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Climate Change

Over 62 million South Asian people may have to migrate from their homes due to slow onset climate disasters such as sea-level rise, water stress, crop yield reductions, ecosystem loss and drought by 2050, according to a new report.



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For SpaceX Mission, Says He's "Excited, Honoured"

Raja Chari, 43, will serve as the commander while NASA's Tom Marshburn will be pilot and ESA's Matthias Maurer will serve as a mission specialist for the SpaceX Crew-3 mission to the ISS, which is expected to launched next year.

Indian-American US Air Force Colonel Raja Chari has been selected as the Commander of the SpaceX Crew-3 mission to the International Space Station (ISS) by NASA and the European Space Agency.

Raja Chari, 43, will serve as the commander while NASA's Tom Marshburn will be pilot and ESA's Matthias Maurer will serve as a mission specialist for the SpaceX Crew-3 mission to the ISS, which is expected to launched next year.

A fourth crew member will be added at a later date, following a review by NASA and its international partners, NASA said in a statement on Monday.

"Excited and honoured to be training with @astro_matthias and @AstroMarshburn in prep for a trip to the @Space_Station," Mr Chari said in a tweet on Monday.

"Proud to be working and training with Matthias Maurer and Thomas Henry Marshburn in preparation for a mission to the International Space Station aboard the SpaceX Crew Dragon," he posted on his Facebook page.

This will be the first spaceflight for Raja Chari, who became a NASA astronaut in 2017. He was born in Milwaukee, but considers Cedar Falls, Iowa, his hometown, NASA said.

He is a colonel in the US Air Force and joins the mission with extensive experience as a test pilot. He has accumulated more than 2,500 hours of flight time in his career. Mr Chari was selected earlier this month as a member of the Artemis Team and is now eligible for assignment to a future lunar mission, it said in a statement.

Raja Chari's father Srinivas Chari came to the US at a young age

from Hyderabad for an engineering degree.

"It's official... next stop: International @Space_Station! In late 2021, I'll fly to humankind's orbital outpost for the first time, continuing our quest to discover more in space for #Earth. Get ready for #cosmickiss a declaration of love for space," Mr Maurer tweeted.

Mr Maurer comes from Sankt Wendel, in the German state of Saarland. Like Chari, Maurer will be making his first trip to space with the Crew-3 mission. Before becoming an astronaut, Maurer held a number of engineering and research roles, both in a university setting and at European Space Agency (ESA). Mr Marshburn is a Statesville, North Carolina, native who became an astronaut in 2004. Prior to serving in the astronaut corps, the medical doctor served as a flight surgeon at NASA's



Image credit: twitter.com/Astro_Raja

Johnson Space Center in Houston and later became medical operations lead for the International Space Station. The Crew-3 mission will be his third visit to the space station and his second long-duration mission. When Mr Chari, Mr Marshburn, and Mr Maurer arrive at the orbiting laboratory, they will become expedition crew members for the duration of their six-month stay. The crew will have a slight overlap with the Crew-2 astronauts, who are expected to launch in the spring of 2021. This will not be the first commercial crew mission to overlap. The Crew-1 astronauts,

who are currently on the station, and the Crew-2 astronauts, also are expected to coincide in their sojourns for a short time. Increasing the total number of astronauts aboard the station is allowing the agency to boost the number of science investigations conducted in the unique microgravity environment, NASA said.

This will be the third crew rotation mission of SpaceX's human space transportation system and its fourth flight with astronauts, including the Demo-2 test flight, to the space station through NASA's Commercial Crew Program.

Indian Employee Crushed By Airplane Equipment At Chicago Airport



A 36-year old Indian man working at the Chicago O'Hare International Airport died after being crushed by airplane equipment. Jijo George died of multiple injuries after being crushed by an "aircraft drivable pushback apparatus" at a hangar at the airport, according to autopsy results released on Monday by the Cook County medical examiner's office. Mr George is survived by his wife, who is 8-months pregnant, a child and his parents. An online fundraiser has been organised to raise funds for Mr George's family. Mr George had moved to Chicago from Pathanapuram, Kerala. Media reports said Mr

George's father Kunjumon and mother Mony are also staying with him in Chicago. Mr George was a maintenance mechanic for Envoy Air and died while working at a building near the airport. Chicago police said they were called about 2 pm to the airport for a man unresponsive under the vehicle. Mr George was taken to Resurrection Medical Center, where he died at 3:50 pm, authorities said. The autopsy ruled his death an accident, a report in the Chicago Sun Times said. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration is investigating the death, and has up to six months to issue workplace safety citations.



1 in 7 children faces hunger.

There's more than enough food in America for every child who struggles with hunger. Help get kids the food they need by supporting Feeding America, the nationwide network of food banks. Together, we can solve hunger™. Join us at FeedingAmerica.org



Rotary Club of Hicksville South (RCHS) held its 6th Annual Winter Giveaway Drive



Rotary Club of Hicksville South

Founded 2009 - Proud Home Club of District Governor (2015-16) Mr. Kamlesh C Mehta

6TH ANNUAL WINTER DRIVE - 400 JACKETS 250 BLANKETS 250 SETS OF HATS GLOVES & SCARVES GIVEAWAY



(Insider Bureau)- Rotary Club of Hicksville South (RCHS) held its 6th Annual Winter Giveaway Drive of Jackets, Blankets and winter accessories last Thursday, December 10th, 2020 at the Caroline G. Atkinson School in Freeport, Long Island, NY. Of the many charitable giveaways this club does this project was done with 400 Winter Jackets, 250 Blankets and 250 Sets of Hats, Gloves and Scarves given away through many NGOs, Churches, Homeless Shelters, Hempstead and Freeport Public Schools, to the families and children with dire needs in this cold winter. The event was another successful

one among many other charity events this year, under the leadership of Club President, Nilima Madan, and the Project Chairs, Quddus Mohammed and Roopam Maini, Team Members, club members and volunteers. They all spoke about various very successful giveaway charitable projects undertaken by RCHS. Deputy Consulate General of India in NY, Mr. Shatrughn Sinha, Superintendent the Freeport School District Dr Kishore Kuncham, School Principal Gisselle Campbell - Ham, Mr. James Clark, Assistant Superintendent for Special Program of Hempstead School District were the dignitaries at the

event and they all appreciated the need of all these donations being given away especially during these pandemic times and the dire help many families seek, in their valuable and encouraging speeches. The representatives of the recipient organizations gave their speeches in appreciation of fulfilment of needs of desperate families. They all highly praised of RCHS's ongoing philanthropic efforts throughout the year, and every year; specially this year during this pressing time. Freeport School District received 250 children's very good quality Winter Jackets for all school ages, Hempstead School District got 100 such Jackets and

organizations like SACSS - South Asian Council of Services were given 125 Blankets and 125 sets of accessories plus 30 similar Jackets, Domestic Harmony Foundation got 50 Blankets and 50 sets of accessories, besides United Methodist Church of Hempstead who received 25 Blankets and 25 sets of accessories plus 10 Jackets, Asian Services at Thai Temple got 25 Blankets and 25 sets of accessories plus 10 Jackets and Kingdom Family Ministry received 25 Blankets and 25 sets of hats-gloves-scarves. Honorable U.S. Representative for New York's 3rd district, Congressman Mr. Tom Suozzi personally could not

attend the event due to his other commitments, but he sent in recognition of efforts of RCHS Citation awards to President Nilima Madan, Service Director Jasbir Singh, Project Chairs Quddus Mohammed and Roopam Maini as well as Co-Chairs Aleya Jung and Anju Sharma for their selfless service to the community.

Social distancing and all other safety measures had been followed. Due to Covid19 limited attendance in person was allowed to be safe in current conditions. The event was broadcasted LIVE via Zoom and Facebook and watched by many

Indian Pleads Guilty To Involvement In Oil Misappropriation Worth \$36.1 Million In Singapore

Sadagopan Premnath committed the crime in 2017-18 while working at the Royal-Dutch Shell Eastern Petroleum located on Pulau Bukom island.

(Insider Bureau)-A 40-year-old Indian man on Tuesday pleaded guilty to his involvement in misappropriation of SGD 49 million (USD 36.1 million) worth of gas oil at a multinational refinery in Singapore.

Sadagopan Premnath committed the crime in 2017-18 while working at the Royal-Dutch Shell Eastern Petroleum located on Pulau Bukom island.

Premnath will return to court for mitigation and sentencing in February. The case also involves several other employees at the refinery.

He pleaded guilty to four charges of abetting criminal breach of trust as a servant, while another five charges will be considered in his sentence, according to a report by the Channel News Asia. Premnath is the first Shell employee involved in the heist to admit to the charges.

He began working with the company around 2012 as a fieldman.

The heist occurred at the manufacturing site on Shell Pulau Bukom, the company's largest wholly-owned refinery in the world in terms of crude oil distillation

capacity and its largest petrochemical production and export centre in the Asia Pacific. The conspiracy to misappropriate gas oil began in 2007 with co-accused Juandi Pungot and Abdul Latif Ibrahim, both Shell employees, and grew to involve more people over 11 years.

Premnath was recruited by Juandi and he joined the syndicate in mid-2017.

His role was to take directions from his co-conspirators and act as a black oil panel man to open and close valves so that awaiting vessels could receive the



misappropriated gas oil, the court heard. He received about USD 150,000 from the criminal proceeds, the court heard. After the suspected theft of gas oil via unauthorised transfer to other vessels was detected, Shell filed a police report in August 2017. The

cases of others involved in the embezzlement are pending. Several officers from the tankers that received the stolen gas oil from Pulau Bukom have been jailed, including a chief officer who was imprisoned in July last year.

"Farmers' Voices Must Be Heard": Indian-American Lawmaker On Protests



"I hope there's a peaceful and fair solution so they can provide for their families," Ro Khanna said in a tweet on Saturday.

(Insider Bureau)-Indian-American Congressman Ro Khanna has hoped for a peaceful and fair solution to the farmers' issues in India, saying he is encouraged by the ongoing dialogue between the protesting farmers and the government.

Mr Khanna, 44, was recently elected for a third consecutive term from the congressional district representing Silicon Valley.

"India and the US share a rich tradition of democracy and peaceful protests. Farmworkers are the backbone of both our nations and must have their voices heard. I hope there's a peaceful and fair solution so they can provide for their families," Mr Khanna said in a tweet on Saturday.

"I am encouraged by the ongoing dialogue," he said, joining other American lawmakers who have expressed their views on the ongoing farmers' protest in India,

several of whom have expressed their concerns.

As Co-Chair of the American Sikh Caucus in Congress, my office has received first-hand accounts of the horrific crackdowns on protestors who are trying to peacefully express their disapproval of India's recent agricultural reform legislation," said Congressman John Garamendi, who along with two other lawmakers wrote a letter to India's Ambassador to the US, Taranjit Singh Sandhu early this week.

According to the letter, "hundreds of thousands of farmers from the states of Punjab and Haryana that have made their way to New Delhi to peacefully protest these new agricultural laws, and the Indian government has met these peaceful protestors with tear gas, water cannons, barricades, baton attacks, and more." Many of these farmers have children,

relatives, and friends who are US citizens, many of whom have reached out to us to share their concerns about these developments. We urge the Indian government to demonstrate its respect for these crucial democratic freedoms, and to be a model of democratic values in the vital Indo-Pacific

region". The letter, dated December 4, was released this week. The two other lawmakers who have expressed their concern on the protest were congressman Jim Costa and congresswoman Shelia Jackson Lee, members of the American Sikh Caucus. Thousands of farmers are currently staying put

at Delhi's borders with Haryana and Uttar Pradesh in protest against the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020.

Indian-American Among 3 Arrested In \$3 Million Fraud Case In US

(Insider Bureau)-An Indian-American from Michigan has been arrested along with two others on charges of conspiring to defraud at least 43 victims of more than USD 3 million through the sale of phony business opportunities, a US attorney has said.

David Weinstein, 61, Vijay Vanam Reddy, 45, and Kevin Brown, 61, have been charged with one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud. Reddy on Thursday made an appearance in a Detroit federal court. Brown and Weinstein were arrested on December 8. Brown was released on USD 50,000 bond and Weinstein a day later. From September 2015 through August 2018, the three advertised business

opportunities for sale on various websites. They purported to sell "blocks" of contracts with medical providers who allegedly wanted to outsource their medical billing, collections, appeals, answering, credentialing or transcription functions.

The buyers would then provide the contracted services to the medical providers and earn a profit. The conspirators promised to deliver a specified number of providers and pledged that their proprietary marketing efforts would provide a guaranteed client base to the buyers. To induce buyers to purchase the business opportunities, they created fake references purporting to be buyers who vouched for their prior business purchases from the conspirators. In fact, the

references were Reddy's family member and Weinstein, using aliases to speak with potential buyers, federal prosecutors alleged. After agreeing to purchase the blocks of medical providers, victims entered contracts with companies represented by Weinstein or Reddy and wired down payments ranging from USD 15,000 to USD 255,000 to accounts controlled by Weinstein or Brown. The remainder of each purchase price was payable when the conspirators fulfilled the contract by delivering the agreed-upon number of providers. After receiving the down payments, Weinstein and Reddy delivered to each victim only a small number of medical providers, federal prosecutors alleged.

Indian American Lawmaker Urges Biden To Reverse Trump's Immigration Policies

"Our immigration system has been broken for decades, and we must finally reform it in a humane way," Indian-American Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal said.

(Insider Bureau)- Influential American lawmakers, including Indian-American Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, have urged President-elect Joe Biden to reverse the immigration policies of Donald Trump, as they introduced a resolution, seeking reform of the immigration system that is just, empathetic and fair.

Ms Jayapal and several of her Congressional colleagues on Friday in a resolution urged Congress to create humane, community-based alternatives to detention, and revamp the current deportation system to include, among other things, guaranteed access to legal representation.

Ms Jayapal along with congressmen Jesus "Chuy" Garcia, Veronica Escobar, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Judy Chu and Yvette Clarke unveiled a Roadmap to Freedom Resolution as a progressive vision to transform the immigration system to one that

is focused on dignity and rooted in the needs and lives of impacted people.

The Roadmap to Freedom Resolution will be introduced at the beginning of the 117th Congress.

This immigration reform proposal develops and implements a Roadmap to Freedom by promoting citizenship, protecting and strengthening a fair process centered on family unity, promoting and preserving diversity and establishing a just, humane immigration system.

Additionally, it ensures federal immigration agencies are fair and accountable, establishes a humane and effective border policy, recognises the value of all work and promotes healthy communities.

The resolution also promotes social, civil and economic integration while modernising and strengthening humanitarian pathways to the US. The resolution addresses root causes of migration as well.

"As a lifelong immigrant rights organiser and one of only 14 naturalised citizens serving in Congress, I know that we must do far more than simply reverse the harmful, xenophobic policies of the Trump Administration that inflicted maximum cruelty on immigrants and families," Ms Jayapal said.

"Our immigration system has been broken for decades, and we must finally reform it in a humane way that focuses on respect, dignity, family unity and real opportunity for all immigrants," she said as she described the resolution as a bold, progressive vision for immigration reform that is fair, equitable, centers family unity and humanitarian protections, combats systemic injustices and works for everyone.

This comprehensive proposal was developed in close consultation with grassroots groups, immigration organisers, labour advocates, civil rights leaders and racial justice



activists. The members of Congress, who are co-leading the resolution, represent the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, Congressional Black Caucus, and the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus as the Roadmap works to address the diverse needs of every community while reflecting the diversity of America's immigrant community. "Our immigration system is broken. Dreamers who have known no other home are at risk of deportation. Hundreds of migrant children are now permanently separated from their parents. Asylum seekers are being revictimised in refugee camps at the border," said Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. "The Roadmap to Freedom outlines a set of

principles for creating an immigration system that is just, empathetic, effective and fair," she said.

The Trump administration hardened the immigration rules on those allowed to seek asylum in the US and advocated a merit-based immigration system to protect US workers.

His administration also tried ending the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) in 2017, but the US Supreme Court blocked its attempt in June.

A federal court early this month reversed the decision of the outgoing Trump administration and ordered full reinstatement of the Obama-era programme that protects undocumented immigrants brought to the US as minors from deportation.

Lebanon's prime minister charged over deadly Beirut blast

A Lebanese judge has charged caretaker Prime Minister Hassan Diab and three ex-ministers with criminal neglect over the huge explosion at Beirut's port that killed more than 200 people this summer.

Diab, as well as two former public works ministers and an ex-finance minister, were accused Thursday of criminal neglect "that led to the death and harm of hundreds of people" in the blast on August 4, according to Lebanon's state-owned National News Agency.

These are the most high-profile indictments in the investigation of an explosion that was believed to have been caused by the detonation of thousands of tons of ammonium nitrate, stored for years at the port of Lebanon's capital. Judge Fadi Sawan, who is investigating the incident, is set to question Diab and the ex-



ministers next week. "The Prime Minister's conscience is clear. He is confident that his hands are clean and that he has handled the Beirut Port blast file in a responsible and transparent manner," read a statement from Diab's office on Thursday.

"Hassan Diab will not allow the Premiership to be targeted by any party." "Diab's government, which stepped down in the wake of the blast and will be replaced when a new cabinet is formed, has repeatedly acknowledged receiving prior warnings about the dangers posed by the storage of the explosive material at the port. Previous governments were also

notified about the warehouse, but no one addressed the problem. It is unclear what triggered the detonation of the material, but government officials have said that they have not ruled out sabotage. The explosion destroyed much of Beirut's eastern coastal area, killing more than 204 people, injuring at least 6,500, and displacing around 300,000 from their homes.

