are not to his knowledge related.

After the shooting, Horton left the scene in a maroon Jeep Grand Cherokee, Smith said. Police in Guntersville, about 10 miles from Albertville, spotted Horton's vehicle and discovered Horton deceased from an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head. Smith said. "Multiple weapons" were recovered from inside the vehicle, he said.

Smith said officers are still processing the crime scene at Mueller and working to understand what "sparked or caused the shooting."

Albertville is in north Alabama, about 50 miles southeast of Huntsville.

'Our hearts are breaking' Mueller released a statement expressing both the company's shock and sadness and its commitment to supporting the employees and families of those impacted by the shooting.

Smith said the plant will likely be closed for a few days while the investigation by both state and federal agencies continues.

Four dead and four others hospitalized in shooting at home on Chicago's South Side



(News Agencies)-Four people were killed and another four were hospitalized Tuesday morning in a shooting inside a residence on Chicago's South Side. The shooting occurred around 5:42 a.m. (6:42 a.m. ET), after an argument at a gathering at the home in the Englewood neighborhood, police said. Three females and one male were killed in the shooting, and three men and one female were wounded, Chicago Police Superintendent David Brown said. There are no suspects in the shooting yet. The victims are the

only witnesses, but police have not been able to get statements from them yet because they are still being treated for their injuries, he said. A 2-year-old was also taken to the hospital for observation but was not shot, he said. Brown said a large capacity magazine from a gun and several casings were recovered inside the house. There was no apparent forced entry, he said. There have been several disturbance calls at the address where the shooting occurred, he said, but the block overall has been quiet.

Two Fort Hood soldiers charged with attempting to smuggle undocumented immigrants into Texas

(News Agencies)-Two Fort Hood active-duty soldiers have been charged with attempting to smuggle two undocumented Mexican citizens into Texas and could face up to 10 years in federal prison, according to the US Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Texas. Emmanuel Oppongagayare and Ralph Gregory Saint-Joie were both wearing their full US Army OCP uniforms when they approached the Hebbroville Border Patrol Checkpoint in a sedan on June 13, according to a criminal complaint by the US District Court for the Southern District of Texas. "At approximately 12:45 a.m., a black sedan approached the checkpoint at a high rate of speed before coming to an abrupt stop to be inspected by the BPA on duty," read the complaint. The border patrol agent asked Oppongagayare, who was driving

the vehicle, to lower the loud radio volume and proceeded to conduct the inspection. When asked where he was traveling to, Oppongagayare told the agent he was traveling to San Antonio from Zapata, Texas. "The BPA



travel to San Antonio, Texas." The agent then referred the vehicle for further investigation. As agents opened the trunk, they discovered two people who were both citizens of Mexico. "At this time, all subjects were placed under arrest and taken to the Hebbroville Border Patrol Station," read the complaint. In his statement, Oppongagayare stated he was approached by someone he met through Saint-Joie to pick up undocumented immigrants in McAllen, Texas, and take them to San Antonio. He was also paid \$100, according to the complaint. "Individual 1 promised to pay Oppongagayare and Saint-Joie an undetermined amount of money when they arrived in San Antonio, Texas, specifically instructed they both wear their United States Army issued uniforms to avoid questioning by BPAs," read the complaint.

Trump-era sentencing reform law doesn't apply to low-level crack cocaine offenders, Supreme Court says

The Supreme Court held Monday that a low-level crack-cocaine offender is ineligible to seek a reduced sentence under the Trump-era First Step Act sentencing reform law. The vote was 9-0. At issue in the case is whether low-level crack-cocaine offenders who were convicted before Congress changed sentencing guidelines in 2010 are eligible for lower sentences under a sentencing reform law passed in 2018. Under federal law there is a three-tier sentencing structure for cocaine offenses. Tiers "1" and "2" concern convictions for large and medium amounts of cocaine, while Tier "3" is reserved for low-

level offenders. In 2010 Congress increased the amount of crack quantities required for the two higher tiers out of concern for disparities between sentences for powder and crack cocaine and allegations that the sentences reflected race-based differences. In 2018, lawmakers passed the landmark, bipartisan First Step Act, making changes retroactive for crimes committed before 2010. The case at hand involved Tarahrick Terry, who was convicted in 2008 with possession with intent to distribute 3.9 grams of crack cocaine. He was sentenced to 188 months in prison under Tier "3." Terry is set to complete his

term of imprisonment on September 22, 2021, and then will begin serving six years of supervised release. His lawyers, supported by the Biden administration, said he should be eligible for a reduced sentence under the statutory changes. A lower court ruled, however, that Terry's offense did not merit a reduced sentence because the law did not target low-level offenders. It only changed the quantity guidelines for Tiers "1" and "2." Writing for the unanimous court, Justice Clarence Thomas said that Terry's offense was "starkly different" from those that triggered mandatory minimums. Justice Sonia Sotomayor agreed



with the court's interpretation of the law. But, she said, that while the First Step Act "brought us a long way toward eradicating the vestiges of the 100-to-1 crack to powder disparity, some people have been left behind."

She noted that if Terry had been sentenced under provisions of the law that require larger quantities of drugs, he would have been eligible for resentencing under the First Step Act "even if sentenced as a career offender."

Spanish man jailed for killing and eating his mother

(News Agencies)-A Spanish man has been sentenced to 15 years in prison after killing his mother and eating her remains. Alberto Sánchez Gómez, 28, was arrested in 2019 after police found body parts around his mother's home - some in plastic containers. The court rejected

Sánchez's arguments that he was experiencing a psychotic episode at the time of the killing. He will now serve 15 years for murder and a further five months for the desecration of a corpse. He has also been ordered to pay his brother •60,000 (\$73,000, £52,000) in

compensation. Police arrived at the home in eastern Madrid in February 2019 after a friend raised concerns about the welfare of María Soledad Gómez, who was in her 60s. During the trial, the court heard that Sánchez, then aged 26, had strangled his mother during a dispute.



Climate change is rapidly transforming the Arctic: Why everybody should care



If we ever encounter aliens, they will resemble AI and not little green martians

explanations for these videos: no extraterrestrials required.

But in a galaxy in which every third star is likely to host an Earth-size planet, it hardly seems possible that our world is the only one sporting intelligence. Which raises the possibility that we might someday make contact. If that occurs, what might the inhabitants of other worlds be like? The question is especially relevant if - as often happens in science-fiction - the aliens decide to pay us a visit.

If extraterrestrials come to Earth, the ensuing scenario would be quite different than picking up an alien radio signal or detecting a flashing laser in the sky, modes of discovery being pursued by my colleagues and myself. The aliens producing such signals will be light years away, and their appearance and intentions wouldn't be of much concern. But those of anyone landing their spacecraft on our turf would be. Consider their looks. On Earth, nature has spawned a wide variety of living forms, and presumably would do so anywhere multicellular life exists. All terrestrials have DNA blueprints, and share similarities in molecular makeup. Nonetheless, few of our fellow

Terrans resemble us. The extraterrestrials wouldn't either.

This argues against the iconic aliens of film and TV, those little gray guys who are no more than modified humans. Their four appendages, upright stance, and absence of body hair are simple extrapolations of ourselves. Yes, Hollywood offers up these beings as residents of faraway worlds. But really they're just the guy



next door, lacking in eyebrows and whites in their eyes.

Any aliens that trek to our planet are unlikely to be carbon-based life forms, either hirsute or hairless. Their cognitive abilities will probably not be powered by a spongy mass of cells we'd call a brain. They will probably have gone beyond biological smarts and, indeed, beyond biology itself. They won't be alive. The reason is a simple

limitations to high-speed rockets.

consequence of the staggering distances to the stars. Even the nearest, Proxima Centauri, is 25tn miles from Earth. Our fastest rockets would take 75,000 years to reach it. Neither humans nor Klingons are built to withstand such trips.

You might be thinking that the aliens might have far speedier spacecraft. Without doubt, that's possible. But there are natural

dismissed by noting that aliens could be far more advanced than us. And that's easily possible: The universe is three times the age of our solar system, so the Galaxy may house societies that are millions or even billions of years ahead of Homo sapiens. Nevertheless, while their technology might be in a different league, the aliens must operate under the same laws of physics. Star Trek and similar scenarios aside, it's extremely difficult to traverse light-years of space in less than a lifetime - anyone's lifetime. You can call up Scotty in the engine room, but he won't be able to help. Traveling from one solar system to another is incredibly difficult and expensive. However, if you're not in a hurry, the prospects for an interstellar voyage brighten considerably. Such leisurely trips aren't going to appeal to biological passengers who will die long before their destination is reached. Machines, on the other hand, won't complain if they're cooped up in a spaceship for tens of thousands of years. They don't require food, oxygen, sanitation or entertainment. And they don't insist on a round-trip ticket. Artificial intelligence aliens may not be as appealing as those who are warm-blooded and squishy, but we shouldn't get

hung up on an anthropocentric viewpoint. Researchers who work in AI estimate that machines able to beat humans on an IQ test will emerge from the labs by mid-century. If we can do it, some extraterrestrials will have already done it.

Therefore it's reasonable to expect that any cosmic intelligence paying us a visit will be synthetic. That rules out easy speculation on what the "aliens" will look like. But if it's a machine, who cares? Of greater concern would be its intentions. Most sci-fi stories postulate that visitors would be noxious, arriving with a primal urge to obliterate Los Angeles or London. Frankly, if that's what's on their mechanical minds, it's probably impossible to keep them at bay. Chimps couldn't outsmart humans in any serious confrontation. Likewise, devices who can manage a trip to Earth will have the capability to do whatever they wish once they get here.

It's a sure bet that any face-to-face encounter with extraterrestrials will be fraught. So, if alien craft ever do settle on the White House lawn, you can hope that whatever's inside is friendly. If not, there's always negotiation.

Trump spied on journalists. So did Obama. America needs more press freedom now

The US Department of Justice is under increasing fire for the still-unfolding scandals involving the secret surveillance of journalists and even members of Congress in the waning days of the Trump presidency. Some of these actions were even initially defended by the Biden administration's Department of Justice.

In response to the growing scandal - and the scathing condemnations from the surveillance targets at the New York Times, Washington Post and CNN - the US attorney general, Merrick Garland, has vowed the DoJ will no longer use legal process to spy on journalists "doing their jobs". The Times, the Post and CNN are set to meet with the justice department this week to seek more information on what happened and extract further promises it won't happen again.

But mark my words: if Congress does not pass tough and binding rules that permanently tie the DoJ's hands, it will happen again - whether it's a Democrat or a Republican in the White House. Promises are no longer enough. In many circles, these scandals are being portrayed as the Trump White House run amok. While some in the Trump justice department may have been motivated by political vengeance,

the problem is far bigger than Donald Trump, William Barr or even the party in charge of the White House.

As the reporter Charlie Savage detailed in an excellent piece in the New York Times over the weekend, administrations in both parties have spied on journalists with increasing abandon for almost two decades, in contravention of internal DoJ regulations and against the spirit of the first amendment. Many people already forget that before Trump was known as enemy number one of press freedom, Barack Obama's justice department did more damage to reporters' rights than any administration since Nixon.

So yes, Garland needs to immediately put his "no more spying on reporters" vow into the DoJ's official "media guidelines", which govern investigations involving journalists. If he doesn't, he or his successor could change their mind in an instant. But, why should we just "trust" Garland's pinky promise to not investigate journalists and politicians without an ironclad law?

Leaks of confidential and classified information to journalists are vital to our democratic system, yet the DoJ often diverts huge resources to root out their sources. If you want

an example, look no further than ProPublica's recent investigation into the American tax system and how the wealthiest billionaires in the country pay little to no taxes. The series of stories sparked outrage across the country as soon as it was published. Garland leapt into action, vowing an investigation ... only, he promised to investigate the leaker - not the tax dodgers.

The rise of internet communications has opened the floodgates to authorities' ability to spy on journalists and root out whistleblowers; they can figure out exactly who journalists are talking to, where, when, and how long; and they can silence media lawyers with expansive gag orders that can leave them almost helpless to appeal. And as the pandemic has rendered in-person meetings even harder than before, people everywhere are more reliant on the communications infrastructure that can betray them at any time.

For real safeguards, Congress needs to act. Perhaps the fact that multiple members of Congress itself, including the representatives Adam Schiff and Eric Swalwell, have now been ensnared in the DoJ's leak dragnet will make them more likely to move than in the past. The irony is Representative Schiff and Representative Swalwell have



of course been some of Congress's most ardent defenders of surveillance - even during the Trump administration. They fought against surveillance reform that would put in more safeguards at the DoJ on multiple occasions. In Representative Schiff's case, despite literally being the co-chair of the "press freedom caucus", he inserted a provision into an intelligence bill that would even make it easier for the government to prosecute reporters who published leaked classified information.

Being the victim of unjust surveillance sometimes tends to make even the most devoted surveillance hawks soften their stance. If Garland is promising to bar the surveillance of journalists for the purpose of finding their sources, Congress can simply pass a law holding them to it. Anything else at this point is

just empty rhetoric.

But there is another issue looming large over this debate, one that many seem hesitant to talk about. Garland has said so far that the DoJ won't spy on journalists unless they are engaged in a crime. Well, the DoJ is currently attempting to make newsgathering a crime, in the form of its case against the WikiLeaks founder, Julian Assange.

Assange is, to say the least, not popular in Washington DC and in mainstream journalism circles. However, the actions described in the indictment against him, most notably the 17 Espionage Act charges, are indistinguishable for what reporters do all the time: talk to sources, cultivate their trust, request more information, receive classified documents, and eventually publish them.

Did I use the pandemic for 'self-improvement'? Nope. And that's fine



Early in the pandemic there was a moment when it started to become clear that the lockdowns that had been proposed as a temporary measure were, in fact, going to go on for a while. Society was understandably anxious. What are we going to do, people wondered, without restaurants, bars, dating, face-to-face human contact, sex with strangers, museums, opera, movie

theaters?

Some of the worst people in the world swept in with suggestions. Don't think of this as lost time, self-help moguls and lifestyle influencers and creative professionals told us. Think of this as an opportunity. Dutifully, some Americans made big plans to utilize and optimize this year of mass death and instability - to perfect sourdough; to learn Italian from an app; to do a lot of squats;

to write King Lear.

I thought they were joking. I thought the pandemic resolutions would end up like the kind made on New Year's Eve, pursued with optimism and vigor for two weeks, then shoved in a drawer never to be thought about again. But a man's viral description of a recent job interview reveals that someone took the notion of spending the pandemic working on ourselves very seriously: our potential employers.

"I don't want to alarm anyone," the pseudonymous Twitter user warned, but at a job interview he was asked whether he used the pandemic to "to pursue any passion projects or personal development". His tweet prompted a flood of other users' similar experiences of being asked to account for their time shut into their houses. Whether you spent the pandemic curled

into a ball mainlining carbohydrates or in a frantic pursuit of accomplishment and accreditation and ambition while people died around you is, I guess, supposed to say something about your character and whether you deserve employment and money and benefits.