Two of the ex-ministers indicted -- former finance minister Ali Hassan Khalil and former public works minister Youssef Fenianos -- were recently sanctioned by the Trump administration for links to Hezbollah. Lebanon's streets, already buckling under the strain of a financial meltdown, political crisis and a global pandemic, have seen



widespread anger over the which they perceive as slow and blast. Protesters have been lacking in transparency and sharply critical of the investigation, independence.

Name Change

I, rajendrakumar Bachubhai Patel S/o Bachubhai Motibhai Patel, holder of Indian passport no A6925579 issued at Mumbai on 21st Dec 1998, Permanent resident of Shivaji Nagar-Mumbai India, currently residing at 10333 Crystal Point Dr. Orlando, FL 32825 USA have changed my name from Rajendrakumar Bachubhai Patel to Rajendra Patel. All concerned Please Note.

I, Gurjit Singhera, permanent resident of V. Rasulpur, P.O. Phillaur, Distt. Jalandhar, Punjab, India, currently residing at 5804 Kenwood Way. Plainfield, IN 46168 USA have changed my name from Gurjit Singhera to Gurjit Singh All concerned Please Note.

Will employees take over Air India in 2nd disinvestment bid?

Unlike 2018-disinvestment attempt, the government has received multiple bids for the Air India Limited. Interestingly, a consortium of the Air India employees is one of the bidders. Will the Air India go its employees in bidding?

(News Agencies)- The last date to bid for cash-strapped national airline Air India has ended with the Expression of Interest (Eoi) deadline ending on Monday. The government has said it has received multiple Eois for strategic disinvestment of the Air India.

Going by the previous attempt by the government to disinvest its shares in the struggling PSU, the Air India Limited, the current bids are a positive sign to say that Air India finally has a buyer. Among the prospective buyers is a consortium of Air India employees and foreign fund.

Air India employees have reportedly submitted a bid in partnership with US-based Interups, an investment fund of the NRIs. Its chairman Laxmi Prasad has been quoted in media reports as making the offer

of 51 per cent stake to Air India employees while retaining the other 49 per cent.

The argument of Interups fund is that Air India employees know the airline inside out and are the in the best position to fix what ails the national air carrier. Interups has a reputation of turning companies around.

The employees' group is aiming to raise a contributory fund made up of a minimum contribution of Rs 1 lakh from each Air India employee. Interups, however, has offered to invest all the money required to revive Air India. There are also reports that Interups is eyeing to buy the AirAsia India after its Malaysian shareholder ran into financial troubles. There is a possibility that if Interups ends with acquiring both the Air India and AirAsia India, the two airlines

may be merged into a single Air India unit.

TATAS ALSO IN THE HUNT

The other major bidder is the Tata Group. Incidentally, Air India was originally started by the Tata Group in pre-Independent India in 1932 as Tata Airlines. The first flight service was inaugurated by the Tata Group founder JRD Tata piloted the first flight from Karachi to Mumbai. It was a cargo flight. The Tata Group runs another airline, the Air Vistara in partnership with the Singapore Airlines. The Tata Group hold 51 per cent stake in the Air Vistara. **WHAT LIES AHEAD?**

The government has said the transaction will now move to the second stage - that the bids will now be physically submitted by December 29 and evaluated to take a final call, expected by early January.



The government had set an ambitious target of over Rs 2 lakh crore from disinvestment but the Covid-19 pandemic ruined all the offloading plans. Reports say only 5 per cent of the target has been achieved till now. So, if the Air India disinvestment plan works for the government, it will be a major boost to its future plans.

The issue with the Air India is that it has a total liability (trade payables and net debt) in the range of Rs 90,000-Rs 1 lakh crore. Any new owner will first have to invest heavily in Air India

to improve its technological and operational viability. The only lucrative part of acquiring the Air India would be the growing air traffic market of India.

The government has also helped the prospective buyers by offering 100 per cent equity share capital in Air India Limited this time around. In 2018, it had offered only 76 per cent along with a portion of the debt. Back then no bidder came forward. The Air India Limited owns the Air India, Air India Express and 50 per cent of Air India SATS Airport Services.

2020, the year Bollywood lost its sheen



2020 changed Bollywood and its celebrity culture forever. Yet, despite a lack of new releases and without airport looks, gym looks and red-carpet events to fall back on, how people were entertained in 2020.

(News Agencies)-The year 2020 has been unfair to everyone, but perhaps what suffered the most is the entertainment industry. Much like how parampara, pratishtha, anushasan were the pillars of Mohabbatein, airport looks, gym looks and red-carpet events are what held the entertainment industry together. You know, when there's no film to talk about per se. We knew exactly what Malaika Arora wore to her daily workout session or if Taimur Ali Khan looked like a little Nawab on his way to playschool. All thanks to the paps. But, with the onset of the novel coronavirus pandemic and the government-imposed lockdown that followed, all this came to a screeching halt. We were all confined to our homes, as were the celebrities we love.

2020 took the sheen off Bollywood. Celebs were stripped of their stardom for they were just as home-quarantined as we were. They were in their PJs, just like us. Heck, they were even doing house chores - cooking, cleaning, sweeping - like us. And no, there's nothing glamorous about that. Sure, their houses were plushier, and their PJs branded, but it still came down to jhaadu, pochha, bartan. And we had had enough of that, no need to catch a glimpse on Instagram. And then, there was the problem of being detached. Even without a herd of paparazzi outside the gym, we did get a peek of Malaika's workout regime, thanks to Instagram. But the fear that the pandemic brought with it was far too strong to be soothed by a few Instagram

updates. We were going to bed fearing for the lives of our family and loved ones, and waking up to coronavirus numbers. There was no silver lining, save a promise of a vaccine in the distant future, and at the moment, we could see no future. And Instagram could barely distract us from what seemed like Armageddon. Most of us found escape into the world

of OTT, watching new and old shows and movies. But even that, as a platform, doesn't feed the celebrity culture. When we were not cowering under an existential fear, we were discovering actors in the likes of Jaideep Ahlawat and Swastika Mukherjee.

SUSHANT SINGH RAJPUT SUICIDE, AND MORE

2020 wasn't going all that well,

and back to back news of our beloved celebrities passing away weren't helping either. But nothing beats the shock we all collectively felt on June 14, Sunday, when news of Sushant Singh Rajput dying by suicide trickled in. There were parallels being drawn with Disha Salian's death, that happened five days before that of SSR's.

Bajrang Dal's content isn't violative of our social media policy: Facebook India tells parliamentary panel?

(News Agencies)- Appearing before a parliamentary panel on Wednesday, Facebook India said its fact-checking team has not found any content that necessitates a ban on the Bajrang Dal. This was reportedly said by Facebook India's head Ajit Mohan during his deposition before the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Information Technology. The panel is chaired by Congress MP Shashi Tharoor. It had called Ajit Mohan on the issue of the citizens' data safety. According to a report by PTI, for Wednesday's deposition, Mohan was accompanied by Shivnath Thukral, the public policy director of Facebook. Quoting unnamed sources, PTI reported that during the deposition, Congress MP Karti Chidambaram, along with

Shashi Tharoor, questioned Ajit Mohan about a recent Wall Street Journal (WSJ) report that suggest that Facebook is reluctant on banning the Bajrang Dal on its platform due to financial reasons and concerns over the safety of its staff. "The WSJ report suggested that despite an internal assessment calling for a ban on the Bajrang Dal, Facebook has not cracked down on the Hindu nationalist group due to these reasons," PTI reported.

Answering to the panel's queries in this regard, Ajit Mohan reportedly suggested to the panel members that the Facebook's fact team consultant "has so far not found any such element in the content posted by the Bajrang Dal that is violative of its social media policies".

Husband in Pakistan jail for 49 years, wife awaits release

The name of Lance Naik Mangal Singh is one among the 83 defence personnel who are in Pakistan's custody.

(News Agencies)-Seventy-five-year-old Satya Devi who lives in Jalandhar was just a 26-year-old when her Lance Nayak husband Mangal Singh was taken prisoner of war by the Pakistan army in 1971.

Satya's hope to meet her husband was rekindled by a letter written by the President of India's office on December 2, 2020 stating that he was alive and efforts are being made to get him released along with others. "The name of Lance Naik Mangal Singh is one among the 83 defence personnel in its custody. The government remains seized of the matter and continues to pursue this matter with the government of Pakistan," says the letter received by Satya from Deputy Secretary, President of

India's office on December 2, 2020.

The communication sent to Mangal Singh's wife has once again thrown light on the illegal custody of 83 missing Indian defence personnel including the prisoners of war.

"We have been waiting for his release for the last 49 years. I did my best to get him released. Wrote a number of letters to the government. It was only after 49 years that the authorities confirmed he was alive. We have been told that Mangal Singh is lodged in the Kot Lakhpat jail of Pakistan," says Satya who never accepted that Mangal Singh was martyred and has spent the last 49 years with the hope that she will meet him one day. Satya, who has appealed to the Indian

authorities for an early release of her husband told India Today that she was living with Lance Nayak Mangal Singh when he was posted as with 14th Punjab Regiment in West Bengal.

"He had joined the Army in 1962 and was initially posted in Ranchi. He was later transferred to Kolkata, West Bengal and was reported missing on the intervening night of November 21-22, 1971. We were sent a telegram saying that the boat carrying him and other soldiers sank and he has died," says Satya.

The family was surprised when a year later Mangal Singh suddenly appeared on Rawalpindi Radio in 1972 and announced he was alive. He had also mentioned that he was a family man and had two

sons named Daljeet Singh and Baljinder Singh.

"My eldest son was just three years old and the other was just a year old when he went missing. It was difficult to raise them as I was getting a monthly pension of Rs 250. I started stitching clothes to sustain the family income," says Satya.

It is not the first time when Satya's hope has seen a ray of hope to see her husband alive. An Indian prisoner identified as Rafuddin who was released in 2012 had told

Satya's family that Mangal Singh was alive.

"Rafuddin, who hails from Meerut had given us a letter which was written by KK Sharma telling us that there are many Indian war prisoners who were languishing in Pakistan jails. Mangal Singh was one of them. We were also told that my father was not well," Mangal's elder son Daljeet Singh said.

Rafuddin had also thrown light on the condition of Indian prisoners in Pakistan jails.



EC orders probe against 3 IPS officers named in 'poll cash' case against Kamal Nath aides

The Election Commission has asked the Madhya Pradesh CEO to lodge a criminal case against three IPS officers and others whose alleged role in the use of black money during the 2019 general elections came to the fore after the I-T department raided close aides of former chief minister Kamal Nath.

(News Agencies)- The Election Commission of India (ECI) has asked the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Madhya Pradesh to lodge a criminal complaint at the Economic Offences Wing (EOW) against certain IPS personnel of the Madhya Pradesh cadre who have been found to be involved in unaccounted cash transactions during the last Lok Sabha elections in 2019.

The officers' alleged role in the use of black money during the 2019 general elections came to

the fore after the I-T department raided close aides of former chief minister Kamal Nath.

The EC cited a report it received from the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) that stated that certain IPS officers were involved in moving cash to the headquarters of a national party in Delhi from Madhya Pradesh. In its report the CBDT that clearly mentioned prima facie involvement/nexus of public/government servants in unauthorized/unaccounted cash transactions. The EC note

released on Wednesday did not name the officers or the political party. While the EC did not name the party, it has been widely reported that the CBDT report referred to the Congress party. EC sources identified the three Indian Police Service (IPS) officers as Sushovan Banerjee, Sanjay Mane, V Madhu Kumar and the state police service officer as Arun Mishra.

The EC has also written to the Union Home Secretary for departmental proceedings against the IPS officers. The



CBDT report also mentions a state police service officer and has asked the Madhya Pradesh Chief Secretary to proceed against him too. The tax department had conducted raids at 52 locations in Madhya Pradesh and Delhi in April last year and those searched

included Kamal Nath's former Officer on Special Duty (OSD) Pravin Kakkar, adviser Rajendra Miglani, Ashwani Sharma, executives linked to his brother-in-law's firm Moser Baer, a company of his nephew Ratul Puri and others.

Bihar is 'dry' but drinks more liquor than Maharashtra, finds national survey

(News Agencies)- In 2016, chief minister Nitish Kumar banned alcohol consumption in Bihar making it a dry state. But according to the latest report of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) 2019-20, Bihar consumes more liquor than Maharashtra.

The NFHS-5 report said 15.5 per cent of all men (that is, above 15 years of age in this case) consumed alcohol in Bihar. Liquor consumption was higher in rural areas than in urban Bihar. Percentage of people consuming

alcohol on rural Bihar stood at 15.8 per cent in the NFHS-5, the same in urban regions stood at 14 per cent.

In Maharashtra, where prohibition is not in place, 13.9 per cent men consume alcohol.

Both rural and urban areas of Maharashtra have lower liquor

consumption ratio compared to Bihar. In urban Maharashtra, 13 per cent population consume liquor, the percentage goes up to 14.7 in rural areas. In both

states, rural areas have a higher percentage of people drinking



liquor. Among women, both Bihar and Maharashtra had the same 0.4 per cent of the population consuming alcohol. However, there is variation in the spatial

distribution of liquor consumers among women in Bihar and Maharashtra. Women in urban areas of Bihar consume more alcohol than their counterparts from Maharashtra - 0.5 per cent in Bihar compared to 0.3 per cent in Maharashtra.

In rural Bihar, 0.4 per cent women consume liquor compared to 0.5 per cent rural Maharashtra.

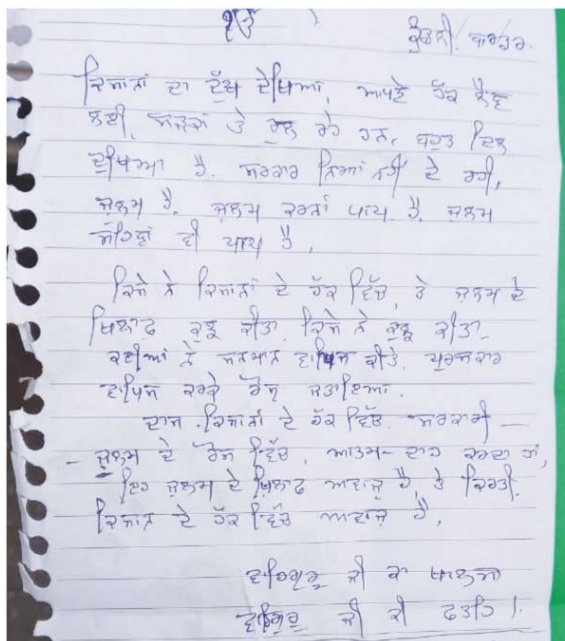
But Bihar was not the only apparent surprise in the NFHS-5. Goa, which is commonly

associated with liberal booze culture, showed lower liquor consumption level than a more 'conservative' Telangana. While 36.9 per cent of Goan men consumed alcohol, the percentage was Telangana men stood at 43.3 per cent in the national survey.

Overall, rural India drinks more alcohol than the urban regions. Gujarat and Jammu and Kashmir have the lowest liquor consumption levels among states and Union Territories with 5.8 per cent and 8.8 per cent for men.

Farmers Protest: Sikh priest shoots self near Singhu border, dies

A priest from Haryana's Karnal died by suicide near the Singhu border in Delhi on Wednesday. According to his suicide letter, he shot himself in solidarity with the protesters.



(News Agencies)-A priest from Haryana's Karnal died by suicide near the Singhu border in Delhi on Wednesday. According to his

suicide letter, he shot himself in solidarity with the farmers protesting against three new farm laws. The deceased, Sant Baba

Ram Singh, was a religious preacher with followers in Haryana and Punjab. He was a former office bearer in many Sikh organisations, including Haryana SGPC. According to initial

inputs, the 65-year-old Sikh priest shot himself with a

licensed gun in Kundali, on the Haryana side of the Singhu border.

In the handwritten suicide note, found near his body, Baba Ram Singh said that he was 'hurt to see the plight of the farmers' and the 'government's oppression'.

"I have witnessed the plight of the farmers, who are on the streets, struggling for their rights. I am hurt to see that the government is not giving them justice. It is a crime. It is a sin to oppress and it is a sin to suffer," Sant Baba Ram Singh's suicide note said.

"Nobody did anything against the oppression and for the rights of the farmers. Many even expressed their protest by returning awards," it said. "This servant commits self-immolation against the government oppression [and] in favour of the farmers. It [The act] is the voice against the oppression and the voice in favour

of the farmers," the suicide note, written in Punjabi said.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has offered condolences on the death of Sikh priest Sant Baba Ram Singh, who died by suicide near Singhu border earlier in the day. The Congress leader condemned the Modi government and claimed that its 'brutality' had crossed all limits. "Sant Baba Ram Singh Ji of Karnal died by suicide after seeing the plight of the farmers on the border. My condolences and tribute in this hour of grief. Many farmers have sacrificed their lives. The brutality of the Modi government has crossed all limits. Quit stubbornness and immediately withdraw the anti-agricultural law!" Rahul Gandhi tweeted. Congress spokesperson Randeep Surjewala also termed the incident as proof of the Modi's government's 'brutality'.

SC seeks Centre's reply on plea seeking 'gender, religion-neutral' grounds of maintenance, alimony for all



At the outset, Arora said, "Religion may treat gender differently but the Constitution will not allow women to be treated differently."

She was responding to a court's question asking her to justify the comparison of Hindu and Muslim women in cases relating to maintenance and grant of alimony.

The senior lawyer referred to the provisions of the Constitution and said the government can make a special legislation on the issue.