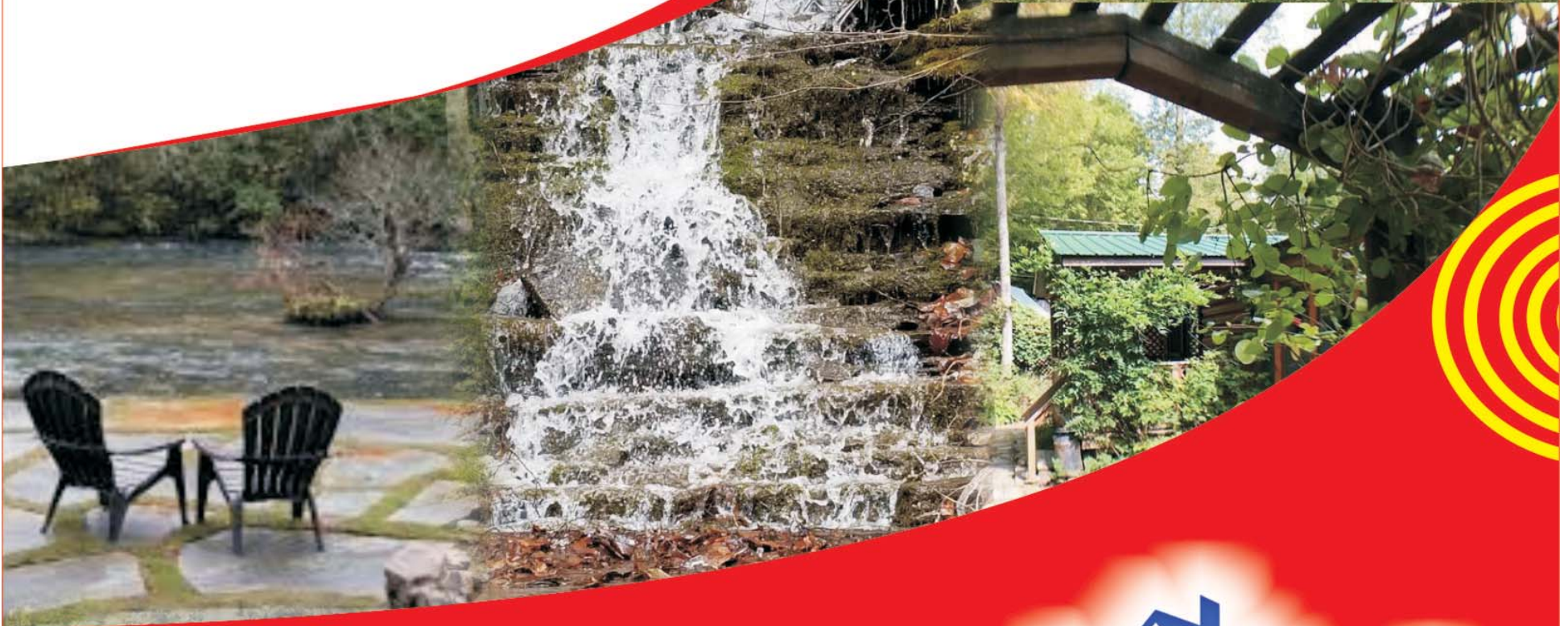
During the past year, the media tried to stuff us with inspirational stories of people who took a bad situation and made it grand. This man made a fortune shorting stocks from his kitchen table. This couple made millions selling handmade masks on Etsy. This person wrote a hit book, got fit, found love in the most unlikely of places. And here were all the good boys and girls of social media, looking for their gold stars for meeting deadlines, getting new jobs, exploiting others' labor in a rentier economy so they

could buy an ugly handbag.

Now that cities are reopening and businesses are hiring employees again and we are re-emerging, as hungry and horny and soft as Brood X cicadas, what do we have to show for it? I feel like the algorithm knows that I have not been living my best life under lockdown; my newsfeeds are working overtime recommending articles on losing my pandemic pounds and making myself attractive to employers. Now the New York Times is suggesting that I ruthlessly cut out friends who aren't inspiring and ambitious enough for my glamorous post-quarantine lifestyle: obese friends will only make me obese, a Times article explains. Depressed friends will only make me depressed. It's time to restart your life; you already wasted a year, you big dummy, the clock is ticking.

Let's go to explore a magical place

*Come into the lap of
Nature, Explore Hiking,
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*Hunting on 100 Acres of
Unexplored & Beautiful
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Inside Story Behind The Coup That Took Down Chirag Paswan

After splitting votes during last year's assembly polls by turning against the leadership of Nitish Kumar, Chirag Paswan had become an "obstacle in the unity of NDA", sources said.

The Black Monday for Lok Janashakti's Party Chirag Paswan - the overnight coup that saw five of the party's six MPs rebel took place after a mutual understanding between the BJP and Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal United (JDU), sources have indicated. This, though, is just the beginning. The LJP's leader in the Lok Sabha, who was replaced by his uncle, Pashupati Kumar Paras by late Monday evening, will be completely marginalised within the party soon, sources said.

This is a well-planned move which has the backing of senior BJP and JDU leaders.

After splitting votes during last year's assembly polls by turning against the leadership of Nitish Kumar, Chirag Paswan had become an "obstacle in the unity of NDA", sources said.

Nitish Kumar - who suspected



But the JDU had strongly disagreed with Union minister Amit Shah about the invitation was rescinded, after number of cabinet berths. Nitish Kumar, sources said, was not keen on sharing

meeting was organised in Patna on Saturday where the decision to replace Chirag Paswan was taken. Pashupati Kumar Paras was told that he would be able to become a part of the NDA in Bihar and the Centre only if Chirag Paswan was not in command.

Pashupati Kumar Paras was told that he would be able to become a part of the NDA in Bihar and the Centre only if Chirag Paswan was not in command.

An agreement was reached after long deliberations and the responsibility of introducing the five MPs to the Speaker after their rebellion on Sunday night was given to a BJP parliamentarian from Bihar.

On Monday evening, the Speaker accepted Pashupati Kumar Paras as the Leader of LJP in the Lok Sabha in place of Mr Paswan.

Mr Paras - known to be the right hand man of his brother Ram Vilas Paswan - fell out with his nephew soon after the union minister's death. The differences were mainly about Nitish Kumar. Mr Paras had been vocal in his support for Mr Kumar and opposed Chirag Paswan's decision of going solo in the polls, breaking away from the NDA.

On his part, Mr Kumar has been deeply upset over Chirag Paswan's personal attacks on him and the BJP's radio silence over it. This, along with Mr Paswan's repeated comment that he wanted the Chief Minister's post to go to the BJP, had deepened the JDU's suspicion that he had rebelled against Mr Kumar's leadership at the behest of BJP.

According to JDU leaders, the party lost 32 seats because of Chirag Paswan - which pushed it on the backfoot and accorded the BJP the primacy in the alliance within the state.

Sources said a meeting of the LJP's national executive will soon be held in which Mr Paras will be elected the party's national president - a post currently held by Mr Paswan. As and when PM Modi's Council of Ministers expands, Mr Paras can be made a minister.

The LJP can even be made part of the government in Bihar, sources said. Though the party failed to win a single seat in the state, the minister can be routed through the Legislative Council.

Political leaders in Bihar, however, said it might be difficult to ignore Chirag Paswan completely, as LJP supporters know he is the political heir to Ram Vilas Paswan and consider him the successor.

The main reason for this rebellion is the working style of Chirag Paswan. He is believed to have been taking all the party-related decisions without consulting any MPs or any other senior leader. It is alleged that all the decisions were influenced by his political advisor Saurabh Pandey and that Mr Paswan was simply putting his signature to them. This includes the decision to contest against the BJP and the JDU in the Bihar assembly polls last year. Mr Paswan, it is believed, had stopped meeting with the party MPs.



that his rebellion took place at the behest of the BJP - refused to have anything to do with him after the election. The Chief Minister made it clear that he did not want Paswan Junior to be part of any meeting of the alliance, or have any relation with the BJP or the Centre, sources said.

One instance, sources said, was in January before the budget session started. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi had invited Chirag Paswan for the NDA meeting.

Matters came to a head with the possibility of an expansion in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's cabinet.

Mr Paswan was seen as a natural choice. His father Ram Vilas Paswan had died while in the cabinet and in that sense, the party had one seat in the Council of Ministers. But this time, the JDU is also hoping for a ministerial post this time, even though Mr Kumar had turned it down after the BJP sweep in the 2019 election and the subsequent

space with Mr Paswan in the cabinet.

Accordingly, senior JDU leader Lallan Singh and a BJP Rajya Sabha MP contacted the LJP MPs on this issue.