She said the apex court has passed orders when issue of gender rights has come to fore as the legislation making process has been "too slow".

Taking note of her submissions, the bench said "we are conscious of what we have done and what we have not done. We are asking you a pure question of law. We are talking about grounds of divorce which are accepted by particular religion." The bench referred to earlier apex court verdict given in the Catholic church matter and asked whether it is discriminatory if states apply fundamental rights of equality and gender justice under Articles 14 and 15 respectively in such matters.

(News Agencies)-The Supreme Court has sought a response from the Centre on a plea seeking laying down of "gender and religion neutral" uniform grounds for granting of maintenance and alimony for all citizens in matrimonial disputes as per the spirit of the Constitution and the international conventions. On Wednesday, notices were issued to the union ministries of Home Affairs, Law and Justice and the Women and Child Development on the PIL filed by BJP leader and lawyer Ashwini Upadhyay. "We are issuing notice with a great caution," said the bench headed by Chief Justice SA Bobde, which also comprised Justices AS Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian after hearing senior advocate Meenakshi Arora for sometime. The plea seeks direction to the government to take appropriate steps to remove the prevailing anomalies in the grounds of maintenance and alimony and make them uniform for all citizens without discrimination on the basis of religion, race, cast, sex or place of birth.

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The Anna and kisan movements

One of the more ironic images from last week's Bharat Bandh called by farmer groups was that of social activist Anna Hazare on a day-long fast in support of their demands. Accompanied by just a handful of supporters, a recorded message from his Ralegan Siddhi village was sent out to television channels. Most channels ignored it, a far cry from when multi-cam teams were chasing the then septuagenarian Gandhi topi leader, some even comparing him to a modern-day Mahatma. The Anna moment in Indian politics has long gone. The question is: Can it be replicated by a new band of protesters and will the 2020 farm protests do to the Narendra Modi 2.0 government what the 2011 Anna anti-corruption movement did to Manmohan Singh's second term? There should be little doubt that the Anna movement was a catalyst in the decline and fall of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) 2. It brought corruption to the political centrestage, crystallised public opinion against the government, enfeebled the executive, and paved the way for a Modi-like leader to offer himself as a strongman alternative to a tottering Congress-led coalition. The India Against Corruption grouping brought together a range of public figures from the Left and Right on the same platform, accompanied by the cry of sab neta chor hai (all political leaders are thieves). Now, contrast the Anna movement with the farmers who have hit the streets. There is no Anna-like figure being held up as a mascot. Instead, we see a multitude of farm union leaders, a majority of them from Punjab. The Opposition, with its own list of grievances against the Modi government, has also jumped in. If 2011 was Team Anna versus the Singh government, this is now being pitched as an Opposition versus Modi battle with farmers as foot soldiers. But there is one key difference: There is no evidence yet of middle-class support. During the Anna movement, the middle-class instantly identified with the anti-corruption slogan. A series of scams created this connect between the protests and the growing sense of citizen anger and alienation towards the political class. That link is missing. India's urban middle-class is perhaps the most vociferous constituency for free market reform. The idea that a farmer needs a safety net in a competitive market environment doesn't seem to strike those who live in their consumerist nirvana. A mass populist upsurge needs an identifiable enemy. The Anna movement had it in the imagery of Union ministers accused of corruption. The farmers protests are far more diffused: A demand for scrapping a law doesn't create an immediate enemy figure. The farm leaders have attempted to whip up

fury against corporate tycoons but whether allegations of cronyism will resonate widely is uncertain. Many Opposition parties have patronised these very business groups when they were in power. There is another important difference. In 2011, the media was an active participant in shaping the anti-government narrative and elevating Team Anna leaders to national heroes. Now, compromised segments of the mainstream media are unwilling to challenge the government while routinely cornering the Opposition forces. The slew of Union ministers speaking out is a sign that the Modi government, unlike its predecessor, will not cede prime-time space for its opponents to set the agenda. Maybe the basic difference lies in the persona of Modi and Singh. Where the latter was weakened by the rigors of coalition politics and his soft-spoken bureaucrat-politician image, Modi as the tough-talking authoritarian figure leading a majority government has less tolerance for any dissent. Where Singh rarely sat on prestige, the Modi approach is driven by the Supreme Leader's conviction in his own sense of infallibility. Unlike the Singh government which legitimised the Anna movement by setting up an official committee to discuss the anti-corruption Lokpal bill, the Modi government has attempted to divide and demonise the farmer protests with Union ministers claiming that there is a sinister design by the so-called "tukde tukde gang" of "urban Maoists" to infiltrate the movement. The incessant name-calling is a familiar stratagem used by the Modi machine in the past too. By invoking the K word - not kisan but Khalistan - the attempt is to convince the citizenry that these protests are not about farm reforms but actually about destabilising India. A Union minister has even bizarrely suggested that the protestors are acting on the instructions of Pakistan and China. The farmers may have won the first round by forcing the Modi government to come to the negotiating table but don't expect an intransigent Centre to blink so easily. This is not a government that will send its ministers to meet the farmers at the dharna site unlike the Singh government which inexplicably organised a red carpet ministerial airport reception for Baba Ramdev. Here, farmers have been barricaded, tear-gassed and highways dug up to prevent them from entering Delhi. A long winter of discontent lies ahead. Post-script: For the urban middle-class, 2020 has been a wake-up call. The lockdown brought home the stark reality of despairing, poor urban migrants being forced to undertake the long walk back home.

By writes Rajdeep Sardesai

China lies about its wrongdoing on COVID, spying, global aggression, pollution and more

The Chinese Communist Party has lied about COVID-19 from the start. And it's still lying about the disease that has turned into a pandemic confirmed to be responsible for nearly 75 million infections around the world, including 17.2 million in the U.S. The global death toll from the pandemic is over 1.6 million, including more than 310,000 in the U.S. Beijing's malignant behavior doesn't Naturally, the Chinese regime denies it all. Its dogged addiction to lying in the face of clear-cut facts is a worrisome indicator that the Beijing we must deal with now and into the future is even more duplicitous and aggressive than the Beijing of the past stop with the pandemic, of course. Just this month we've learned of Chinese spies trying to seduce U.S. lawmakers and other politicians. And we've learned of other Chinese Communist Party members who have infiltrated a host of U.S. universities and businesses. The regime's mendaciousness about COVID-19 began when it underreported the size of the initial outbreak in China. Then the Communist government tried to hide how contagious the disease was, even denying it could be transmitted by human-to-human contact. The Chinese also allowed international travel to continue, knowing it was likely exporting a global outbreak. Such self-evident falsehoods cannot stand forever. Even CNN, which at the time dutifully parroted the regime's false talking points, recently admitted that China lied. The Chinese are still lying, trying to pin the origin of

COVID-19 seemingly anywhere other than Wuhan Province in their own country - the actual place where the disease first appeared. Chinese officials suggested in March that COVID-19 it originated in, you guessed it, the U.S. Last month, they pointed fingers at India. Last week, they were blaming Italy. The evidence for this latest claim? An Italian study that found cases in that country earlier than expected. The report's authors, however, quickly debunked Beijing's self-exonerating interpretation. "These findings simply document that the epidemic in China was not detected in time," Giovanni Apolone, scientific director of Italy's National Cancer Institute and a co-author of the study, told a news conference in Milan. China's outrageous conduct during the pandemic goes beyond mere lying and negligence. It also has bullied and threatened other nations. At one point a Chinese official threatened to withhold medical supplies and personal protective equipment from the U.S. market. China also received criticism for exporting defective and substandard medical equipment. Beijing's continued aberrant behavior can lead to only one conclusion. The regime doesn't believe honesty is the best policy. Rather, its preferred policy seems to be deceit and aggression. Recently more news came to light of efforts by Chinese intelligence to infiltrate and influence government, including most famously the office of Rep.

By James Carafano



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What Government's Getting Wrong In Approach To Talks With Farmers

As the intensity and reach of the farmers' protests increases, the government has unleashed a disinformation war accusing farmers of being, in turn, Khalistanis, agents of Pakistan and China, Maoists, pawns of urban Naxals, unthinking victims of opposition propaganda-vile abuse against the community of producers who have, through the decades, ensured India's food security. Anyone who has visited the Singhu border where a makeshift township has been set up has seen the indomitable spirit of the kisans, especially from Punjab. Bringing with them the culture of langars, of seva, hundreds of volunteers work around the clock to ensure discipline, food, medicines - such a peaceful, democratic struggle has not been witnessed for decades. It is these thousands and lakhs of farmers across the country who are accused as being "agents." And who dares to make these outrageous charges against India's kisans? Union Ministers acting more like a bunch of robots repeating ad nauseam what they are told to say by a high command so enamored by their own "Mann ki Baat", that they refuse to hear the "Mann ki Baat" of "we the people of India."

If thousands of kisans braving police lathis, tear-gassing, water cannoning and police cases have camped at the borders of Delhi, it is because the government has not only refused to listen to their grievances but is forcibly imposing a set of policies which the kisans believe will further the distress they have faced. The totally authoritarian nature of governance which is the hallmark of the present regime has led to the present situation.

The government ignored the nationwide protests of farmers against the Bills. It refused to call the farmers for talks. The three Bills were rammed through without even a single round of talks with farmers' organisations. This same government, which will have multiple rounds of talks with associations of big industrialists before announcing taxation policies, did not care to even once call



the joint platform of Kisan organisations spearheading the struggle. Look at the way the Bills were pushed through the Rajya Sabha where a majority of members were in favour of referring the Bills to a Select Committee of parliament. This is after the government refused the normal procedure for Bills of such importance to be vetted by the

enacted alternate laws, farmers were not convinced that they would be protected from the reach of the central laws. Protests started across the state. The farmers who had initially blocked the rail tracks relented but spitefully, the Railway Ministry refused to run goods trains leading to coal shortages and electricity

because they felt that the government was not addressing their issues. Amit Shah, who suddenly called a meeting of farmers' representatives, brought nothing new to the table; perhaps he thought his presence would be enough. It was not. A set of proposals was sent later to the farmers which they have unanimously rejected. But what the written proposals do prove is that the laws pushed through by the government are deeply flawed. Why this authoritarian approach? Global experience shows that it is under the most right-wing governments that contempt for democracy goes hand-in-hand with the growth of obscene inequalities and a regime of crony capitalists. At the heart of these so-called agri-reform laws being pushed by the government is the commitment to open up agriculture to "ease of business" and especially for certain Indian corporates who have used government subsidies to build up a strong presence in storage infrastructure as well as retail outlets. Even the limited regulations and subsidies are to be weakened. The kisans have identified certain Indian corporates who have used government subsidies to build a strong presence in storage infrastructure as well as retail outlets. Anticipating such a law, one of these companies registered as many as 20 new agribusiness companies in the period of this government.

The note given to kisans contains a paragraph on how the "laws will open up international markets for kisans and increase

their incomes." When, in the wake of the pandemic, the global economy is in a downward spiral, is it not utter nonsense to talk about international markets. In any case, world prices are manipulated by well-formed cartels and multinational companies as well as unfair trade practices. Even the most developed countries committed to the free market give huge subsidies to their farmers to protect them from the vagaries of international prices. More than one third of the EU's budget is subsidies for farmers. In the last year, the US spent over 32 billion dollars in various subsidies for farmers and livestock breeders to protect their incomes. And here, the government of India wants to leave our farmers to the loving care of the market! As is known, the large majority of India's farmers are marginal farmers dependent on rain-fed agricultural production. They have not received the benefits of government interventions to ensure a minimum price for their produce. For example, 87 per cent of total wheat procurement at MSP is just from the three states of Punjab, Haryana and MP. In the case of paddy, around 56 per cent of procurement is from four states - Punjab, Chhattisgarh, Telangana and AP. For the rest, they have the "freedom" to sell where they want and to whom they want. Most of India's farmers, deprived of an MSP-based procurement, have to make distress sales precisely because the government has left them to the mercies of the market. Instead of strengthening regulations and procurement for the majority of deprived farmers, the first law seeks to weaken and destroy whatever is there and hand it over to corporates. Similarly, the second law for contract farming is protective not of the farmer but of the corporate. In the entire process of pricing and terms, the government has no role. How can there ever be a fair agreement between two unequals, a giant agribusiness and an average Indian farmer, unless the law provides certain guarantees for the farmer, backed by the government? But the new law does nothing of the sort.



Standing Committee of parliament. This is blatant misuse of a parliamentary majority to subvert usual parliamentary procedures which help build a consensus over legislations. In the Rajya Sabha, even the basic right of a Member of parliament to demand a vote on an amendment moved was denied. Many of the amendments relate to issues that the farmers are raising. Protests of several state governments that the laws were an encroachment on the rights of the states were also ignored. After Presidential assent and when the laws came into force, several state governments announced that they would not allow the implementation of the laws in their state. In Punjab, even after the state government

stoppages. The central government message was clear enough: protest and face collateral damage. So the farmers were left with no choice. They finally managed to reach Delhi. What did the government do? It refused them permission to enter the city. They were told that talks were conditional on their shifting to a ground at a remote corner of Delhi where not even a bird would see them. The farmers refused. It was only after the government realized that they would not be bullied or intimidated, that the government started talks. In five rounds of talks, it did nothing to win the confidence of the farmers on a single issue. In the last round, the farmers remained silent for over an hour

Indian diplomacy's climate test

India has been an overachiever on Paris — but the road ahead is strewn with challenges

Come 2021, the climate for diplomacy will change. In 2020, the black swan event of the pandemic was unforeseen. In contrast, the pivoting of the global diplomatic agenda towards the climate crisis is visible.

Numerous conventional diplomatic issues loom on India's horizon. They include tackling China's increasing assertiveness and engaging a new United States (US) administration; reinforcing bonds with our neighbours and strengthening bridges with our extended neighbourhood; bolstering relations with the European Union (EU) and reinvigorating ties with a post-Brexit United Kingdom; countering the perennial pestilence of midnight's other child; and enhancing our burgeoning ties with developing states globally. However, its the unconventional that may upend all these important goals.

When climate takes centre stage of global policymaking, the economic, social and political implications of the solutions to address the transboundary concerns are likely to override all else on the diplomatic agenda. The announcement of John

Kerry's appointment to the new post of special presidential envoy for climate is an indication that US President-elect Joe Biden's climate agenda is global. Kerry's assertion that, "America will soon have a government that treats the climate crisis as the urgent national security threat that it is" reflects the thinking that the impact of the climate crisis is becoming more complex.

Calls for greater ambition to reach net carbon neutrality by 2050 have gathered steam. The Virtual Climate Ambition Summit held on the fifth anniversary of the Paris Agreement on December 12 is a precursor to the efforts underway. More than 125 states have committed to the goal of a net zero carbon future by 2050. Others are veering towards it. A majority of the G-20 are on board; 38 countries have declared "climate emergencies" until carbon neutrality is reached. China has provided a goal of 2060 and sees climate diplomacy as an opportunity at resuming the G-2 playbook of the Paris Agreement. The incoming Biden Administration is expected to set its target too. Once the US gets on board, those accounting for 63% of global greenhouse emissions would have

agreed to carbon neutrality targets. Despite their announcements, there are gaps between 2050 targets and the policies that these countries have put in place.

India is one of the few overachievers in terms of meeting the Nationally Determined Contributions announced under the Paris Agreement for 2030. At the same time, India, as yet, is not in a position to set an economy-wide net-zero target as it needs to sustain economic growth, pull millions out of poverty and provide power to them. Our policymakers are struggling to find solutions to restrain stubble-burning in some regions despite their horrendous impact in nearby regions. The diverse sensitivities that need to be borne in mind in our global engagement will far surpass the concerns our trade negotiators went into Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations had to take into account. Climate negotiations potentially are more far-reaching for our polity, economy and society. Several are suggesting that our best option is a "No" to more ambitious commitments. However, we need to be cognisant that some are



preparing tools of coercive climate diplomacy. EU is eyeing a carbon border adjustment mechanism by 2021. The Biden administration will also look to favour a carbon tax with border adjustments, although whether it can get through such legislation remains uncertain. Kerry will try for a major international breakthrough in his first year. Having witnessed his hectoring approach to promote ratification of the Paris Agreement, caution needs to be our watchword. For a sui generis state such as ours with varied interests, to gather allies with similar climate goals is not easy. The Conference of Parties (COP) 26 in Glasgow next year will not be just another multilateral meeting. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, addressing the Climate Ambition Summit, signaled that, "Centennial India will not only meet its own targets, but will also exceed your expectations". It is now for our thought leaders and officials

to flesh this out and suggest options. These could perhaps be of a sectoral nature and encompass power, transport, agriculture and forests as possible areas for achieving decarbonising target dates.

India has set up an Apex Committee for Implementation of Paris Agreement (AIPA) to ensure coordination among 14 key ministries and to engage business and other stakeholders. We will also need to leverage bilateral ties with key players such as the US and EU; espouse common concerns in plurilateral groups such as BRICS which we currently chair; and make tactical alliances where possible. Besides, the thrust towards climate crisis as an international peace and security issue is likely to grow. Diplomacy will inevitably be a tool in addressing the growing importance of the phenomenon.

By Syed Akbaruddin

Stay firm, but be sensitive



The government must defend farm laws. But use words carefully, don't defame protests

The farm protests have continued despite the government's offer to amend the laws and address key concerns of agitating groups — except an outright repeal of laws and inserting the guarantee of continued procurement under

the minimum support price regime within the law. This newspaper has consistently backed the agrarian reforms, and continues to believe that the protesting farmers would do well to adopt a more flexible approach to the issue. But this does not

absolve the government of its duty of continued outreach.