The LJP's constitution was studied so that the decision cannot be challenged legally. Maheshwar Prasad Hazari, the Deputy Speaker in the Bihar assembly and a JDU leader, played a key role. He was an MLA from Mr Paswan's party in the past and has close relations with the Paswan family. A

Why Delta Strain Is Dangerous, Will Vaccines Work On It, And Other FAQs



As nations race to roll out vaccines in the global effort to contain Covid-19 and allow for a return to normal, the rise of dangerous virus variants threatens to prolong the pandemic. In the U.K., the spread of the so-called delta variant, first identified in India, has led officials to send military personnel to hotspots and prompted the government to reconsider easing Covid restrictions on June 21 as planned. Here, Sam Fazeli, a Bloomberg Opinion contributor who covers the pharmaceutical industry for Bloomberg Intelligence, answers questions about the risks stemming from this variant and more. The conversation has been edited and condensed.

What sets the delta variant apart from other variants and what makes it so concerning?

The Sars-Cov-2 delta variant, also known as B.1.617.2, is a so-called variant of concern like others we have seen before including "alpha" (first found in the U.K.), "beta" (first identified in South Africa) and "gamma" (discovered in Brazil). Two factors set delta apart and make it potentially the most dangerous to date: First, it has about a 40% higher transmission rate compared with alpha, which already had a 50% higher transmissibility than the original strain of the virus. This is clearly visible in the data coming out of the U.K., which shows that the delta variant went from accounting for 1% of all cases in early April to 70% by mid-May. It

will likely almost completely replace the alpha variant by the end of June. The higher transmissibility is also clear from the increase in the number of cases across the U.K. Second, it is also believed to cause more severe disease than alpha, translating to a further rise in the percentage of positive cases that require hospitalization, despite the fact that the infections are in younger people. This second problem of increased severity had not been confirmed with any other variant to date.

Does the delta variant respond to vaccines? Is there any data about which vaccines may work better against it?

What is rather surprising about delta is that it has lost the key mutation that had people worried about the beta and gamma variants (to get technical, it's the one in position 484 of the amino acid chain of the spike protein of the virus). This is one of the mutations that contributed to the loss of response to some antibodies, including those produced by the vaccines. We do know that delta is less sensitive than alpha to antibodies generated by the vaccines, and at about the same level as beta. Also, data from Public Health

England shows that the first dose of the Pfizer Inc.-BioNTech SE and AstraZeneca Plc vaccines provide only about a 30% protection against delta, though this rises to at least 88% after the second dose of the Pfizer vaccine and 60% after the second dose of the Astra vaccine (this is likely to rise with more time for second doses to take effect in Britain). These levels of protection are lower than what has been seen against the older variants such as alpha, but they still show that two doses of vaccines work pretty well against the delta variant. The real risk is when you consider the broader population, where many people are either unvaccinated or only have one dose of the vaccine, combined with delta's higher transmissibility and disease severity.

Where is it in the world?

This is not an easy question to answer because the level of genomic surveillance is low in so many countries. Based on data from GISAID, a global effort for sharing and tracking information on viruses, the U.K. has the highest proportion of the delta variant outside of India, at 70% of its cases. The U.S. is showing about 5% (and growing) and

Germany is at about 2%. Italy and Spain are each at about 3% to 5%. The issue is that many of these countries are going down the road of opening their economies while their full vaccination levels have yet to hit the critical 50% to 70% required for controlling virus spread.

Should the U.S. or countries in the European Union worry about it as much as the U.K.?

The spread of delta is already out of control in the U.K. But other countries appear to only be at the early stages. I think the best any country can do, where the virus variant is already present, is to vaccinate as fast as possible, while increasing testing and genomic surveillance. Otherwise, the first indication of a problem will be an increased rate of positive cases. The U.K.'s situation compared with Israel throws a spotlight on why the delta variant is such a problem. Israel managed to get its cases under control when it reached about a 50% vaccination rate among its entire population. Despite the fact that the U.K. achieved a 42.3% a vaccination rate, its case counts have started to rise rapidly in the past two weeks because of a combination of early reopening and the spread of delta.

New York reaches vaccine milestone and joins California in reopening

Tuesday brought reopenings in two of the largest states, with New York reaching an important vaccine milestone and joining California in dropping most of its Covid-19 restrictions. "This is a momentous day, and we deserve it because it has been a long, long road," New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said. "We can now return to life as we know it." At least 70% of New Yorkers have received at least one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine dose, prompting the lifting of pandemic mitigation measures.

On the other side of the country, California, the first state to shut down last year, ended limits on capacity at most venues and stopped requiring physical distancing and masks for people who have been vaccinated.

"I'm very happy about it. I think as long as we're safe, it's great," San Francisco resident Jim Bloedau told CNN. "Go out and get vaccinated. It's safe and everybody should take care of

themselves and take care of each other."

The reopenings are occurring in the two states that have seen the most deaths from Covid-19 -- California with more than 63,000 and New York with 53,500. Tuesday, the US death toll from the pandemic passed 600,000. Cuomo noted that at one point, his state had a Covid-19 positivity rate of 48.16% -- once the highest positivity rate in the world. The governor said the positivity rate is now 0.40% -- the lowest rate in the country, according to Johns Hopkins University.

"We were alone, and it was frightening. It was like living through a science fiction movie ... people abandoned New York, but others stayed and others fought," Cuomo said. "Where are we today? We have the lowest positivity rate in the United States of America. ... We went literally from worst to first."

All state-mandated restrictions were immediately lifted across all

commercial and social settings, including the requirements on social gatherings, capacity restrictions, social distancing, cleaning and disinfection protocols, and contact tracing. Mask requirements will continue in pre-K settings, on public transit and in health care settings, Cuomo said.

"We're no longer just surviving. We're not in our homes afraid to go out," the governor said. "We're not in our homes disinfecting everything we that we can see. Life is not about survival. Life is about thriving." The governor also announced that all of the state's assets, including the Empire State Building, will be lit in blue and gold Tuesday night. Additionally, firework shows will occur at 9:15 p.m. ET at various sites across the state Tuesday night. Cuomo warned there are still things to be concerned about as New York recovers. "We still have to watch these variants of interest. We still have to



be careful." Variants of concern worry experts As coronavirus keeps spreading across the globe, it has mutated into more transmissible strains -- including the Alpha (B.1.1.7) and Delta (B.1.617.2) variants.

Both strains are now considered "variants of concern" by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which added the Delta variant now accounts for

close to 10% of US cases.

That means there's "evidence of an increase in transmissibility, more severe disease (e.g., increased hospitalizations or deaths), significant reduction in neutralization by antibodies generated during previous infection or vaccination, reduced effectiveness of treatments or vaccines, or diagnostic detection failures," the CDC says.

Major US mall owner files for bankruptcy



Washington Prime Group, a major mall owner of more than 100 locations across the United States, filed for bankruptcy, citing pandemic-related shutdowns. The Columbus, Ohio-based company filed for Chapter 11 late Sunday, saying Covid-19 "created significant challenges"

and that the move is "necessary." Washington Prime secured \$100 million in new funding to support its day-to-day operations so it can "continue in the ordinary course without interruption." "The company's financial restructuring will enable Washington Prime to right size

its balance sheet and position the company for success going forward," said CEO Lou Conforti. "During the financial restructuring, we will continue to work toward maximizing the value of our assets and our operating infrastructure." Shares of Washington Prime (WPG) plunged as much as 55% in early trading. The stock is down 60% for the year.

Temporary closures and relaxation of rent to some of its tenants were the causes of the bankruptcy. Washington Prime, which warned this move was coming in recent regulatory filings, said it's using Chapter 11 to "implement a comprehensive

and consensual financial restructuring" to deleverage its nearly \$1 billion in debt.

Shifting consumer habits and the pandemic rattled the retail industry over the past year. Two other mall owners, CBL Properties (CBLPRD) and PREIT (PEI), both filed for bankruptcy last year and cited similar problems. All three mall owners were hurt by some major tenants also filing for bankruptcy.

"The bankruptcy shows that while things are now getting back to normal, many of the scars left by the pandemic have not fully healed," said Neil Saunders, retail analyst and managing director at GlobalData. "Strong balance

sheets and sound operations are needed to see property companies through this period," he added. "Washington Prime did not have those fundamentals and so has chosen Chapter 11 as a way to restructure and pay down its debts."