This, indeed, has happened. But along with that, ministers as well as leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have sought to undermine the farm movement, with pejoratives,

including by labelling them as the "tukde-tukde gang" — a term that adds little analytical value but has unfortunately been used by the regime to label criticism as anti-national, meant to fragment the country. This is unfortunate. The farm movement — despite the presence of select individuals who harbour extreme identity-based aspirations and the counterproductive role of the diaspora — is a rooted mass movement, which has genuine economic and political concerns. By tarnishing the credibility and motivations of farmers, mostly from Punjab, the government risks deepening the trust deficit and alienating a large segment of the population in this crucial northern border state. It doesn't help that the Opposition too ends

up responding in a similar manner, with Akali Dal leader — and a BJP ally till not so long ago — Sukhbir Badal calling the BJP the real "tukde tukde gang" and warning against the deepening Hindu-Sikh divide. In a state with a troubled history of communal relations, a discourse that moves from economic anxieties to one about nationalism and communalism will only entrench attitudes and make a compromise difficult. Political competitiveness inevitably leads to crudity in political language. And this has only deepened over the last few years with increased political polarisation. But words have consequences, and can well have serious implications for national unity.

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The menace of social media monopolies

Facebook's global monopoly profits helped propel WhatsApp's domination of India, with great social costs

The United States (US) federal government and over 40 state governments in the US are seeking to break up social media giant, Facebook and its subsidiaries, WhatsApp and Instagram. The governments allege that Facebook abused its monopoly powers in stifling competition and distorting the social media industry. Of all the 187 countries that Facebook and its subsidiaries do business in, arguably, India has the most at stake resting on the outcome of this case.

However, India's problems with Facebook and its monopoly subsidiaries are not as much about the economics of free market capitalism but about a more profound issue of social order and harmony.

There is an entire Wikipedia page dedicated to lynchings

and deaths in India caused by rumours spread on the WhatsApp communication platform. It lists 12 cases of lynchings since 2017 in which 36 Indians have been injured or killed in social violence incited by fake messages spread through WhatsApp.

It is an astonishingly dubious distinction for a seemingly innocuous technology platform to be hailed as the perpetrator of violent deaths in a society. Widely-circulated rumours and false news on WhatsApp have caused severe upheavals in Indian society over the past few years. Just as gun violence is an acknowledged abomination in the US, WhatsApp violence in India is now an acknowledged disgrace. Despite all its acclaimed benefits, WhatsApp

has turned into an enormous social menace in India.

In a meeting with Facebook's global leadership team in the US in July 2018, I raised my concerns over the misuse of Facebook's technology platforms in India and urged them to take this issue up seriously. They showed no signs of recognition of the gravity of the situation. Subsequently, in another meeting in October 2018 with the then global CEO of WhatsApp and their India leadership team, I once again raised alarm over WhatsApp's unwitting complicity in perpetrating social unrest in India and asked them how the company proposes to address it. Facebook's India team dismissed this concern nonchalantly and waxed eloquent about the immense benefits to Indian society from WhatsApp.



The notion that no civilised society should tolerate a single death, even if it means denying benefits to thousands seemed lost on them. The enormous market power and clout that Facebook and its subsidiaries enjoy has lured the company into a false sense of self-righteousness and made them callous about the unintended deep social harm inflicted by their products. WhatsApp is a big social menace primarily because of its ubiquity. Nearly one out of every two adult Indians uses WhatsApp. WhatsApp has

become hugely popular in India largely because it was free for the Indian consumer. Indians send as many free WhatsApp messages in one day as the number of text messages they send in a whole month. If WhatsApp charged a fee for every message or revealed the identity of the original sender of a widely circulated message, then perhaps WhatsApp would not be the menace that it is now. But, as the Netflix documentary Social Dilemma reminded us — “if the product is free, then you become the product”.

Decoding the DC-Brussels-Beijing geopolitical triangle

Irrespective of this economic engagement, there is friction between Beijing and Brussels, which is independent of Washington

Joe Biden's election as the United States (US) president has led to talk of greater coordination between Washington and Brussels over China. In early November, European Union (EU) foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell was quick to call for “a coherent and robust China stance” between the transatlantic allies. Biden, meanwhile, has promised to consult traditional allies to “develop a coherent strategy” on China.

In late November, Financial Times reported that a draft EU Commission paper had called for working with the US to deal with the “strategic challenge presented by China's growing international assertiveness” with the technology domain being the “the backbone of a wider coalition of like-minded democracies”. This was followed by reports of the EU proposing a new Transatlantic Trade and Technology Council to jointly set standards on new technologies, strengthen technological and industrial leadership and expand

trade and investment. None of these reports have been confirmed. But the EU Council highlighted “shared priorities” for Brussels and Washington.

At the same time, however, Borrell was keen to point out the need to strengthen European autonomy. This desire lies at the heart of EU-US tensions, particularly after the tumult of the Trump era. Autonomy has emerged as a strategic objective for the EU. Not surprising then that it is one of the spaces around which Beijing has focused its efforts. For instance, Chinese officials have repeatedly emphasised the threat of US unilateralism and a new Cold War undermining EU's interests. Chinese media and analysts have been dismissing the possibility of a coordinated EU-US action.

At the same time, Chinese officials have emphasised the economic opportunities that Beijing has to offer. In an article last week, Zhang Ming, China's ambassador to the EU, said that

“China's domestic demand is the EU's external demand, which means a source of growth for the EU”. He added that the two sides had signed an agreement allowing greater market access for European agricultural goods and highlighted that the investment treaty was just around the corner. This has some merit. China pipped the US to become the EU's largest trading partner through the first half of this year. The trade remains skewed, with European imports outstripping its exports. This does lead to some consternation. However, as a recent study by the Mercator Institute for China Studies argued, cheap Chinese imports free up greater disposable income of European citizens. The researchers found that there were 103 product categories in electronics, minerals, pharmaceuticals, etc, in which the EU “has a critical strategic dependence on imports from China”. The study also informs that on average, China accounted for over 11% of the



profits European companies in 2019. That's not a huge amount, but it is still significant, considering that despite the calls for building supply chain resilience and decoupling, only around 11% of European companies in China say they are thinking about shifting investments to other markets. Irrespective of this economic engagement, there is friction between Beijing and Brussels, which is independent of Washington. This is evident in frustrations over market access and State subsidies, as it was in the European discourse over China's mask diplomacy. On values, Foreign Minister Wang Yi's threat to Czech Senate President Milos Vystrel from the podium in Berlin in September

highlighted the challenge. A few weeks after that fiasco, during the China-EU summit, Xi dismissed concerns over Hong Kong and Xinjiang, saying that China didn't need an “instructor” on human rights. The adoption of the European Magnitsky Act is a manifestation of Europe's desire to lend teeth to its proposition on human rights. It remains to be seen, however, if the bloc will be using this against Beijing. Borrell has said that he doesn't want the designation of China as a “systemic rival” to lead to a “systematic rivalry”. Gaining from economic engagement despite the political and strategic gap remains the EU's challenge in dealing with China. In this, Biden's victory lends it leverage.

Steps to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 if you are sick

FOLLOW THE STEPS BELOW: If you are sick with COVID-19 or think you might have it, follow the steps below to help protect other people in your home and community.

Stay home except to get medical care

- **Stay home:** People who are mildly ill with COVID-19 are able to recover at home. Do not leave, except to get medical care. Do not visit public areas.
- **Stay in touch with your doctor.** Call before you get medical care. Be sure to get care if you feel worse or you think it is an emergency.
- **Avoid public transportation:** Avoid using public transportation, ride-sharing, or taxis.



Separate yourself from other people in your home, this is known as home isolation

- **Stay away from others:** As much as possible, you should stay in a specific “sick room” and away from other people in your home. Use a separate bathroom, if available.
- **Limit contact with pets & animals:** You should restrict contact with pets and other animals, just like you would around other people.
 - Although there have not been reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with COVID-19, it is still recommended that people with the virus limit contact with animals until more information is known.
 - When possible, have another member of your household care for your animals while you are sick with COVID-19. If you must care for your pet or be around animals while you are sick, wash your hands before and after you interact with them. See COVID-19 and Animals for more information.



Call ahead before visiting your doctor

- **Call ahead:** If you have a medical appointment, call your doctor’s office or emergency department, and tell them you have or may have COVID-19. This will help the office protect themselves and other patients.



Wear a facemask if you are sick

- **If you are sick:** You should wear a facemask when you are around other people and before you enter a healthcare provider’s office.
- **If you are caring for others:** If the person who is sick is not able to wear a facemask (for example, because it causes trouble breathing), then people who live in the home should stay in a different room. When caregivers enter the room of the sick person, they should wear a facemask. Visitors, other than caregivers, are not recommended.



Cover your coughs and sneezes

- **Cover:** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- **Dispose:** Throw used tissues in a lined trash can.
- **Wash hands:** Immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.



Clean your hands often

- **Wash hands:** Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. This is especially important after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food.
- **Hand sanitizer:** If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry.
- **Soap and water:** Soap and water are the best option, especially if hands are visibly dirty.
- **Avoid touching:** Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.



Avoid sharing personal household items

- **Do not share:** Do not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding with other people in your home.



How did slums survive during the lockdown?

The pandemic has shown that slums need sustained engagement between crises



Usually, when Adeel Kureshi contacts government officials, it is to demand paved roads, sewers, and streetlights for Pahari Nagar, a sprawling slum settlement in eastern Jaipur. This past April, though, Kureshi was seeing to more pressing needs—making sure residents have enough food and fuel during the raging coronavirus pandemic and stringent lockdown. Kureshi, an informal leader and resident of Pahari Nagar, told us over the phone: “I have tried to make a list of households who are the rozkamine vale, roz khane vale. If they don’t work for one day they will go hungry. So I made sure they got supplies...” Six hundred kilometers away in Bhopal, Om Prasad, another slum leader, was scrambling to ensure residents were keeping the settlement clean and understood how easily the virus can jump from person to person. “The first thing I did [following the lockdown’s announcement] is get the settlement cleaned. The second thing was to build awareness about how the disease can spread between neighbours.”

India’s slums received substantial media attention for being potential coronavirus hotspots. Journalists note that slum communities are especially vulnerable to the spread of the virus, and the economic consequences of restrictive mitigation strategies. Slum residents are susceptible given most work in the informal sector and live in crowded conditions, often with inadequate access to essential

public services like water and sanitation.

Despite widespread concerns, we have little systematic information from slum residents about their pandemic-time experiences. Most reporting has focused on conversations with residents in ‘famous’ slums in megacities like Dharavi in Mumbai. These city-sized slums are unrepresentative of most settlements, which are smaller and in less metropolitan

the height of the lockdown in April and May 2020. To our knowledge this is the first such effort to canvas these important leaders during the pandemic. What did we find?

First, our survey demonstrated that slum leaders are not idly watching the virus spread and economic distress deepen. Roughly six in ten leaders contacted a local politician during the lockdown to request assistance. However, the focus of their lobbying



cities. Media accounts also tend to render settlements as uniformly vulnerable and helplessly passive in the face of the pandemic. These portrayals ignore significant variation across slums in their levels of infrastructural development, and neglect the internal structures of self-governance through which these communities solve problems during ‘normal times’.

To better understand how slum residents were affected by the lockdown and pandemic, we conducted a phone survey with 321 slum leaders across 79 slums in Jaipur and Bhopal, at

efforts shifted dramatically from ‘normal’ times. 91% of requests during the lockdown were for food rations, instead of more usual demands for public infrastructure. This reorientation makes sense given leaders estimated the average household in their settlement had only enough savings to survive for 24 days. This shift in focus highlights a hidden cost of the pandemic—a reduction in the time leaders have to address pre-existing deficiencies in basic public services.

Second, pre-pandemic disparities in infrastructural

development also shape the extent to which residents can abide by public health guidelines. 39% of the 1594 households we surveyed across the same 79 settlements in 2015 lack domestic water taps. Accessing water requires them to congregate at communal sources like public taps and truck-fed tanks, where intermittency in water supply creates uncertainty that forces long waits. Slum leaders in settlements with sparser household connections are nearly twice as likely to report public water sources as a problem for social distancing than leaders in settlements with more widespread connectivity. As Vikram, a slum leader in Jaipur told us, “people understand it is dangerous to come to a crowded place for water, but they have to do it.” Approaching ‘slums’ as a homogenous category misses how disparities across settlements matter during the crisis.

Third, slum leaders are not uniform in their ability to help residents. We asked leaders to enumerate any relief schemes that had been initiated or expanded during the lockdown that slum residents might benefit from. 47% of leaders correctly identified zero or 1 scheme, while 25.5% of leaders correctly identified 3 or more schemes. Slum leaders also varied in their reported ability to get requested assistance from politicians. Two key factors underpinned their influence with city leaders: education and their

embeddedness in political party networks. In prior, pre-pandemic research, we found these exact traits corresponded with effectiveness in everyday problem-solving. Leaders who were effective before the pandemic remained more effective during it.

Public health experts have called for community-driven solutions to slow transmission and soften the economic blow of containment measures. In India’s slums, such participatory efforts will encounter informal leaders like Kureshi, Om Prasad, and Vikram. Our findings reveal active forms of leadership even in the most underserved areas of India’s cities. However, we also document that slum leaders are deeply dependent on party networks, and that nine in ten are men. These traits inevitably bias the types of residents that leaders are most likely to hear and help. Rather than flatten and simplify slum communities, participatory efforts must recognize these complexities within them.

A small silver lining to the pandemic has been in rendering visible the Indian state’s inadequate understanding of important urban communities, ranging from circular migrants to slum residents. Acting on this realization requires more than calls for making cities inclusive. It requires sustained engagement between crises, not a flurry of recognition during them.



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Trump will soon leave. But his Republican enablers haven't learned their lesson

Joe Biden has won so much that he is, apparently, tired of winning. That was the crux of his speech Monday night, after the electoral college vote that made official (or rather, yet again made official) his victory over Donald Trump. After a blizzard of false claims of fraud and frivolous lawsuits, the race is over. The attempt to overturn the people's will failed.

In particular, the president-elect singled out courageous election officials – both Democrats and Republicans – who refused to be cowed by Trump's attacks on the election. "We owe these public servants a debt of gratitude," he said, "and our democracy survived because of them." He didn't name names, but one can reasonably assume he was talking about conservatives such as Georgia's secretary of state, Brad Raffensperger, who publicly debunked pro-Trump conspiracy theories, or its voting system implementation manager, Gabriel Sterling, who warned that the president's actions were stoking violence and has been since barraged with death threats.

As a rhetorical matter, the president-elect was right to praise the courage of Republicans who stood up to



Trump's attempt to overturn the election. He was also right to declare victory for democracy. It's his job to put the country's best foot forward.

But when it comes to the republic's longer-term survival, the outcome remains far from certain. Because even the Republican officials who most bravely and patriotically stood up to Trump still don't get it. The greatest threat to the American experiment isn't the would-be autocrat on his way out the door. It's the political party he continues to both lead and personify.

The problem begins with the Republican establishment's relationship to reality itself. Since at least the 1980s, mainstream conservatives have embraced theories that are not well-supported by evidence. (It's hard to make a compelling argument,

for example, that tax cuts for the rich pay for themselves.) But in recent years, as Republicans went from being the party of Reagan to the party of Mitch McConnell, the Republican party has gone from spinning facts to rejecting them entirely.

Today, to be an aspiring Republican politician in good standing, one must espouse a set of core beliefs that are either entirely baseless or provably untrue: the climate crisis isn't real; gun safety laws don't reduce gun violence; masks don't reduce the spread of Covid-19. To many observers, embracing a conspiracy theory about corrupted voting machines or late-night "ballot dumps" would represent a break with reality. But for much of the Republican elite, that's not a problem. They broke with reality long ago.

The Republican establishment is also increasingly willing to disenfranchise eligible voters if it helps them win. Between 2008 and 2016, America lost 10% of its polling places, with cuts falling hardest on minority communities. Ever-broader voter purges have kicked millions of eligible, registered voters off red-state voting rolls. In Florida, the Republican state legislature



rammed through a new law designed to disenfranchise former felons from voting – despite a 2018 ballot measure in which an overwhelming majority of Floridians voted to restore ex-felons' rights.

These examples barely scrape the surface of the war on voting that Republican politicians, not just Trump, have waged in recent years. The president's wild attempt to steal an election is a first in American history. But it didn't come from nowhere. Trump simply absorbed his party establishment's prevailing view – that it is acceptable to win elections through whatever means possible, including by throwing out large numbers of votes on technicalities, hoping conservative judges put ideology

over country, or stoking fears about nonexistent fraud – and took that approach to its logical conclusion.

Perhaps that's why so many Republican elected officials endorsed Trump's baseless attacks on our democratic process well before the first 2020 ballot was cast. Explicit calls to replace democracy with a different form of government remain relatively rare. But the idea that power should be clung to using any means possible – and that the guardrails of our republic should be ignored or dismantled – is entirely within the Republican mainstream. That's why Republicans in the Senate refused to call witnesses during Trump's impeachment trial.

By David Litt

William Barr's exit is bad news for Trump's hopes of an 11th-hour pardoning spree

On Monday, Donald Trump announced the exit of William Barr from the justice department. Finally, the president had succeeded in imposing his will upon someone, anyone, after weeks of repeated failures. On the very day that marked the 300,000th American death to Covid-19 and the electoral college's ratification of Joe Biden's victory, Trump had again hounded his attorney general from office. Jeff Sessions is no longer a club of one.

Yet Barr also won't be there if and when the president delivers his final round of pardons, a likely relief to the president's legal spear carrier but also a reason for Trump to fret: Barr knows a thing or two about 11th-hour pardons. Mike Flynn is only the latest. As attorney general to George HW Bush, Barr successfully urged the late president to grant a passel of pardons in the aftermath of the



Iran-Contra scandal and Bush's 1992 loss to Bill Clinton. Indeed, in Barr's telling he was a driving force nearly three decades ago, running roughshod over justice department "naysayers".

Specifically, Barr fought for the pardon of Caspar Weinberger, Ronald Reagan's defense secretary who was under indictment, and five others, including Elliot Abrams. In time, Abrams would join the

administration of George W Bush and eventually serve as Trump's special representative for Iran and then Venezuela.

In a 2001 interview, the law-and-order Barr framed things this way: "The big ones obviously were the Iran Contra ones. I certainly did not oppose any of them. I favored the broadest." As for limiting Bush's pardons to just Weinberger who was facing perjury charges, Barr was having

none of that. He explained: "There were some people arguing just for Weinberger, and I said: 'No, in for a penny, in for a pound.'" At the time, Abrams had already pleaded guilty to withholding information from Congress, but Barr was not deterred. Rather, Barr "felt" that Abrams "had been very unjustly treated". As expected, Lawrence Walsh, the then independent counsel, saw things differently, saying: "The Iran-Contra coverup

... has now been completed." Years later, Barr would distort the findings of the Mueller report, earning the ire of Mueller, his one-time friend and of Reggie Walton, a George W Bush appointee to the federal bench. In a 23-page opinion, Walton "seriously" questioned whether Barr "made a calculated attempt to influence public discourse about the Mueller Report in favor of President Trump despite certain findings in the redacted version of the Mueller Report to the contrary". To be sure, that was not the last time that Barr would draw fire from the courts. In the aftermath of the justice department's tortured efforts to drop the government's case against Flynn and Trump's pardon, another federal judge, Emmet Sullivan, hammered Barr's leadership.

By Lloyd Green

Indian farmers are right to be outraged



Within a month, the Indian government would launch a military attack on the Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple) of Amritsar, the most significant of Sikh sites. The Indian government justified the military action as a matter of national security, though journalists and independent sources report mass civilian casualties in the thousands.

Within the year, the prime minister of India was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards. And in the decade that followed, there was turmoil in Punjab: the Indian state carried out widespread human rights abuses, "encounter killings" and the extra-judicial disappearances of thousands of innocent civilians, while a segment of Sikhs in Punjab engaged in a years-long armed uprising for self-determination. The current protests in India should warn us of another pressure-cooker situation. Today, the farmers are reacting to the new laws that divest them of minimum price guarantees for their crops. But their grievances and their impetus for protest go far beyond that. To understand what they are protesting and why,

we must recognize the historical context.

In 1966, less than 20 years into its nationhood, India was faced with impending famine and responded by introducing a new, experimental technology into key states, in a program known as the Green Revolution. Having demonstrated success in some other parts of the world, engineered seeds, chemicals and irrigation were beginning to become popular, and India embraced them.

Just as some medications are tested on humans of developing countries before being accepted in developed nations, the Green Revolution was an agricultural experiment tested out on the fields of Punjab.

While the Green Revolution produced more crops in the short-term and helped mitigate India's risk of national famine, its long-term effects have contributed to the degradation of the economy, environment and health of Punjab. These factors have exacerbated the strife between farmers and the government.

The Central Government's subsidization of Green Revolution technologies have effectively coerced farmers to adopt these

resource-intensive methods. Yet India has not guaranteed a profitable market for these crops, leaving the farmers in an unviable situation.

The input cost for producing crops already exceeds the purchase price in many instances: According to a recent report from Punjab Agricultural University, eight out of ten farmers are in debt, and the average amount a farmer owes is more than four times the average annual income.

Further, the government has not protected farmers from multinational corporations. International agricultural giants have been deregulated since 1988, through World Bank-encouraged seed policies, and they have been building their empires for decades now. This is an issue for farmers, who are not allowed to keep their seeds at the end of the year and have to buy new seeds every year.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said that the reforms are intended to benefit farmers. But removing its existing price guarantees for crop sales only empowers these corporations by requiring farmers to negotiate with them individually.

Tens of thousands of farmers have marched to the Indian capital of New Delhi from neighboring states to protest new legislation that hurts small farmers and benefits large corporations.

Police unleashed tear gas and water cannons to halt the march, and last weekend protesters blocking major roads leading into New Delhi were met with hundreds of police and paramilitary forces. One senior police official alleged that the protestors pelted police with stones and damaged property, but even if this is true, the heavy-handed response by police is disproportionate.

The current situation may feel like déjà vu to those familiar with modern Indian politics. The lives

and livelihoods of Indian agricultural workers -- who make up more than half of India's workforce -- have long been secondary to the national interest of feeding the masses. Nowhere has that been more evident than in the northwestern state of Punjab, India's agricultural hub and "bread basket."

In May of 1984, Punjabi leaders initiated a campaign for equal rights, Punjab Bandh, which blocked the transport of crops and withheld taxes from the federal government. It was a part of a states' rights movement against the central government in New Delhi. In response, the federal government deployed 100,000 army troops to the state.

How Biden should confront China



The need to take a tough stance toward China is a rare point of agreement between Democrats and Republicans these days. This bipartisan consensus started to emerge even before President Donald Trump took office, fueled by alarm at China's economic and technology catchup with the United States and frustration at Beijing's trade and human rights policies. But President-elect Joe Biden's incoming administration and

Congress need smart policies toward China, not just tough ones.

Here are some things the new administration and Congress should keep in mind:

Play the long game

The Trump administration correctly recognized that aspects of previous US policy toward China have been ineffective — in particular, the frequent reluctance to confront Beijing on problematic trade and

foreign policies. But the administration — with cheerleaders from both parties in Congress — has erred by flipping to the other extreme. US policy today is to find any tool to act unilaterally against China — from tariffs to controls on US technology exports — without first plotting a sustainable strategy.

Consider restrictions preventing the US semiconductor industry from selling to Huawei, China's leader in 5G wireless technology, and other tech firms. The move has seen short-term success in blunting China's ability to grab a global lead in running 5G networks, but also carries dangers for US technology supremacy. Chinese as well as other foreign firms now have an incentive to "design out" US products and intellectual property from their technology sectors.

The result, if the United States is not careful, is that US semiconductor firms will lose global market share — and the profits to invest in cutting-edge technologies — while Chinese and other foreign firms supply these products instead.

Export controls, like financial sanctions and many other diplomatic and economic tools, work best when the United States works in partnership with allies, such as the European Union and Japan. The Biden administration and Congress will need to combine the resoluteness of Trump's approach with a strategy that leverages US alliances.

Invest in domestic strengths
The United States also needs to make the necessary investments to keep its technological edge. The top priority here should be reversing the long decline in federal funding (measured as a

share of GDP) for basic science and research and development. Numerous studies have shown that federal funding not only yields breakthroughs in science and medicine but also brings a high economic rate of return.

As proposed by two MIT economists, the United States could fund innovation hubs in red states and other areas — away from traditional centers, such as Silicon Valley — kickstarting local economies and reducing income inequality. Improving connectivity via rural broadband expansion and embarking on a long-term upgrade of critical infrastructure could also bolster US innovation capacity while strengthening the economy. Be determined but not hyperbolic

The next administration must avoid seeing China as the bogeyman behind every corner.

Why Punjab is angry

As the farmers of India's premier agricultural state protest strongly against central farm reforms, the Opposition unites behind them to challenge the Modi government.



For much of his first term as prime minister, Narendra Modi seemed content with incremental reforms in agriculture. His critics charged him with using only an air rifle to target the changes needed. A year into his second stint, in the middle of a raging Covid-19 pandemic, Modi saw an opportunity in adversity to accelerate the reform process. This time, he pulled out a bazooka and fired a salvo of ordinances in June 2020, which he believed would bring about Farm Revolution 2.0. These included lifting restrictions binding farmers to sell their produce only in state-regulated mandis, easing the way for the corporate sector to engage in contract farming and knocking out the outdated Essential Commodities Act. The recoil came only in September when his government rammed the ordinances through Parliament to turn them into law. It was strong and from unexpected quarters. First, his food (processing) minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal quit in a huff, and her party, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), with a strong base in Punjab and a close ally of the BJP for decades, decided to exit the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA). Soon after, Punjab itself, where farmers had spearheaded Green Revolution 1.0, went up in revolt. The state government, led by Chief Minister Amarinder Singh, passed laws in the state legislature that negated two of the new central acts pertaining to marketing and contract farming. Other Congress-ruled states followed suit, with Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh moving legislations in their respective assemblies to undo the key portions of the law. These events were just a prelude to the

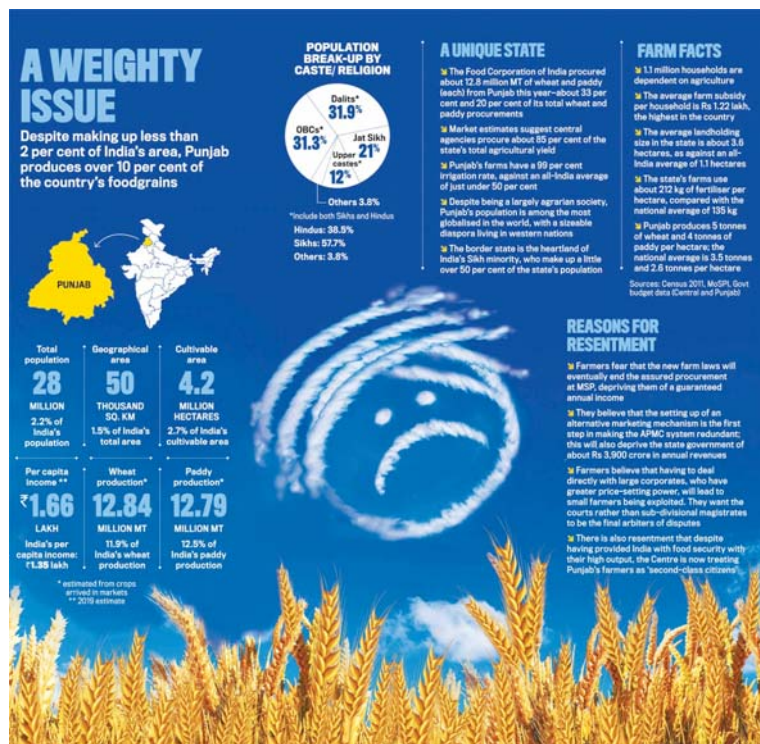
welter of protests bubbling in the region. As the Modi government refused to make any concessions, over 40 farmer outfits from Punjab and across the country made a rare show of unity by laying siege to Delhi, cutting off major arterial routes to the capital. Soon, what began

of the biggest tests of his prime ministership. Clearly, Punjab was the epicentre and how Modi dealt with the issues raised by the country's leading farming state would determine how successful the remaining years of his second term would be. The sensitivities were even

of the rice grown in India. In terms of India's food security, it contributes over a third to the annual buffer stock, making it among the most important grain-producing states.

Yet, of late, its position as the leading agricultural supplier is being increasingly challenged. For the first time, Madhya Pradesh overtook Punjab this year as the largest contributor of wheat to the central pool. This, despite Punjab's per hectare productivity of wheat being at least 50 per cent more than MP's. The latter's rise is the result of a phenomenal expansion of acreage under wheat cultivation in the past two decades. In rice cultivation, Punjab contributes close to 25 per cent to the stock purchased by the central pool, but its share is gradually decreasing as, apart from neighbouring Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh have also increased their output. Worse, water tables in several rice-producing areas of the state are dropping rapidly, making the crop ecologically unviable in the long run. Caught in the wheat-rice cycle, Punjab's per capita income has been dwindling steadily and is now Rs 1.66 lakh compared to the all-India average of Rs 1.35 lakh. A NITI Aayog report last year indicated that debt in the average rural household in the state was Rs 2.1 lakh, among the highest in the country. The spate of farm laws enacted by the Modi government hit the state amidst this brewing agrarian, economic and social crisis. Among the most contentious of the three farm acts is the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce

(Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020. It essentially facilitates a one-nation, one market for farmers by removing the restriction to sell their produce only to state-regulated Agricultural Production Market Committees (APMCs). The new Act also prohibits levying market fees, cesses or levies outside the APMC area and permits traders to operate without licences, with only PAN card as proof. Central officials said the legislation would benefit farmers and buyers who now pay between 2 to 8 per cent as market fees and will help break the stranglehold the traders' cartel have over the sale of produce. It would also free farmers to get the best price for their produce by offering it anywhere in the country rather than be confined to their district or state. Punjab chief minister Captain Amarinder Singh, however, sees only red. By setting up a parallel mandi system, the Centre, he says, will undermine and dismantle the existing state-run APMCs. He points out that by not levying fees on sales outside the APMC, it will give undue advantage to private traders and deprive the state of revenue needed to develop and maintain agricultural infrastructure in the state. (Punjab earns around Rs 3,900 crore annually from APMC levies). He also points out that the 'arthiyas' who, for over the past decades, had developed close relationships with farmers and helped them in times of need would be out in the cold. Amarinder told INDIA TODAY, "The Centre wants to remove the mandi system, impacting both farmers and arthiyas and in turn affecting every facet of state governance." (See interview: "Don't write Punjab off".) **MSP IS THE NEW USP** Apart from the revenue loss to the state, many Punjab farmers' associations harbour a deep suspicion that the new farm act is a way of eventually removing the Minimum Support Price (MSP) system that the Centre uses to purchase grain for the central pool and keep the prices of grain stable.



as an agitation centred round the woes of farmers in Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh gathered support from farmers' organisations across the country besides those allied to opposition parties. That unity was evident during the Bharat Bandh observed on December 8. If Modi was hoping to be the great helmsman of a second green revolution, the script was not going quite as planned. The prime minister was in danger of falling afoul of the farming community that constitutes over 60 per cent of the country's population. The prolonged agitation was proving to be one

higher as Punjab is a frontline state and with Pakistan ever willing to fish in troubled waters, it could exploit any dissonance, especially among the youth, to revive Khalistan sentiments that caused enormous strife in the 1980s.

WHY PUNJAB IS THE EPICENTRE - As a state, Punjab's population is just 28 million or 2.2 per cent of India's population. It constitutes just 1.53 per cent of the country's geographical area and 2.7 per cent of its cultivable area. Yet, it accounts for 11.9 per cent of the wheat production and 12.5 per cent

Mar-a-Lago neighbors want Trump to go elsewhere after he leaves the White House

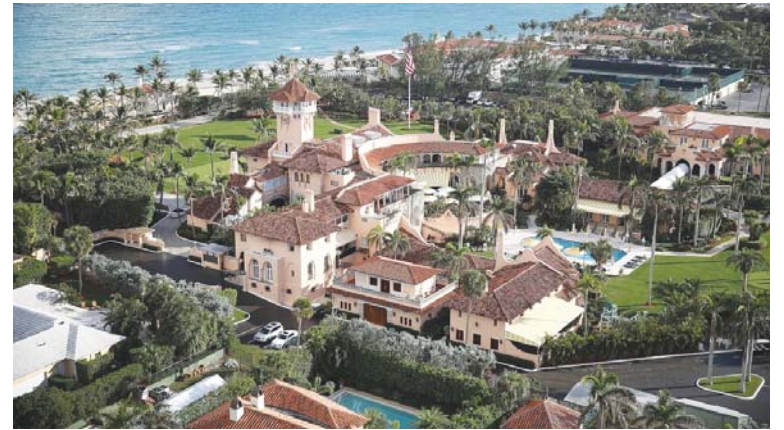
First lady Melania Trump plans to slip down to Palm Beach via government jet on Friday for a weekend walk-through of renovations underway at the Trump family's private quarters at Mar-a-Lago, according to a source familiar with the first lady's schedule, to make sure it's to her liking before she and President Donald Trump move to the private club after January 20, when President-elect Joe Biden moves into the White House. But beyond the new paint, fabrics and finishes and general expansion of the approximately 3,000 square foot private quarters, there looms a much larger issue with the permanency of the move: whether or not it is legal. When he turned the private residence into a club, Trump had agreed with the town to limit his stays there, and now some Palm Beach residents say he might be violating that agreement. Trump bought the former estate of Marjorie Merriweather Post in

1985, and subsequently turned it into a members' only club in 1993. The plan was -- as with most Trump deals -- to turn a profit. Yet in order to transform the private residence into a revenue-generating business, Trump had to agree to certain limitations, based on guidelines presented as dealbreakers from the Town of Palm Beach. For example, there could be no more than 500 members, there were rules concerning parking and traffic, and club members -- Trump included -- could not spend more than seven consecutive days at Mar-a-Lago, for no more than three weeks total a year. At the time, following several appearances at town council meetings by Trump and his lawyers to plead his case for approval on the evolution of the property, Trump assented to abiding by the 21-day rule.

However, he has been exceeding that number by staying at Mar-a-Lago far more often while president, and is apparently hoping to make the club his permanent home after he leaves

office -- something nearby residents in posh Palm Beach are not interested in supporting in a neighborly manner.