The pandemic sped up the shift to online shopping, and the continued growth of e-commerce sales will lead to more stores shutting down after the pandemic ends, UBS retail analysts predicted in a recent report. The report estimates that around 80,000 stores will close over the next five years. They also believe the number of US malls will also decline over the same period.

Covid Has Created An 'Ecosystem' Of Innovation In India: Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw

The ongoing COVID-19 public health crisis has resulted in the creation of an "ecosystem" of innovation in India, Biocon chief Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw has said ahead of the annual India-US bio-pharma summit in Boston next week.

Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, 68, is one of the key speakers at the 15th edition of the annual virtual summit on June 22 hosted by the USA India Chambers of Commerce. The other star-studded speakers include Dr Albert Bourla, Chairman and CEO of Pfizer; Dr Francis Collins, Director, National Institutes of Health; Dr Janet Woodcock, Acting Commissioner, US Food

and Drug Administration; and Amitabh Kant, CEO of NITI Aayog.

"The whole intent (of the more than a decade old annual India-US bio pharma summit) is to catalyse an innovation ecosystem in India. I think, COVID-19 has actually created the ecosystem," she told PTI in an interview.

COVID-19, she, noted, has actually resulted in innovative vaccines being produced, such as Covaxin, Genova mRNA programme, and many other programmes that the Indian vaccine makers have licensed and developed in the country.

Then, of course, the whole clinical

research ecosystem has been created because we've had so many clinical trials in India, whether it is for new repurpose drugs or vaccines...basically bridging trials, a lot of clinical trials have also happened in India, said the executive chairperson and founder of Biocon, a top biotechnology company based in Bangalore, noting that clinical trials were banned in India at one stage.

"And then when the whole environment opened up for clinical trials, there were not enough trials going on. Now suddenly, a whole bunch of clinical trials have gone on. A lot of clinical sites have opened. A lot of investigator-



initiated studies have started."

I think the whole understanding that you've just got to get into clinical trials and clinical research, to actually address a large number of unmet needs is now beginning to dawn on the Indian innovation system, she said. She noted that India has a large number of incubators, where they are developing some

very innovative programmes.

"There is VC funding now getting into those programmes. So slowly, that ecosystem has been created," the billionaire entrepreneur said, adding that companies from India have started US operations to raise funding and are becoming a part of the US' innovation ecosystem.

Rishi Sunak Drawn Into Father-In-Law Narayana Murthy Amazon Tax Dispute: Report



Following the report, the office of UK Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak, who is son-in-law of Mr Murthy, was forced to comment.

Cloudtail India Pvt Ltd - the online retailing joint venture of Infosys co-founder NR Narayana Murthy's firm and Amazon.com - faced a 5.5 million pounds demand, including interest and penalties, from tax authorities after it paid "meagre"

taxes over the past four years, a media report said on Monday. Amazon reportedly developed independent sellers such as Cloudtail, as "special merchant" which enjoyed over 35 per cent of total sales on the platform until 2019. While Mr Murthy's

Catamaran Ventures indirectly holds 76 per cent in Cloudtail and Amazon the remaining 24 per cent, the firm's two top posts - chief executive and finance director - were with the US retailer. Cloudtail's holding company, Prione is also run by a former Amazon manager, the report in "The Guardian" newspaper said. It said that it is not known precisely what the tax dispute is about and the company said that it was contesting the bill, adding that since the "matter is sub judice, we are unable to comment any

further". Following the report, the office of UK Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak, who is son-in-law of Mr Murthy, was forced to comment. The revelations come just days after Mr Sunak led the G7 finance ministers' charge to agree to a global deal designed to make tech companies pay more tax.

"Reaching an international agreement on how large digital companies are taxed has been a priority for the chancellor since he took office," said a spokesperson for his UK Treasury office. "The Chancellor's

consistent position has been that it matters where tax is paid, and any agreement must ensure digital businesses pay tax in the UK that reflects their economic activities. That is what our taxpayers would expect and is the right thing," the spokesperson said. Mr Sunak has been dubbed the UK's richest minister, largely as a result of his wife Akshata Murthy's family wealth. The latest 'Guardian' report claims that an analysis of Cloudtail's accounts and activities shows that it is one of the largest sellers on Amazon.

The Great Indian Bustard And India's Renewable Energy Challenge



In an effort to save the great Indian bustard from flying into power lines, a Supreme Court order is asking for transmission lines in a large swathe of the region to go underground.

Pity the great Indian bustard. The majestic, endangered bird is massive, making it slow to maneuver in flight. It has poor frontal vision, and an unfortunate habit of scanning the earth while flying across the flat grasslands of India's western borders. That combination too often sets it on a fatal collision course with power lines.

Pity also, if you will, the plight of India's renewable energy developers. The wide-open region that's home to the rare bird has long been an ideal location for wind and solar projects. In an effort to save the great Indian bustard from flying into power lines, a Supreme Court order is asking for transmission lines in a large swathe of the region to go underground. The companies say the directive could cost an estimated \$4 billion in extra expenses, and jeopardize nearly 20 gigawatts of awarded solar and wind projects.

Before taking sides, though, be aware that the issue is more nuanced than a straightforward clash pitting industry against nature. The effort to save the bustard holds risks for what is arguably an even larger environmental cause: It could set back India's climate goals, which depend heavily on the availability of wasteland like the bustard's domain for putting up solar panels and wind turbines.

"The whole renewable industry, especially solar, could come to a standstill," said Parag Sharma, chief executive officer at O2 Power Pvt., a Temasek Holdings-backed developer that's building a 780-megawatt solar project in the western Indian town of Jaisalmer. "You won't find land that easily anywhere else in the country." Other companies that have projects in the region include Adani Green Energy Ltd., ReNew Power Pvt. and Acme Solar Holdings.

'Certain' Extinction

The April ruling was a result of a petition filed in 2019 by M.K. Ranjitsinh Jhala, a former bureaucrat

turned wildlife activist. The judges based their order on a report by the state-run Wildlife Institute of India, which said that "unless power line mortality is mitigated urgently, extinction of GIBs is certain."

The court ruled that all low-voltage lines, including existing ones, need to be taken below the earth. It formed a three-member committee to examine the feasibility of also putting high-voltage cables underground.

The problem, according to the energy companies, is that the court

went well beyond the report's prescription. While the WII advised burying cables in a region where most of the birds live, the court also called for action in potential habitats, expanding the protection area and the cost burden for the companies.

"We were taken by surprise," said Subrahmanyam Pulipaka, CEO of industry lobby National Solar Energy Federation of India. "We are discussing all options, including filing a review petition before the court, approaching the committee to present our case, or both."

'Slow Bird'

Great Indian bustards -- the name means "slow bird" in Old French -- are among the heaviest flying creatures on earth. They stand about 1 meter tall (3.3 feet), have a wing span of about 2 meters, and

weigh nearly 18 kilograms, more than twice the size of a peacock. The easily frightened, ground-nesting bird used to roam across 11 states in India, but their dwelling ground has shrunk to mostly Rajasthan.

A WII survey covering 80 kilometers of power lines across the Thar desert region of the state found four bustard deaths during a single year due to high-transmission wires, including some connected to wind turbines. The study found that the birds died either because of the impact of the collision or electrocution.

Besides the transmission wires, a rapid conversion of grassland for farming or industrial projects and a slow birth rate -- bustards lay one egg every year or two -- have also led to their depleting numbers.

"These birds are on the brink of extinction and are now confined to a very small area. Saving that ecosystem should be as much a part of our climate goals as any other thing," said Sreeja Chakraborty, a Bengaluru-based environment lawyer.

"If the industry finds it tough to comply with the court's order, they should move their projects to other locations." Since the ruling, the power companies and government and state officials have scrambled to find a solution for both businesses and birds. In a meeting in early May, the participants discussed the technical difficulties of taking high-voltage lines below ground, the cost implications and even environmental hazards of below-the-earth cabling, according to documents seen by Bloomberg.