West Palm Beach-based attorney Reginald Stambaugh wrote to Palm Beach officials on Tuesday saying that Trump has already violated the agreement for visitor stays at Mar-a-Lago, noting the President's plans to move to the club in January. The letter was first reported by The Washington Post. Stambaugh said he represents a client who may have been exposed to a so-called microwave fence used to secure the property, and that he still has security concerns with the fence and with how Trump's usage of Mar-a-Lago might devalue neighboring properties. "It is the Town Council's responsibility to right these wrongs and restore safety and security to the neighborhood by upholding its Use Agreement," Stambaugh wrote. "In order to avoid an embarrassing situation for everyone and to give the President time to make other



living arrangements in the area, we trust you will work with his team to remind them of the Use Agreement parameters." "Palm Beach has many lovely estates for sale and surely he can find one which meets his needs," the letter continues. According to Brian Seymour, a Palm Beach County land use expert and attorney, the allowances the town gave Trump during his presidency could end once he becomes a private citizen again. If the club doesn't comply, the town can try to enforce its regulations and agreements it made, such as by suing or fining Mar-a-Lago to enforce the

residency limits, Seymour said. But ultimately, it would be up to Trump to comply. "It could get very complicated if the town really was enforcing this," Seymour said. When asked for the town's response to the complaint Wednesday morning, Palm Beach officials didn't immediately respond. CNN also reached out to the White House for comment and did not immediately receive a response. "There is no document or agreement in place that prohibits President Trump from using Mar-a-Lago as his residence," a spokeswoman for the Trump Organization said in a statement.

South Korea warns of first potential lockdown as coronavirus numbers continue to rise



South Korean health officials have warned residents to take current restrictions seriously, as the country faces the possibility of entering into its first potential lockdown since the beginning of the pandemic amid an alarming rise in new infections.

South Korea has long been considered a model country for its effective response to multiple waves of coronavirus, earning praise from the World Health Organization earlier this year after authorities successfully halted the spread of the initial outbreak. Despite being among the first

countries to be hit by the virus, South Korea has managed to avoid the type of stringent lockdown measures seen elsewhere in the world, thanks largely to a combination of aggressive testing and sophisticated track and trace techniques.

But as the pandemic drags on into winter, the emergence of a so-called "third wave" has resulted in an apparently untraceable rise in new infections.

Speaking Wednesday, senior Health Ministry official Yoon Tae-ho urged people to participate fully with social distancing measures

in the Seoul Metropolitan area, which accounts for around half of the country's 51 million-strong population. Those restrictions are currently at level 2.5 on the country's scale, with level 3 being a de facto lockdown.

Yoon said officials are currently consulting with experts, local governments, and the anti-virus work committee about whether to raise restrictions to level 3.

Such a move would likely constitute "a big social change," warned Yoon and could result in harm to small businesses and the self-employed.

On Tuesday, South Korea reported 1,078 new cases, the highest daily count since the start of the pandemic, bringing the national total to 45,442. Some 226 patients are in critical condition, while there were an additional 12 deaths Tuesday, increasing total fatalities to 612.

On Wednesday, the acting Mayor of Seoul, Seo Jung-hyup, warned the capital was facing a critical shortage of hospital

space, with 77 of the city's 78 ICU beds now occupied by coronavirus patients.

While these numbers pale in comparison to those seen in much of Europe or the United States, the latest spike is demonstrative of the additional difficulties caused by freezing winter temperatures -- which drive people indoors, where infection is easier -- and growing fatigue over restrictions and precautions.

According to a tally by Johns Hopkins University, cases in South Korea have been steadily increasing since mid-November, and the country has been slowly enacting more restrictions and social distancing rules in response.

Last week, military and police were called in to help with contact tracing efforts, while testing centers extended their hours into the night and on weekends to encourage testing in the greater Seoul area. At a briefing announcing new efforts,

a top South Korean health official warned the country was facing its "biggest crisis" so far.

Level 3 restrictions could see schools and churches forced to move operations online. Earlier this year, multiple outbreaks in South Korea were linked to religious groups, and some led protests against the government when authorities attempted to enforce social distancing measures.

According to public broadcaster KBS, at least one cluster in Seoul has been linked to a church.

"The church held gatherings four times a week for seven weeks in a confined space for a prolonged period of time, meaning the possibility of droplets spreading among participants was very high," Park Yoo-mi, a local health official, told KBS. "We are further investigating the matter."

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From landowners to labourers: The curious case of small farmers from Bihar, UP

Some migrant labourers say farming is not a profitable proposition in their states as they don't get good value for their crops. India Today TV has interacted with a few such labourers in Ambala and Mohali to find out more about this strange situation.

(News Agencies)-Small farmers from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh face a unique problem. Despite owning land in their states, they are working as labourers in Punjab and Haryana. Some migrant labourers say farming is not a profitable proposition in their states as they don't get good value for their crops. India Today TV has interacted with a few such labourers in Ambala and Mohali to find out more about this strange situation.

Ganga Mahto is a resident of Bahuara village in Sheohar district of Bihar. He has been working as a labourer at a farm in Kawnla village of Haryana's Ambala for two decades now. Back home, Ganga owns four bighas of land on which he grows wheat and paddy but the low price of his produce is not enough to support his family. "Rs 800-900 is the per quintal rate. If the price doesn't go up, then we will

have to sell at whatever rate is being offered because we can't keep it for long. It is difficult to raise a family, look after the education of kids and daily food requirements, so we work as labourers," he told India Today TV.

Another migrant labourer working at the same farm, Ganesh Ram, is also from Sheohar. He has been working as a labourer in Punjab and Haryana for 30 years now. Ram too is a farmer in his native village and owns three bighas of land. He said, "We don't get a good price for our produce, our paddy sells at Rs 800-900 only." "Farmers here get a better price, they have organised market, a reason they have achieved so much," he added.

In 2006, Bihar was the first state in the country to abolish the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) Act which

facilitated private companies to directly purchase from farmers. Some farmers there claim they have to sell their produce to private companies at throwaway prices as middlemen and local traders make huge profits by buying the produce below the Minimum Support Price (MSP). Jafar is a farmer from Meerut where he owns four bigha land in his village in Sardana tehsil. He grows wheat and sugarcane on his land but lack of an organised mandi is a big factor. "Only Rs 800-1,000 is what we get from our baniya. When we bring the same to Karnal mandi in Haryana after crossing the border, we get a better price. But the transport cost is high, so I have no option but to work as a labourer here. If I had two acres of land here, then I would have been a landlord too," he said. Their landlord Gurvinder Singh owns just four acres of land and leases out another 15 acres,



but he is fearful. "These are black laws. Look at these labourers from UP and Bihar; they are also landowners like us but we know what is their condition because there are hardly mandis. We request the government not to turn us into UP or Bihar," he told India Today TV.

BETTER PRICING A BIG FACTOR FOR MIGRATION
Small farmers from UP and Bihar have also taken up cultivation on leased land in Punjab and Haryana. India Today TV met a family from Bareilly in UP that has been farming in Punjab for three decades. They have leased land in Gajju Majra in Mohali

for growing vegetables; better price of produce is a big factor. One of the seven brothers, Irshad Ahmed, said, "There are fewer mandis in UP. Here there are many mandis, so there is a better price for our produce. We have 10-12 bigha land in our village in Bareilly but the value is much less. We have given that on lease at Rs 10,000-11,000 per bigha whereas here we have been leased at Rs 50,000 per acre." The farmers are protesting in the national Capital against the three farm laws passed by the Narendra Modi government. Farmers fear that the MSP will not be enforced once private mandis come up.

What triggered the vandalism at Wistron iPhone facility

India Today TV visited the Wistron iPhone factory in Narasapura, spoke to parents of the workers and police to understand what triggered that vandalism at the facility on Saturday.



(News Agencies)-After Saturday's violence at Wistron Corp's Narasapura facility near Bengaluru over alleged non-payment of promised remuneration to contract workers, overtime and around 12 hours shifts every day, the company had earlier claimed in their police complaint to have suffered losses over Rs 437 crore.

While the company has now downgraded its loss estimate to Rs 43 crore, the incident could have far-reaching implications on Apple's 'Make in India' plans.

India Today TV visited the main facility, which is located in the Narasapura industrial area in Kolar district near Bengaluru on

Tuesday, to find out what triggered the violence.

Production of iPhones has been temporarily halted and workers are yet to be allowed inside the facility. However, work is on to repair the damages that were caused due to the agitation. The police now arranged permanent deployment, comprising 2 striking forces with around 40 personnel, to make sure the company can restart operations quickly.

POLICE QUICK TO TAKE ACTION

An FIR has been registered against 7,000 unknown people including 5,000 contract workers, in connection with violence and vandalism at the facility.

According to the police, they have arrested 158 people in the case. Karthik Reddy, Superintendent of Police, Kolar district, told India Today TV that a total of 4 cases have been filed and the accused are being identified with the help of the 454 surveillance cameras in the facility, WhatsApp group chats and other technical evidence.

The police officers are also taking the help of staffing agencies and line supervisors to identify the workers before making arrests. The police have now set up 10 teams consisting of around 80 personnel to sift through all the data coming in to apprehend the perpetrators. "The situation is under control and peaceful. We have created an environment where the company can go ahead with its operations," said Reddy. **PARENTS OF THOSE ARRESTED CRY FOUL**

India Today TV met a few parents of those employees who have

been arrested by the police and sent to judicial custody. Many of them claim their children were not even present when the violence took place but have still been arrested. KS Narayanswamy from Kakere village said his two children, Suraj (21) and daughter Shilpa (23), have been working for the past few months in the Wistron facility. His son was picked up by the police on Sunday morning. Narayanswamy was waiting outside the SP office in Kolar to get his son released. He said that his children were promised a salary of Rs 21,000 per month but only got between Rs 6,000-9,000 per month. In fact, his son had just written the competitive exam to join the state police force and the father believes this incident will destroy his career. There was a WhatsApp group he was on and the SIM was registered in my name. The police came looking and I told them that my children

work with Wistron. They asked Suraj to get ready and come with them so that they could enquire about his salary. He was sleeping when they came and took him," Narayanswamy said. Likewise, another parent said he was worried about his son Bharath who has been sent to judicial custody. He said his son began working just two months ago at the Wistron facility. "My son was not well. He only worked on Monday and Tuesday and was on leave. His next shift was only on Saturday evening on the day of the violence which took place in the morning. He was not involved. On Sunday morning, we had to attend a function and that is when the police came and took him," he said. Another individual came to secure the release of a boy named Madesha J, whose attendance details showed that he punched in his attendance on December 10, 11 and even 12 (day of the violence).

A tale of U-turns on the three farm laws

(News Agencies)-The fault line on the farm bills may be the prime minister versus the rest of the political outfits, but Narendra Modi in Kutch on Tuesday dug in his heels and attacked the Opposition for using the shoulders of the farmers to fire. The PM drew the line for his partymen and agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar, who is the government's frontline in negotiations with the farmers, that attempts to assure farmers need to go on with exposing what the government claims to be a political hand behind the protests. The PM said, "Opposition leaders when in power used to bat for these reforms at one time. Now that this historic step has been taken, they are misleading farmers."

So did the Opposition actually do a U-turn on these farm reforms? Congress's flip-flop

Congress's dual stance on the farm laws is well known. In the first week of October, Rahul Gandhi drove a red tractor in his



party's 'Kheti Bachao Yatra' in Punjab's Narpur. Just a week ago, he'd posted this tweet.

The unstated allegation in this post is that the farm laws are tailored for private players to operate exploitative grain procurement mandis as an alternate to the ones under the existing Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) regime.

But the Congress's 2019 Lok Sabha election manifesto with Rahul Gandhi on the cover page for the first time, under the segment "agriculture", promised repealing of the APMC Act and

not merely bringing an additional procurement set-up as proposed by the new law.

"Congress will repeal the Agricultural Produce Market Committee Act and make trade in agricultural produce - including exports and inter-state trade - free from all restrictions," said the Congress manifesto, dated April 2, 2019. Arvind Kejriwal's U-turn The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) notified one of the three farm laws after protests reached Delhi. Facing flak, the party, which had earlier denied Delhi Police permission to convert nine city stadiums into temporary detention

centres in light of the farmers' agitation, first backed the December 8 Bharat Bandh called by farmers, and then sat on a one-day solidarity protest fast. But in October 24, 2016, the AAP manifesto for Punjab assembly election spoke a different language. In 2016, the AAP manifesto proposed "Best Price for Farmer" via amendment to the APMC Act to "allow farmers to sell their produce to buyers & markets of their choice in and outside the state". The manifesto shows that AAP was not averse to entry of private players, as in 2016 in Punjab, it had promised "Private push to Markets: Large scale private investment in Markets and Processing Centres in every district where farmers will sell their produce; rural entrepreneurs shall get same benefits as industrial & IT Start-ups." Congress's support for dismantling APMC Even the Congress, led by Amarinder Singh, spoke about the need to upgrade the APMC structure.

The Congress's manifesto for the 2017 Punjab election said, "An updation of APMC Act will be done to ensure direct access of farmers to the national and international markets through digital technology without tinkering with existing MSP system". However, it set a tough tone on MSP, saying the government of India will not be allowed to tinker with the existing MSP system. This is not all. While the Congress, led by its former president Rahul Gandhi, in Delhi and Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh are out to make a meal of the farm protests, the party at various levels since 2004 supported dismantling of the APMC structure. In Maharashtra, the Congress, along with its ally Sharad Pawar, has been opposing the farm laws. However, Pawar, as the UPA agriculture minister, had written to several chief ministers pushing for reforms that included changes in APMC.

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- Do not touch your face with unwashed hands.
- Do not shake hands. Instead wave or elbow bump.
- Monitor your health more closely than usual for cold or flu symptoms.



STAY HOME IF SICK

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



PROTECT THE MOST VULNERABLE

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



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Thousands of Oysters Enter Harbor Rather than Land on Restaurant Dinner Plates Due to COVID Impact on Restaurants



Oyster Bay, NY (News Agencies)- Oyster Bay Town Supervisor Joseph Saladino, Councilman Lou Imbroto and Town Clerk Richard LaMarca today joined with The Nature Conservancy, Pew Charitable Trusts, and Friends of the Bay to provide an early holiday gift to Mother Nature as 50,000+ surplus commercially-grown oysters were entered into the harbor. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the shuttering of local restaurants for long periods of time, commercial oyster growers have been faced with a larger than normal surplus of mature oysters. Rather than discard these perfectly healthy

bivalves, they will be placed in protected areas of Oyster Bay Harbor, where they will help naturally clean and filter local waterways while spawning additional shellfish to help build back the depleted Oyster population. "Rather than land on dinner plates, these oysters are headed into the harbor due to the lack of demand at local restaurants during this public health pandemic," said Supervisor Saladino. "By placing these oysters in protected areas of the harbor, we strengthen the resiliency of our waterways and boost shellfish reproduction. These oysters will also help to naturally

absorb wave action for shoreline stabilization while cleaning and filtering local waterways and spawning additional shellfish to help build back the depleted the oyster population."

This project partners the Town with the Pew Charitable Trust and the Nature Conservancy as part of their Supporting Oyster Aquaculture and Restoration (SOAR) Project. Under this initiative, more than 100 shellfish companies will be supported during these tough times, and over 200 critical shellfish farming jobs will be preserved across the country, all while simultaneously planting over 5 million oysters across 7 states! In addition to all the environmental benefits, commercial growers will also be reaping the economic benefits of this partnership during a time where most people and businesses have been struggling, with sales decimated within the last 9 months due to the global pandemic.

New Zealand to purchase Covid-19 vaccines from 2 more firms, says PM Ardern

(News Agencies)-The New Zealand government will purchase COVID-19 vaccines from pharmaceutical companies AstraZeneca and Novavax, meaning every New Zealander will be able to be vaccinated, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said on Thursday. The new agreements secure access to 7.6 million doses from AstraZeneca -- enough for 3.8 million people, and 10.72 million doses from Novavax -- enough for 5.36 million people.



Both vaccines require two doses to be administered, according to a government statement. The four pre-purchase agreements secured to date are 750,000 courses from Pfizer/BioNTech; 5 million courses from Janssen; 3.8 million courses from the University of Oxford/AstraZeneca; and 5.36 million courses from Novavax, said the statement.

There are multiple types of vaccine technology that have been used to develop COVID-19

vaccines. "Our strategy has been to purchase different types of technology, to ensure if some are found in development or in trials not to be a successful option, we will have alternatives available," Ardern said. "We now have agreements in place with four providers, covering three different types of vaccine technology and we have secured more than enough doses to cover our entire population plus the Pacific,"

she said. The AstraZeneca and Novavax vaccines announced on Thursday complement the other purchases, and are compatible with existing infrastructure and storage facilities in New Zealand, she added. "If proven to be safe and effective by New Zealand's pharmaceuticals regulator Medsafe, they will provide broad population coverage for New Zealand and our Pacific neighbors," Ardern said.

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Anit-Semetic Graffiti Found in Forest Hills

QUEENS, NY (News Agencies)- Queens Borough President Donovan Richards stated the following in response to the discovery of anti-Semitic graffiti discovered today on 68th Road and the Grand Central Parkway in Forest Hills.

"This sickening display of anti-Semitism has no place in The World's Borough, especially as our Jewish brothers and sisters in Forest Hills and across Queens

rejoice during the holy week of Chanukah," said Borough President RICHARDS. "This intolerable act of vandalism will not go unpunished, and our office is working closely with the NYPD, the NYC Commission on Human Rights and the NYC Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes to ensure those responsible are held accountable for their shameful, unacceptable act of hate."

Arrival of Covid-19 Vaccine in Queens

QUEENS, NY (News Agencies)- Queens Borough President Donovan Richards stated the following in response to today's arrival of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine in New York City, which was administered first to Northwell Health Long Island Jewish Medical Center nurse Sandra Lindsay in Queens.