Life Style

How cycling can take centre stage in a post-Covid India

With motorists largely staying off the roads during the lockdown last year and in May 2021, Mumbai's streets saw several residents bring out their bicycles to ride on the less-crowded city roads. The reasons were many--it's a good form of exercise, is non-polluting and environment friendly, offers a cost-effective mode of travel, plus allows for social distancing, which will be key to staying safe as people begin emerging from their homes and start commuting to work. A lot of cycles now come with better safety features--strong aluminium bodies and gears--so people can ride with more force. It's a great way to get exercise without using common spaces like gymnasiums. Pradeep K. Aggarwal, Bicycle Panel Convenor, EEPC India, says that with "better quality" cycles with enhanced safety features

and sturdier frames more in demand, the government must implement a few measures to bring more cyclists on the streets. We need strong laws that make roads safer for cyclists. Speed restrictions on



city roads, especially at roundabouts, must be implemented by the government. The World Health Organization (WHO) has launched a campaign, 'Streets for Life', to urge governments to reduce speeds to 30 kmph in cities. We also need strict penalties for

motorists who endanger the lives of cyclists by driving rashly. That will be a deterrent for people who do not follow speed restrictions and road safety rules. Once these rules are in place, more people will be confident of cycling. E-bikes are becoming popular, too, with people since they are a great way to commute short distances. In Indian summers, riding a cycle can be very exhausting during the day, so e-bikes take the exertion out of cycling. It also requires

less force so you can commute to work or to places easily. Meanwhile, petrol pumps, too, must install bicycle repair centres or kiosks. This can be done at a low cost, since the repair instruments can be set up within a budget of Rs 5,000. Repairmen, who usually sit by

the roadside, can be given a place at petrol pumps. So, if people are riding long distances and their cycles break down, they can easily find a repair shop at a petrol pump. That convenience will encourage more people to use bicycles.

Archaeological sites, zoos, botanical gardens, forts and any other places of tourist interest which have a large expanse, should offer bicycles on rent. It will make it easier for people to explore the place and popularise cycling. Last year, Smart Cities Mission had launched the India Cycles4Change Challenge, an initiative by the government to inspire cities to implement cycling-friendly initiatives, such as dedicated cycle lanes. Many cities in Europe created lanes for cyclists during the lockdown last year and have retained those.

Luca movie review:

Pixar's latest is a lively, laugh-out-loud Italian adventure in the middle of a pandemic

Luca movie review: Disney-Pixar's new film will give you intense wanderlust, and also wholesome entertainment.

You can't have too many musical montages in Luca, the spectacular new film from Disney-Pixar that doubles up as a cruel reminder that there will be no Italian vacations for you in the immediate future. Not unless you mask up and get that vaccine. Set in a sleepy seaside town in the Italian riviera and directed by a man whose almost comically authentic-sounding name (Enrico Casarosa) overcompensates for his lack of feature directing experience, Luca doesn't have the emotional wallop of some of the studio's earlier work, but is still miles ahead of most toxic entertainment geared towards kids these days. Inspired equally by the films of Federico Fellini and Hayao Miyazaki, Luca is a lot like its protagonist - a hybrid. On the surface, it's the sort of wholesome American entertainment that audiences

have grown to expect from Pixar, but the undercurrent of sadness that runs through most of the studio's films has been replaced by a fountain of optimism. It's no wonder that Luca is in many ways about the fleeting nature of youth, and the importance of nostalgia. It's also a less-strange version of The Shape of Water, but let's not get into that. Jacob Tremblay and his Canadian accent star as the titular Luca, a young sea monster who discovers that he can transform into a human being if he ventures above the surface. But the town of Portorosso is a dangerous place, whose inhabitants have long harboured a deep-rooted fear of the seaw dwellers, although they haven't ever really seen any. It's this sight-unseen prejudice against the 'other' that makes Luca a film of great relevance.

On one adventurous trip to the

surface, Luca meets Alberto, a runaway sea monster who has been living by himself in a crumbly old lighthouse. They bond instantly. Soon, Luca and Alberto are solving the mysteries of the universe, making purchases mere moments after being introduced to the concept of money, and together dreaming of one day owning the most alluring of all manmade artefacts: a shiny Vespa. It'll be a means of escape - from a life of oppression, of fear, and of being demonised by men and women who don't even know them. Luca and Alberto decide that the only thing left for them to do is to somehow make enough money to buy themselves a ticket out of town. So they befriend a local girl named Giulia, and before they know it, they're eating pasta dinners at her home and preparing to participate in the annual triathlon. There's genuine



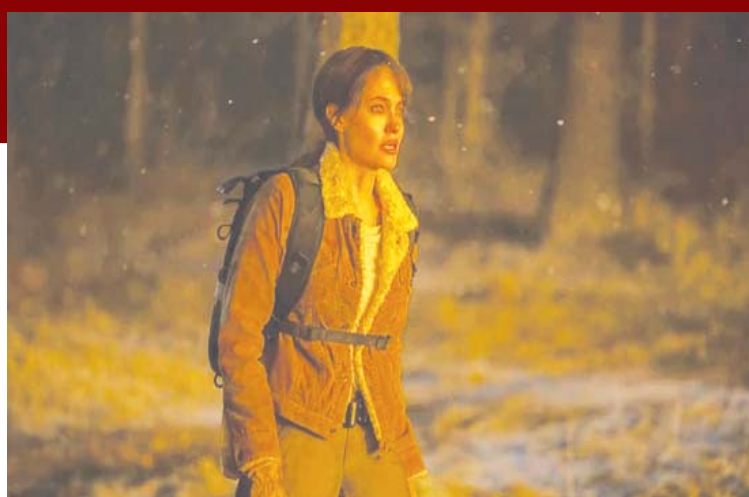
warmth and humour in these scenes, as the three misfits find that even though they didn't have much of a choice in their past, they can certainly decide what they want their future to be. The queer-bating is a bit of an issue, though, especially if you take into account the film's (very obvious) hat-tips to the films of Luca Guadagnino, particularly Call Me by Your Name. Incidentally, Jack Dylan Grazer, who plays Alberto, even starred in Guadagnino's similar coming-of-age series We Are Who We Are. The once-infallible animation house still seems to be finding its footing in the post-John Lasseter years.

While Soul clearly struck a chord with audiences, Onward was a rare disappointment. Luca, armed with Dan Romer's unabashedly whimsical score and some truly stunning visuals, will be difficult to resist. Unlike Soul, and so many other recent Pixar films, Luca isn't aiming for photorealism; it's the rare cartoon movie that looks and feels like a cartoon movie. Even though the technology exists, and has been proven to work time after time, Enrico Casarosa and his team seem to be going after a more stylised look - a combination of hand-drawn and stop-motion animation.

Those Who Wish Me Dead movie review:

Angelina Jolie is jaw-droppingly good in Taylor Sheridan's old-school thriller

Those Who Wish Me Dead movie review: Angelina Jolie delivers a real movie star performance in director Taylor Sheridan's old-school chase thriller.



Taylor Sheridan is a better writer than he is a director; the two films that he has directed so far prove this hypothesis. There's a niggling feeling that in the hands of a more experienced filmmaker, his latest, Those Who Wish Me Dead, would've been even better than it already is. Much like how Denis Villeneuve and David Mackenzie elevated Sheridan's scripts for Sicario and Hell or High Water, perhaps a new pair of eyes would've discovered exciting elements in his screenplay for Those Who