"More than 95,000 Queens residents have contracted COVID-19 over the past nine months, including more than 6,000 of our friends, neighbors and loved ones whom we've lost to this unforgiving virus. Today's arrival of a COVID-19 vaccine will not lessen our collective pain, but today's historic feat of science and

medicine is the day we permanently altered the course of this pandemic — saving countless lives in the process," said Borough President RICHARDS. "It is not lost on Queens — the epicenter of the pandemic of this pandemic, where communities of color were hit with starting severity — that a Black female healthcare hero administered New York State's first dose of the vaccine to another Black female healthcare hero. As vaccines become more widely available, a just recovery from COVID-19 and the inequalities in our society it exposed means routing these life-saving inoculations toward our historically underserved and hardest hit communities.

Borough President Richards to Sponsor Scholarship Competition in Recognition of Black History Month

QUEENS, NY (News Agencies)- Queens Borough President Donovan Richards today announced he is inviting talented Queens high school seniors interested in pursuing a post-secondary education to apply for the African American Heritage Scholarships that will be awarded by the Borough President's African American Heritage Committee during Black History Month early next year.

"Queens is home to some of the best and brightest high school seniors in the country, so it is great that our African American Heritage Scholarships give us the opportunity to support some of them financially as part of our continuing effort to ensure equal opportunity and

give all of youth a chance to succeed," said Borough President RICHARDS. "There is no better way to celebrate African American history than to help promising students who are destined to make history of their own."

All of the scholarship winners will receive monetary awards they can use to cover expenses related to their post-secondary studies. Eight students won scholarships during last year's edition of this competition, with each student receiving a \$1,000 scholarship.

Students interested in applying for a scholarship can do so by completing the application form at <http://

www.queensbp.org/AAHCScholarshipApp> www.queensbp.org/AAHCScholarshipApp<https://www.queensbp.org/AAHCScholarshipApp/>. Only Queens residents are eligible for the scholarships.

Any Queens high school senior seeking to apply for an African American Heritage Scholarship must submit a completed application and an official high school transcript by 5 p.m. on January 11, 2021. Those who win the scholarships will be notified by February 1, 2021 and will be recognized during Borough President Richards' virtual Black History Month Celebration on Wednesday, February 24, 2021.

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Since April 2005 Editor : Sharnjit Singh Thind

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ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਉਡਾਰੀ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਖਰਚੇ 27000 ਕਰੋੜ

ਨਵੀਂ ਦਿੱਲੀ ■ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਨਿਗਮਾਂ ਦੇ ਅੰਕੜਿਆਂ ਦੇ ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਉਡਾਰੀ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਖਰਚੇ 27000 ਕਰੋੜ ਕਰੋੜ ਰੁਪਏ ਖਰਚੇ ਹਨ।

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

ਨਵੀਂ ਦਿੱਲੀ ■ ਸਿੱਖ ਨਿਗਮਾਂ ਦੇ ਅੰਕੜਿਆਂ ਦੇ ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਸੱਜਣ ਕੁਮਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਸਿੱਧਾਂ ਕੋਲੋਂ ਬਚਾ-ਬਚਾ ਕੇ ਰੱਖੇਗਾ ਜੇਲ੍ਹ ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਾਸਨ।

ਭਾਰਤ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨੇ ਅੰਤਰਰਾਸ਼ਟਰੀ ਨਿਰਬਲ ਰੋਸ ਪਾਏ

ਨਵੀਂ ਦਿੱਲੀ ■ ਭਾਰਤ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨੇ ਅੰਤਰਰਾਸ਼ਟਰੀ ਨਿਰਬਲ ਰੋਸ ਪਾਏ।

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

ਨਵੀਂ ਦਿੱਲੀ ■ ਅਮਰੀਕੀ ਫੌਜ ਨੇ ਬੰਬ ਦਾ ਟਵੀਟ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਮੰਗੀ ਮੁਆਫੀ।

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Long island son indicted with his mother for gunning Down Man extradited From Florida And Arraigned on Murder Charges

Anonymous Tip Led to Whereabouts of the Accused; Both Defendants Face Up to 25 Years-to-Life in Prison if Convicted

(News Agencies)-Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced today that Raymond Jackson, 22, who has been on the run since he allegedly shot to death a man in September, has been apprehended and returned to Queens to face charges. The defendant was indicted for murder and other crimes along with his mother, Avita Campbell, who has been in custody since her arrest following a traffic stop in October. District Attorney Katz said, "This mother and son duo allegedly teamed up to kill a man. A minor dispute over a few hundred dollars sparked this tragic shooting. The pair sought out the victim and, when they found him, the son allegedly fired more than dozen shots at him. The mother was allegedly armed with a metal pipe. This was a brutal, senseless killing that should not happen in our neighborhoods. Both defendants are now in custody and face very serious charges." Jackson, who lived with his 38-year-old mother on Hook Creek Boulevard in Valley Stream, Long Island, was arraigned late yesterday before Queens Supreme Court Justice Ushir Pandit-Durant. Jackson is charged in the 10-count indictment with murder in the second degree, criminal possession of a weapon in the second degree and unlawful possession of personal identification information in the second degree. Campbell is additionally

charged in the same indictment with criminal possession of a weapon in the third degree, criminal mischief in the fourth degree, aggravated unlicensed operation of a motor vehicle in the third degree and operating or driving a motor vehicle without a license. Campbell was arraigned in Supreme Court in October. Justice Pandit-Durant set Jackson's return date for January 19, 2021. Campbell is also scheduled to appear in Court on that date. If convicted, the defendants face up to 25 years-to-life in prison. DA Katz said, at approximately 5:40 p.m. on September 23, 2020, both defendants were seen on video surveillance exiting a white BMW on Beach 31st Street near Seagirt Avenue in Far Rockaway, Queens. Both defendants were allegedly armed - Campbell holding a metal pipe and Jackson carrying a handgun. The victim, Lasaaun Lawrence, was seated inside of a double parked car at the location. As the pair approached the 27-year-old, defendant Jackson raised his arm and allegedly aimed and fired at the victim. About a dozen shots rang out and the victim was struck by multiple bullets. Continuing, said the DA, when Jackson stopped shooting his mother allegedly slammed the pipe into the victim's car's windshield, causing the glass to shatter. Jackson and Campbell then jumped back into the BMW and fled the scene. The victim, who

lived in the area, died as a result of the gunshot wounds. On October 2, 2020, according to the charges, Campbell was driving the same white BMW when police pulled her over for a traffic stop. Police executed a Court-authorized search warrant and allegedly found a loaded silver and black handgun and two magazines inside a book bag. Defendant Campbell was arrested at that time on weapons charges and arraigned in Criminal Court. According to the indictment, ballistics tests performed on the recovered gun by the New York City Police Department's Firearms Section revealed it was allegedly a match for the gun used to shoot and kill Mr. Lawrence. The investigation was conducted by Detective Andre Figueiredo of the NYPD's 101st Detective Squad under the supervision of Detective Sergeant Courtney Cummings. Assistant District Attorney Jonathan Selkove, of the District Attorney's Homicide Bureau is prosecuting the case, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Brad L. Leventhal, Bureau Chief, Peter J. McCormack, III, Senior Deputy Bureau Chief, John W. Kosinski and Kenneth Appelbaum, Deputy Bureau Chiefs and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Major Crimes Daniel A. Saunders.

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Sen, Kaminsky's Bill to Expend Access to Home Delivery of Groceries For NYS Poor Signed Into Law

New law will fight food insecurity amid COVID-19 and beyond

(Albany, New York) -- Yesterday, legislation sponsored by Senator Todd Kaminsky expanding the pilot program allowing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ("SNAP") participants to purchase groceries online (S.8247) was signed into law by Governor Cuomo. Under the new law, the state will develop a plan to maximize retailer participation and seek all necessary federal approvals to make sure the program is offered in as many stores as possible. The measure, which was sponsored in the Assembly by Assemblyman Andrew Hevesi, aims to protect families and seniors during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, while expanding access to vital nutritional aid.

"During these tough times, families who are struggling to get by should not have to make

the difficult decision of prioritizing putting food on the table over their health and safety," said Senator Todd Kaminsky. "Thanks to this new law, we will be able to expand access to online groceries for SNAP recipients, while fighting the troubling trend of food insecurity head-on. I have no doubt that my legislation will help countless New Yorkers throughout the pendency of the pandemic and beyond, and I applaud Governor Cuomo for signing it into law."

"Expanding the pilot program which allows SNAP participants to purchase groceries online removes an unnecessary barrier and increases food accessibility for New Yorkers facing unprecedented challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated food insecurity; it is crucial that we use every available resource to ensure that safe, easily accessible, nutritious food is available to every New Yorker. I

am grateful to Senator Kaminsky for his partnership in the Senate and to Governor Cuomo for signing this common sense legislation into law," said Assemblyman Andrew Hevesi. "The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) online purchasing pilot program is an important step for low-income New Yorkers who need safe access to purchasing groceries during the pandemic. Empire Justice Center is deeply appreciative of the Governor's support, Senator Kaminsky and Assemblymember Hevesi's leadership in passing the measure," said Kristin Brown, President and CEO of the Empire Justice Center.

"No Kid Hungry applauds State Senator Todd Kaminsky for introducing this legislation that extends New York's online SNAP purchasing program to the extent allowable by federal law. We are

grateful that Governor Andrew M. Cuomo has now signed this into law. It will allow families to reduce their risk of transmitting or contracting COVID-19 during trips to the grocery store while also addressing long-term barriers to SNAP, such as transportation issues and stigma against the program, that contribute to food insecurity in New York. SNAP serves as a lifeline for many families, and helps to ensure that those who have fallen on hard times are able to access the nutrition they need to get back on their feet. With the economic effects of the COVID-19 crisis permeating every part of the state, it is more important than ever to remove the barriers that impede access to SNAP and this law will do just that" said Rachel Sabella, Director, No Kid Hungry New York "We are hopeful that the

enactment of this law will allow even more individuals to access clear information about using their SNAP benefits for online food purchases at a time when this is a critical health and safety need for tens of thousands of food insecure New Yorkers. We can prioritize both keeping New Yorkers safe and fed," said Saima Akhtar, a Senior Attorney at National Center for Law and Economic Justice.

"Long Island Cares, Inc.-The Harry Chapin Food Bank is grateful to Senator Kaminsky for sponsoring S.8247 which expands the current pilot program allowing SNAP participants to buy groceries online. There are currently more than 1.6 million households in New York State receiving SNAP benefits, with greater than 90,000 of these households on Long Island.

Healthfirst To Address Food Insecurity Through Holiday Donations

Donations to World Central Kitchen's Restaurants for the People, Feeding Westchester, and The Health and Welfare Council of Long Island Will Support more than 200,000 People Residing in Healthfirst Member Communities

NEW YORK, (Press Release) "The Health and Welfare Council of Long Island (HWCLI) - <https://hwcli.com/> A Healthfirst donation will help the HWCLI screen and enroll thousands of Long Island residents in government-sponsored food programs, including school nutritional programs, food pantry access, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to ensure they are getting the assistance they need.

"Feeding Westchester - <https://feedingwestchester.org/> A Healthfirst donation will help nearly 40,000 families (or 150,000 people) by stocking Feeding Westchester's Mobile Food Pantry and Fresh Marketing Program with more than 88,000 pounds of food. "The economic crisis caused by the pandemic has led to devastating consequences for those who were already struggling. For many of our members, including one million Medicaid clients, food insecurity

has always been an issue. COVID-19 has dramatically worsened the situation and laid bare how many of our neighbors lack the basic necessities to sustain a healthy life," said Pat Wang, president and chief executive officer of Healthfirst. "Healthfirst will continue its commitment to addressing the nutrition needs of New Yorkers as part of our ongoing efforts to battle disparities and to help improve health outcomes in the communities we serve. We enthusiastically support the efforts of these wonderful organizations dedicated to combating food insecurity across the communities where our members live and work."

World Central Kitchen uses the power of food to heal and strengthen communities through times of crisis and beyond, providing fresh meals to communities in immediate need while also keeping small restaurants and food businesses open. World Central Kitchen buys meals directly from

restaurants and delivers them to people who need help. "World Central Kitchen is grateful for Healthfirst's support and belief in our mission," said Fiona Donovan, Relief Operations Lead and NYC efforts lead. "They share our vision that a powerful solution to the ongoing health, economic, and humanitarian crises is to work with restaurants to prepare nutritious meals for food-insecure communities. Healthfirst's donation will support the NYC community and contribute to WCK's Restaurants for the People program, which pays restaurants directly to help keep their business afloat while also providing tens of thousands of meals to people in need." The Health and Welfare Council of Long Island, with a mission that matches Healthfirst's to serve those most vulnerable, has led the region's health and human services delivery response to COVID-19 since early in the pandemic. "At the Health and Welfare Council of Long Island, we are

immeasurably grateful for the support and partnership with Healthfirst," said Rebecca Sanin, president and CEO of the Health and Welfare Council of Long Island. "Thanks to Healthfirst, Long Islanders devastated by COVID-19 are receiving critical, needed support to help sustain their families during this difficult time. Healthfirst is committed to addressing the inequity that plagues the Long Island region and to making sure that the needs of those who are most vulnerable and have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 are prioritized." Feeding Westchester, at the heart of a network of more than 300 partners and programs, is the country's leading nonprofit hunger relief organization. "This holiday season presents an unprecedented set of challenges for many families and individuals right here in Westchester County.

US defence bill slams China on LAC aggression

The bill urges Beijing to settle the issue using diplomatic mechanisms and 'refrain' from using force and coercion

(News Agencies)-AUS defence spending legislation that has been cleared by both chambers of the US Congress expresses "significant concern" with Chinese aggression along the border with India, and urges Beijing to settle the dispute through "existing diplomatic mechanisms" and "refrain" from using force and coercion.

The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), 2021 seeks to convey this message as an expression of the "sense of Congress". Though it is neither a demand nor a threat tagged with enforceable consequences, it is a significant show of support for India and solidarity, passed by the Democratic-controlled

House of Representatives and Republican-controlled Senate. The legislation is now awaiting the signature of President Donald Trump. He has until December 23 to sign the bill into law or veto it, as he has threatened to. However, since the legislations passed both the House and Senate with two-thirds majorities, the measure has enough support to override a presidential veto. In Section 1206 of the bill titled "Sense of Congress on the aggression of the government of China along the border with India and growing territorial claims" the bill says, "Continued military aggression by the Government of China along the border with India is a

significant concern." And that the "government of China should work with the government of India toward de-escalating the situation along the Line of Actual Control through existing diplomatic mechanisms and refrain from attempting to settle disputes through coercion or force". It goes on to point to China's other aggressive actions in the region and around, and says that Congress believes that "attempts by the Government of China to advance baseless territorial claims, including those in the South China Sea, the East China Sea, and with respect to Bhutan, are destabilizing and inconsistent with international law". House Speaker Nancy



Pelosi signed the NDAA last Friday, starting the 10-day notice period for the President to sign it. Trump has threatened to veto the bill if it did not contain provision taking away immunity enjoyed by social media platforms from prosecution for content published by them, under Section 230 of the Communication Decency Act. He wants to punish Twitter,

Facebook and other platforms for censoring and labelling objectionable content published by him and his conservative allies. The \$740 billion defence spending bill doesn't contain that provision, in a rare joint snub by both Republicans and Democrats, which has set up a confrontation with lawmakers of both parties, who are determined to override his veto.

Three dead as Storm Gail blasts the East Coast:



Biggest nor'easter in a decade dumps up to 2ft of snow on 70 million people, causes huge pile-ups and threatens to hold up vaccine delivery - but doesn't stop New Yorkers dining outdoors

Brannagan Locklear, was also killed in a car crash in Virginia, according to authorities. A spokeswoman for the Virginia State Police said the agency had responded to about 200 calls about collisions by 3pm. In the Big Apple, which is set to see its heaviest December snowfall in a decade with 12 inches forecast, road conditions deteriorated rapidly over the course of the afternoon before the FDNY reported a crash involving 20 cars on the Henry Hudson Parkway in the Bronx at about 6.30pm. At least six people were reportedly injured in that collision, as first responders worked to free others who were

'pinned' in their vehicles. 'Take this seriously,' Mayor Bill de Blasio warned in a tweet hours before the Bronx crash as he announced that New York City Schools would be closed for in person learning Thursday. In Maryland, state police reported a sharp spike in traffic calls soon after the weather arrived, including 161 crashes and numerous stalled or abandoned vehicles on icy roadways. More than 57,200 homes and businesses in Virginia were without power as of 10pm, per poweroutage.us, along with another 11,600 in New Jersey. Despite increasingly treacherous road

conditions COVID-19 vaccine shippers said they would not let Winter Storm Gail affect distribution - but that they have made additional plans in case it does. Some hospitals said they were anticipating delays in shipments as the roads worsened through Wednesday night. Weather conditions also prompted several major cities, including New York, Baltimore and Hartford to suspend COVID-19 testing until further notice, while hospitals around the region, already struggling with surges in virus patients, pushed back elective surgeries to make room for storm-related admissions.

(News Agencies) Three people were killed in car crashes on Wednesday evening as a powerful nor'easter rolled across the East Coast bringing up to two feet of snow and creating treacherous conditions on thousands of miles of roadways. More than 60 million people were placed under weather warnings before Winter Storm Gail began

blanketing areas from northern Virginia to New York City to southern Maine with powder as governors around the region urged residents to stay safe indoors. Two people died in a pile-up involving dozens of vehicles on Interstate 80 in Clinton County, Pennsylvania, state police said. A 19-year-old man from North Carolina,

Russia scales back Covid-19 screening amid surging cases

(News Agencies) Russia has conducted around 10 per cent fewer Covid-19 tests so far this month than the same period a month ago, despite a surge in recorded infections, official data shows, raising questions over authorities' ability to control the spread.