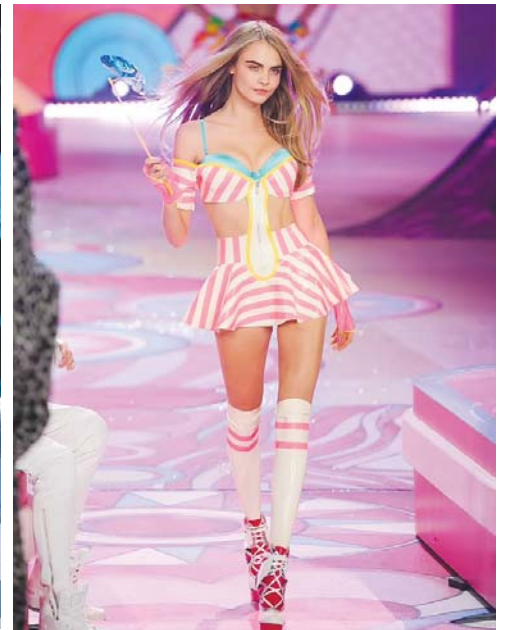
Wish Me Dead, a drama-thriller about an outcast firefighter who is forced to protect an on-the-run child. But perceived through Sheridan's neo-Western sensibilities, it remains exactly that. This isn't to say that the film doesn't work - far from it, it's a hyper-lean, confidently made old-school chase thriller - but I wish that the characters had more to do than simply fulfil the requirements of the plot. Angelina Jolie delivers a true movie star performance as Hannah, a smokejumper who is

struggling emotionally, after failing to save three young campers and a colleague in a forest fire. In a punishment posting, she's been sent to live in an observation tower in the middle of a forest. On one of her rounds, she runs into a lost young boy at the side of a creek, and noticing his state, offers help. She brings young Connor to her observation tower, where she learns that he's been marked for murder. Sheridan sets up the conflict with surprising confidence - the first act is devoted almost entirely to Connor, who is forced to go on the run after a couple of hitmen assassinate his father. In his final moments, Connor's dad gives him some secret documents, and instructs him to get them to his brother, a sheriff's deputy who also happens to be close friends with

Hannah. We are never told about the contents of the documents, nor given a solid explanation as to why Connor's dad was even killed. But that's the sort of conviction with which Sheridan tells his stories. He understands that this information will add nothing to the plot; his focus is on the people. He surrounds Jolie with a spectacular supporting cast, which includes Jon Bernthal as deputy sheriff Ethan, Medina Senghore as his wife Allison, and Nicholas Hoult and Aiden Gillen as the Blackwells - the two Terminators hot on Connor's trail. Tyler Perry pops by in a surprising one-scene cameo as the Blackwells' boss. This is the sort of studio movie that used to get made a decade ago. And that's squarely the style that Sheridan is going for in Those Who Wish Me Dead. He directs without any visual

embellishments, although his story builds to a conclusion that can only be described as melodramatic. Hannah goes full momma-bear on the assassins in a fiery face-off, giving Jolie an opportunity to flex not only her dramatic chops, but her long-dormant bonafides as an action star. Like a real Western heroine, Hannah essentially stumbles into conflict - she is like the Mad Max to Connor's Furiosa; or the Rooster Cogburn to his Mattie Ross. Her PTSD plays out in the background, and the film is only partially framed through her perspective. Underwritten as they might be, however, the supporting characters are given enough moments to stand out - Bernthal is typically feral in one scene, but it is his onscreen wife who has been given the film's most thrilling sequence.

Victoria's Secret has axed its 'really harmful' Past for a very PC rebrand. And LINDA KELSEY feels strangely nostalgic



So the Angels of Victoria's Secret, wobbling precariously on their killer stilettos for some years, have finally fallen. They will be replaced, according to a company announcement this week, with a 'culturally relevant' group of seven women who will form the 'VS Collective'. Their mission? As newly appointed brand ambassador Megan Rapinoe, 35, a pink-haired soccer superstar and LGBT advocate, put it bluntly this week, to address a culture which was 'patriarchal, sexist, viewing not just what it meant to be sexy but what the clothes were trying to accomplish through . . . what men desired. And it was very much marketed toward younger women'. That message, she added, was 'really harmful'. Surely, though, it's more a case of reversing a decade of bad PR and falling sales in a

breath-takingly cynical marketing exercise. There was a time when I could look at a bevy of beautiful supermodels sporting giant wings and skimpy underwear and simply smile at the ludicrous spectacle. Harmful? It never struck my mind. To me, they were alien creatures with their pert breasts, tight butts, endless legs and spray-on tans, but they didn't make me feel bad about myself, because in the same way as I don't feel worthless because I don't have the brains to become an astrophysicist, neither do I feel without value because I don't have the looks to bare almost all on the catwalk. But then along came #MeToo,

and revelations of bullying and sexism in the rarefied VS firmament, as well as exposure

and film producer, with 64.5 million Instagram followers and credentials as an environmental and women's rights campaigner. Also included in the right-on collective are model and South Sudanese refugee Adut Akech (whom Meghan Markle put on the cover of Vogue when she was guest editor), 21, as well as Chinese freestyle skier Eileen Gu, 17, and British former TV presenter Amanda de Cadenet, 49, whose #Girlgaze platform connects 'women and non-binary creatives with business and brands'. To round off, mixed-race,

plus-size model and inclusivity advocate Paloma Elsesser and Brazilian trans model Valentina Sampaio, both 29. That these are admirable women, all of whom are terrific female role models, I do not doubt. But I have no interest in whether any of them define themselves as gay, straight or anything else, because I can't see how it's relevant to the underwear I choose to buy. Breasts need bras, regardless of where you are on the gender spectrum. And quite what any of them are doing promoting the re-modelled Victoria's Secret is mystifying. Big pay cheques are bound to be part of the allure, and perhaps it's a way to highlight their pet causes, but I still fail to understand why they need to do it in the realm of women's underwear. The marketing folk must have spent ages trying to



of demands for the models to half-starve themselves before the annual shows that were broadcast around the world. And to cap it all, the revelation of a close connection between the recently resigned CEO Leslie Wexner and convicted sex abuser and paedophile Jeffrey Epstein, who was his financial adviser. The carnival that rolled into town on a bed of feathers, rhinestones, glitter and flesh and customers willing to pay up to \$15,000 for a ringside seat, began to look like the sad and faded fairgrounds we see on bank holiday weekends. As virtue-signalling goes, the line-up of new ambassadors gets full marks. First up Priyanka Chopra-Jonas, 38, the fabulously talented and wealthy Indian actress, singer

find a woke enough word to describe this gathering of spokeswomen. It must have been a real Eureka moment when someone came up with the word 'collective', suggesting not just a group of females but women united with a common desire to work together to achieve a common goal. In this case, to reinvent beauty standards for women. But why not be honest and admit that, ultimately, for all the new podcasts and right-on initiatives to come, the true goal is to sell more knickers in a company that has been teetering on the financial edge for years. For surely we can see through this re-branding as easily as our slaving menfolk could see through some of Victoria's Secret's most transparent knickers? The VS Collective screams more of tick-box culture than anything else. Me Too, tick. Black Lives Matter, tick. Gender inclusivity, tick; ageism, tick; sizeism, tick. It's a stunning volte-face, but is this what women today really want when it comes to bras and panties? Or might a better fit and some quality fabrics be what the female consumer needs? You can't blame Victoria's Secret for wanting to do something, anything really, to shed the toxic image of the past few years. When the company was founded in 1977 by U.S. businessman Roy Raymond, his aim was to create boudoir lingerie shops that were 'man-friendly'. The name reflected Victorian primness, with the word 'Secret' suggestive of the hidden treasures underneath the clothes.





Kiara Advani looks sultry in new Dabboo Ratnani Calendar 2021. See viral pic

Kiara Advani once again makes it to Dabboo Ratnani's calendar. The actress looks gorgeous in the black-and-white picture from her photoshoot with celebrity photographer Dabboo Ratnani. Kiara was also featured on the celebrity photographer's 2020 calendar, where she had posed topless.

KIARA POSES FOR A SULTRY BLACK-AND-WHITE SHOT

In the picture, Kiara has left her hair open and is seen lying on the sand. With subtle make-up

and multiple rings on her fingers, Kiara looks like a diva in the picture.

ALIA BHATT REACTS

Kiara Advani's new picture left Alia Bhatt in awe. She commented on her post saying, "Wowza." Dabboo Ratnani called her an 'absolute beauty' in the comments section.

CONTROVERSY ON KIARA'S 2020 PIC

This isn't the first time Kiara was featured on Dabboo Ratnani's calendar. In 2020, Kiara had posed topless for Dabboo's calendar. In the picture, she was

seen posing topless behind a large leaf. The picture went viral, but it faced backlash for its striking similarity with International photographer Marie Barsch's photoshoot.

Here is a look at Marie Barsch's photoshoot, similar to Dabboo's 2020 photograph. On the work front, Kiara Advani will next be seen in Shershaah, opposite Sidharth Malhotra. She also has Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2 with Kartik Aaryan and Jug Jugg Jeeyo with Varun Dhawan in the pipeline.

Anushka Sharma enjoys tea and scones in England while watching cricket, Dhanashree Verma calls her 'genuine'



Anushka Sharma has been documenting her trip to Southampton on social media, much to the delight of fans. On Thursday night, she took to Instagram Stories to share a glimpse of her meal, as she watched a game of Test cricket. "Tea and scones on a rainy English summer day," she wrote in her caption.

Ask Me Anything session on Instagram. On being asked to say something about Anushka, Dhanashree shared a boomerang video of them with their husbands, Virat Kohli and Yuzvendra Chahal, and wrote, "Extremely sweet, warm and a genuine person." She added a flower and heart emoji.

Meanwhile, Dhanashree also answered a question about Virat. "Great Verma showered praise on Anushka Sharma during an

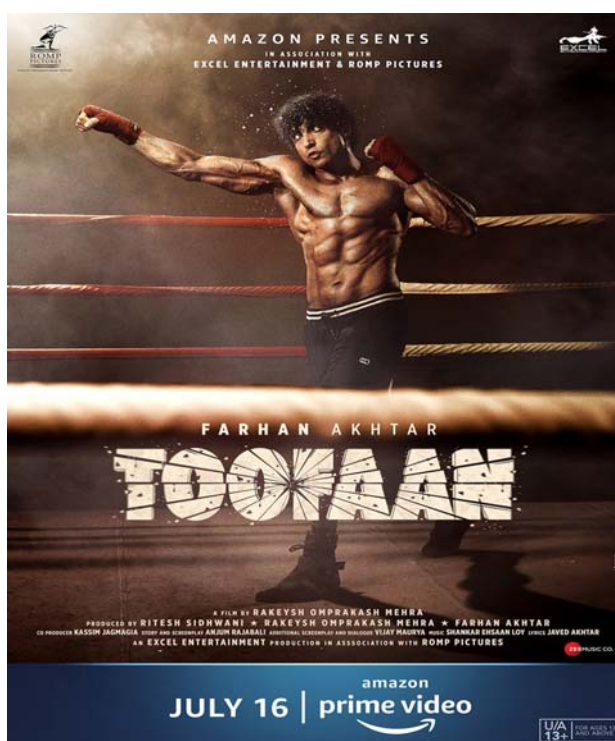
great time with him," she wrote.

Farhan Akhtar, Mrunal Thakur and Paresh Rawal Starrer Toofaan to premiere Globally on Amazon Prime Video on July 16th

Produced by Ritesh Sidhwani, Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, Farhan Akhtar, directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra and presented by Amazon Prime Video, the film also stars Paresh Rawal and Mrunal Thakur in lead roles

Toofaan will stream on Amazon Prime Video in India and across 240 countries and territories starting July 16th, 2021

Mumbai, 16th June 2021: Amazon Prime Video today announced the premiere date for Toofaan, the highly anticipated inspiring sports drama featuring Farhan Akhtar on the streaming platform. Directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra and produced by Excel Entertainment (Ritesh Sidhwani and Farhan Akhtar) and ROMP Pictures (Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra), Toofaan is poised to be the biggest sports drama of the year. Fans in India and across 240+ countries and territories worldwide can enjoy this exciting film starting 16th July only on Amazon Prime Video. Toofaan stars Farhan Akhtar in the lead role along with Mrunal Thakur, Paresh Rawal,



Supriya Pathak Kapur, Hussain Dalal, Dr. Mohan Agashe, Darshan Kumar and Vijay Raaz.

After the successful collaboration of Farhan Akhtar and Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra in Bhaag Milkha Bhaag, the dynamic duo return to pack a punch with Toofaan. This motivational story revolves around the life of Ajju an orphan boy born in Mumbai's Dongri who grows up to be a local goon. His life changes when he meets a bright and a compassionate young woman Ananya, whose belief in him motivates him to find his passion as he embarks on his journey to becoming Aziz Ali, a boxing champion.

Toofaan brings alive the exhilarating nature of boxing as a sport, while narrating a riveting tale that follows the journey of a common man as he navigates through the ups and downs of life to achieve his dreams. It is a story about resilience, passion and perseverance and the drive to succeed.

Get ready for extraordinary and inspiring journey with the World Premiere of Toofaan on Amazon Prime Video starting July 16th



If we ever encounter aliens, they will resemble AI and not little green martians



like me, because extra-terrestrial life is being widely discussed now in the lead-up to the Pentagon's highly anticipated report on so-called unexplained aerial phenomena. Yet I should say straight away that I am not expecting any big revelations out of the report. I think it's overwhelmingly likely that aliens are present in our galaxy. But I don't believe they're hanging out in our airspace. Not now, and not in historic times.

Claims that extraterrestrials helped build large, pointy monuments in the Egyptian desert 5,000 years ago are, frankly, laughable. And I don't think that videos made by cameras on navy F-18 Hornets actually show alien craft darting around the skies above the Pacific. There are more prosaic

(SAI Bureau)- I'm an astronomer at the Seti Institute, a non-profit research organization in California's Silicon Valley. My colleagues and I look for extraterrestrial life, including intelligent beings - or in the vernacular, aliens. It's exciting times for people

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The Congress Party's Death Wish



(SAI Bureau)-The commentary on the departure of Jitin Prasad from the Congress has tended to club him with two previous defectors, Himanta Biswa Sarma and Jyotiraditya Scindia. Like them, he left the party because he felt that his personal growth prospects were better in the BJP.

I'll return to this trio later, but let me first draw attention to two women politicians whose contrasting careers are equally illustrative of the death wish that the Indian National Congress is apparently possessed with.

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Luxury And Hunger, The Two Faces Of An Unequal Pandemic



(SAI Bureau)- Mercedes-Benz AG recently introduced its Maybach sport utility vehicle in India -- right in the middle of a fierce second wave of the pandemic. The 50 cars the German automaker wanted to sell by the end of 2021 were lapped up in a month. It turns out that just as the rich were scrambling to own these \$400,000 wheels, annual per capita income was sliding below \$2,000, with the country falling behind neighbouring Bangladesh. Emerging economies have historically tolerated higher inequality, hoping to hit the inflection point in the Kuznets curve, beyond which incomes keep rising but disparities fall. Whatever the merits of the controversial hypothesis, the gap opened up by Covid-19 is no price of progress. The situation

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Malawi's landscape is clogged with plastic waste that could linger for 100 years. One woman has taken on plastic companies and won

(SAI Bureau)- For more than five years, Gloria Majiga-Kamoto, a 30-year-old Malawian environmental activist, has waged a David v Goliath battle against some of the country's largest plastic manufacturers to bring an end to single-use plastics.

Together with other activists and civil society groups, Majiga-Kamoto spearheaded a grassroots campaign that fought to pressure authorities into instituting a plastic ban in Malawi.

"We organized several marches - marched to the court and in communities to document their experiences and the challenges they encountered because of the plastic problem we have in the country," Majiga-Kamoto told CNN.

After a protracted legal battle with plastic manufacturers, the Malawi

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Milkha Singh dies of Covid-19 related complications, five days after wife Nirmal Kaur's death

(SAI Bureau)-Legendary Indian athlete Milkha Singh died on Friday night with Covid-19 related issues in a Chandigarh hospital. He was 91. Milkha Singh had tested positive for Covid-19 last month. Notably, Milkha Singh's wife Nirmal Kaur had passed away just five days ago due to the same illness.

Milkha Singh is survived by three daughters Dr Mona Singh, Aleeza Grover, Sonia Sanwalka, and son Jeev Milkha, who is an ace golfer. "Legendary Indian Sprinter Shri Milkha Singh ji was admitted in the ICU of Covid Hospital of PGIMER on 3rd June 2021 and was treated for Covid there till 13th June when after putting up a valiant battle with Covid, Milkha Singh Ji tested negative. "However, due to post- Covid complications, he was shifted out of Covid Hospital to medical ICU. But despite best of the efforts by the medical team,