Beyond affluent Moscow, people with Covid-19 symptoms can wait days to be tested and doctors sometimes refuse to

test them all together, according to Reuters interviews with patients, doctors and officials in 11 regions. Rospotrebnadzor, the consumer health watchdog, ordered an increase in testing on Nov. 16 yet the number of tests conducted in the first half of December fell by 825,000, or 11 per cent, compared with the first half of November, Reuters calculations using official data showed. Rospotrebnadzor has since Nov. 16 allowed medical

workers not to test people who have had contact with infected people but have no symptoms themselves, which analysts said could account for some of the decline.

The health ministry, Rospotrebnadzor and the national coronavirus crisis centre did not respond to requests to comment on the reason for the drop in testing. Two local officials and a doctor from the Central, Povolzhsky and Nizhny

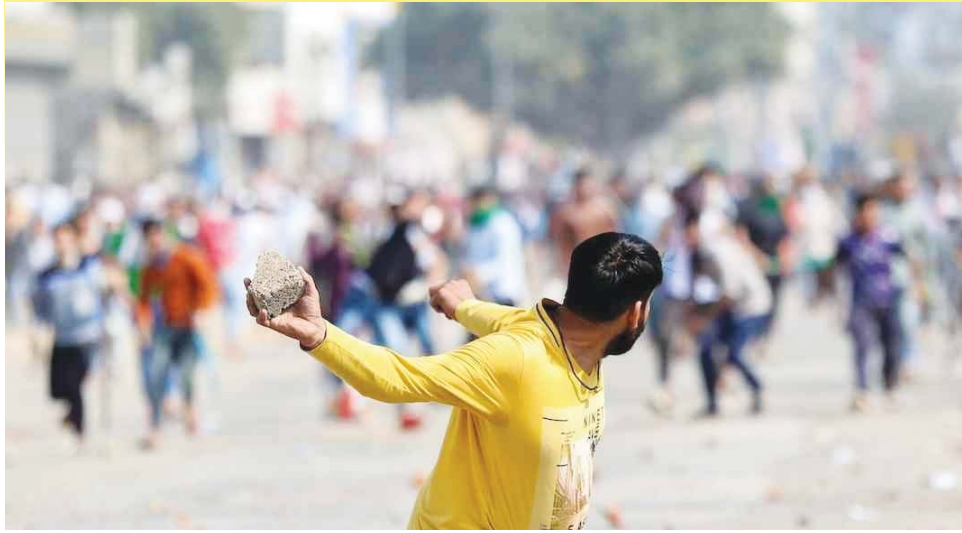
Novgorod regions respectively told Reuters on condition of anonymity that healthcare workers in the regions had been informally instructed by their managers or the local government to reduce testing due to a shortage of doctors.

The official from the Central region said doctors were required to refer patients with flu-like symptoms for testing under official rules but that in practice that was "impossible"

due to the sheer numbers. Covid-19 cases in Russia have surged since September, climbing to a record one-day high of over 29,000 on Dec. 6.

The Kremlin has resisted a second strict lockdown, saying measures in some regions limiting gatherings and mandating remote learning and work where possible and self-isolation for the elderly are enough.

Year-ender: 2020 in protests, riots, scams and scandals in India



farmers, mainly from Punjab and Haryana but also from Kerala, over the three farm laws brought out first as Ordinance by the government and later enacted by Parliament. It's seeing a surge in coronavirus cases.

The three laws are The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, and The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act. Of these, the third is an amendment to existing law. Together, they provide for setting up a mechanism parallel to the MSP system allowing farmers to sell their produce outside the APMC mandis and traders buy directly from them outside these government-controlled markets. Farmers' unions leading the agitation say these laws will ultimately dismantle the MSP system and make the farmers vulnerable to exploitative corporate market forces. The government dismissed their claims but has failed to convince them that the new farm laws are beneficial reforms. As a result, thousands of farmers continue to stay put at Delhi border points for two weeks.

DELHI SEES RIOTS

What seemed as intense protests against and in support of the CAA by opposing groups in Delhi, turned into communal violence in Northeast Delhi in February. The clashes between the supporters of the citizenship law and protesters began on February 24. It spiralled out of control, leaving at least 53 people dead and around 200 injured.



Multiple cases in connection with the Delhi riots are being probed by the Delhi Police, which in its charge sheet said it was a conspiracy by persons who committed a crime against humanity. It named former JNU students union leader Umar

Khalid and another JNU student Sharjeel Imam as accused.

The Opposition and several activists hit out at the Delhi Police and the government saying that the role of Kapil Mishra, a BJP leader in Delhi, was not being probed in connection with Delhi riots. They alleged that the riots happened after Kapil Mishra threatened to take matters into his hands if the



handed over to the NIA, local police had arrested more than 300 members including those belonging to the SDPI, the political wing of the Popular Front of India. The NIA has conducted several searches in connection with the Bengaluru riots and arrested more than 100 persons. A major political scandal broke out following the death of actor Sushant Singh Rajput, who was

found hanging in his flat in Mumbai in June. After his father approached the Bihar government for registering a case suspecting foul play behind his death, the administrations of Bihar and Maharashtra seemed to be fighting each another.

Bihar Police registered an FIR in Sushant Singh Rajput's death case. When the police officer from the state landed in Mumbai, they were forced into quarantine by the BMC in what the Bihar government said was an act to block the probe into the case. Later, it transferred the matter to the CBI. Maharashtra moved the Supreme Court challenging the CBI probe by Bihar. The Supreme Court upheld the decision of the Bihar government. All this while, political war of words continued between the two sides involving the JDU and the BJP on one and the Shiv Sena and the Congress on the other.

Later, it became a battle between actor Kangana Ranaut and the Shiv Sena-led Maharashtra government. Meanwhile, Sushant Singh Rajput's girlfriend Rhea Chakraborty was arrested over illegal drugs issues, and spent

four weeks in jail. Now, the probe is largely centred on the use of narcotics in Bollywood.

KERALA GOLD SMUGGLING SCANDAL

This was the most serious political scandal this year. It broke out with the customs officials detaining a diplomatic baggage from the UAE at Thiruvananthapuram airport on June 30. The consignment turned out to be carrying illegal gold.

The gold smuggling network reached the doors of Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's office. A key accused in the gold smuggling case turned out to be a contact of his personal secretary. Pinarayi Vijayan sacked the official and handed over the probe to the central agencies. Now, the case is being looked at from the angles of terrorism and money laundering with the NIA and the Enforcement Directorate leading the probe.

J&K'S ROSHNI LAND SCAM

Before the year ended, a major scam broke out in Jammu and Kashmir. It related to a decision by the Jammu and Kashmir government in 2001 to regularise the unauthorised occupation of the government land. The ownership of the land was to be transferred for payment of a fee.

The money collected from this scheme was to be used for the power project in Jammu and Kashmir. Hence, the enabling law was called the Roshni Act. The government set a target of Rs 25,000 crore to earn from the fees against title ownership to the beneficiaries. In 2014, the CAG found that the Roshni Act proved to be a tool for land grab by several powerful people in Jammu and Kashmir. In November this year, the CBI registered a case in the Roshni land scam.



anti-CAA protesters did not clear the road blockade in the area.

BENGALURU RIOTS OF AUGUST

Riots broke out in Bengaluru on the night of August 11 over a purported inflammatory social media post about Prophet Muhammad by a Congress MLA's relative. Mobs of hundreds of agitators attacked police stations in DJ Halli and Kadugondanahalli areas of Bengaluru.

The residences of Congress MLA R AKhanda Srivinivasa Murthy and his sister were among the targets of the rioters. Large scale arson and violence took place in the city. Four people including three in police firing died during the riots. The riots had triggered fear and panic in the neighbouring areas. The case is now being probed by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) which usually probes the cases related to terrorism. Before the case was

The world is changing. India needs to get its priorities right



At the outset, it is important to bring conceptual clarity to the term "world order". Instead of trying to predict the future, it is useful to conceptualise many possible orders the world might end up in. One way to do this is to visualise these orders at the intersection of major changes in geopolitics and geo-economics.

Some foreseeable geopolitical trends include a unipolar United States (US)-dominated world, a co-operative US-China G2, a full-

on US-China confrontation, or a multipolar world. Similarly, key geo-economic trends can be thought of along the lines of a global recession, a secular stagnation, a new economic boom, or a technological disruption. The confluence of the geopolitical and geo-economic trends results in multiple world order scenarios. In each scenario, strategies to maximise India's national interest can then be worked out. Geopolitically, the pandemic has accelerated the

confrontation between the US and China. Geo-economics-wise, it has plunged the world into a recession phase. Taken together, this could create a "race to the bottom" world order with stable geopolitical dynamics - characterised by US-China rivalry - and dynamic geo-economics - characterised by the emergence of many new economic webs. In this order, the US will likely see countering China as an overriding national priority. Reorienting supply chains to reduce

dependence on China will be taken more seriously. Like the global economy, technological governance may splinter into multiple interacting webs with more State oversight. Global bodies such as the UN could become far less important, and regional institutions organised around powerful nation-states could gain prominence.

In this world, where distrust with regard to China increases, India can be a part of multiple economic webs and gain from them. At the same time, its ability to shape the world order gets intricately linked with the economics and politics at home. With newer restrictions in global labour flows and thinned out capital flows, India will need to find a new engine of growth such as large-scale manufacturing. Returning to a higher economic growth trajectory then becomes a precondition for India's emergence as a swing power between the US and China. Without this, India's global role will decline, forcing it to bandwagon with other powers on less favourable terms. Some

other reforms that would serve India in multiple scenarios are implementing labour and factor market reforms, becoming an attractive foreign investment destination, championing the cause of globalisation, and executing three critical military shifts - from land to sea, from the physical to the technological, and from more manpower to more firepower.

What also comes up across all reform themes is the urgent need to improve the capacity of the India's State, which is small where it really matters and overbearing in other ways that are counterproductive. Prioritising the State's role has never been more important.

Finally, we realised that there are many ways to construct world orders. More Indian perspectives about the changing world will enrich the global discourse. India's current problems can't be an excuse for insularity. The Arthashastra says, "Policy precedes all action." We humbly add that policy, in turn, is preceded by an imagination of a desirable future.

CBI books Hyderabad company for loan fraud, amount bigger than Nirav Modi case



involved in the fraud is even higher than what fugitive diamondaire Nirav Modi owes to banks in India. The 49-year-old is currently facing extradition proceedings and is lodged in a UK jail. He owes some Rs 7,700

crore to Indian banks. Transstroy, which deals in construction of highways, bridges, irrigation projects, metro related work and is also in the business of oil and gas, is currently under liquidation process as per an

order by National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) in September 2019.

Apart from Transstroy and its CMD Cherukuri Shridhar Sridhar, the CBI has named as accused Rayapati Sambasiva Rao

Apart from Transstroy and its CMD Cherukuri Shridhar Sridhar, the CBI has named as accused Rayapati Sambasiva Rao (additional director in the company) and Akkineni Sathish (additional director) in the FIR registered at its Bengaluru unit.

(additional director in the company) and Akkineni Sathish (additional director) in the FIR registered at its Bengaluru unit. The agency teams on Friday carried out raids in Hyderabad and Guntur at the premises of accused persons and recovered documents related to the fraud, officials said.

CBI spokesperson RK Gaur said that Transstroy had availed credit facilities on multiple banking arrangements from consortium formed with other banks led by Canara Bank.

"It was further alleged that the accused had involved in

falsification/fabrication of books of accounts, fudging of stock statements, tampering of balance sheets, round tripping of funds etc. It was also alleged that the accused misappropriated bank's funds and diverted the loan amount sanctioned by the banks and caused loss of Rs 7926.01 crore (approx) to Canara Bank and other member banks. The account had become NPA (non performing asset) and the fraud was reported," Gaur said.

Transstroy's legal or company representatives could not be located by HT for comments.

Climate change could create 63 million migrants in South Asia by 2050

The growing impacts of climate change have already pushed more than 18 million people to migrate within South Asian countries, but that could more than triple if global warming continues on its current path, researchers warned on Friday. Nearly 63 million people could be forced from their homes by 2050 in the region as rising seas and rivers swallow villages, and drought-hit land no longer supports crops, said ActionAid International and Climate Action Network South Asia in a report. The projection does not include those who will be forced to flee sudden disasters such as floods and cyclones and so is likely an under-estimate, noted Harjeet Singh, global climate lead at ActionAid. He said the situation could become "catastrophic". Many will head from rural areas to towns and cities in their own countries, in search of work, he said.

There they often end up living in slum areas exposed to flooding and with very limited access to social services, doing precarious jobs such as rickshaw-pulling, construction or garment-making. "Policy makers in the Global North and the Global South are not yet waking up to this reality," Singh told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "They are not realising the scale of the problem, and how we are going to deal with (it)." He urged rich nations with high planet-warming emissions to redouble efforts to reduce their carbon pollution and provide more funding for South Asian countries to develop cleanly and adapt to conditions on a warming planet.

If governments meet a globally agreed goal to limit warming to below 2 degrees Celsius, the number of people driven to move in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal could be cut almost by half by 2050, the report said. It builds on research published in 2018 by the World Bank, which said unchecked climate change could cause more than 140 million people to move within their countries' borders by 2050 in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America. The new report, which used an updated version of the same methodology, raises the



original 2050 projection for South Asian migration by about half, adding in new data on sea level rise, as well as the effects of ecosystem losses and droughts. The new report also tracks expected migration on a finer scale. **PREPARING FOR MOVEMENT** The projections have financial implications for countries such as India and Bangladesh, where the poorest people often lack the means to move far from their original homes to safer places without state support. The new figures show the largest number of

people are expected to migrate by 2050 in India, at more than 45 million. But the country with the sharpest projected rise in migration is Bangladesh, with a seven-fold increase from today.

The report included examples collected by aid workers of people who have already been hit by worsening climate pressures. In Pakistan's arid Tharparkar district, Rajo, 37, and her husband, both labourers, moved to three different places in their area in the last three years to escape hunger caused by severe drought. She lost a baby

because of heavy lifting in her job and had to borrow money from the landowner to cover medical bills for her family, she told the researchers. Kabita Maity, from an island in the Sundarbans delta region of India, has had to move five times as previous homes were gobbled up by the sea. "We will have to stay here until the sea forces us out, as we do not have resources to buy land and resettle inwards," Maity was quoted as saying. The report called on South Asian governments to do more to prepare for worsening displacement linked to climate change - and emphasised the importance of acting now to limit the number of people who will be forced to migrate in the future.

It recommended strengthening social protection systems to provide cash and work for those affected by climate extremes and improving essential services

for migrant workers in cities - now hit doubly by the COVID-19 pandemic, with many left jobless. Measures that can help prevent "distress migration" include promoting farming methods that keep soils in good condition, managing water more efficiently, improving access to markets or trying new crops and ways to earn money, the report noted. Where people are relocated, authorities need to ensure the land is safe and fertile, tenure rights are secure and people have enough money to build new homes, it added. Sanjay Vashist, director of Climate Action Network South Asia, said tackling poverty and inequality also needed to be part of regional responses to climate migration. "South Asian leaders must join forces and prepare plans for the protection of displaced people," he said in a statement.

Climate change-led migration in India could treble by 2050 : Report



Over 62 million South Asian people may have to migrate from their homes due to slow onset climate disasters such as sea-level rise, water stress, crop yield reductions, ecosystem loss and drought by 2050, according to a new report by Climate Action Network South Asia (CANSA) and ActionAid International.

In India, an estimated 14 million people may have migrated this year due to slow onset climate change events according to the report. This number is expected to more than treble if current nationally determined contributions are not enhanced

and the world heads for 3.2 degrees C warming over pre-industrial levels.

The research was undertaken by Bryan Jones, one of the authors of the World Bank's Groundswell Report on internal climate migration in 2018. He uses a model that projects future changes in the spatial distribution of the population, from which estimates of climate change led migration is drawn. Ecosystem loss and drought have been added as new drivers of climate migration, along with water and agriculture sectors that were included in the Groundswell report. These

numbers do not include migration caused by sudden climate disasters such as flooding and cyclone and the report also assumes that countries will start taking action towards meeting their pledges and targets under the Paris Agreement. Some examples of sudden climate disasters that have led to large scale migration in the recent past include cyclone Sidr in 2007 that caused damages to USD1.5 billion in Bangladesh; Amphan earlier this year caused losses worth USD13 billion and 118 lives; cyclone Bulbul, again in West Bengal last year, damaged crops across almost 1.5 million hectares of land, triggered fishery damage worth USD100 million, and killed 13, 286 livestock. However, in India, over 60% of agriculture is rain-fed. The region's rural communities are thus highly sensitive to crop-destroying climatic shocks and 99.3% of south Asia's agricultural workers are informal labour which makes them more vulnerable. "Slow-onset climate impacts could cause countries in South Asia to lose nearly 2% of their GDP by 2050, rising to a loss of nearly 9% by 2100, without counting for the losses due to extreme weather events," the report released on Friday has said. Some climate hot spots will experience displacement due to uninhabitable rising temperatures, eroding rivers and rising seas like the Sundarbans or the Mahanadi

delta. In their study of migration patterns, the report found that the poor in south Asia often sell their belongings and take loans at predatory interest rates to fund their migration. Forced movement often takes people to urban areas nearby and then to megacities where they are forced to take poorly waged unskilled jobs. Most of the internal movement within South Asia is considered as seasonal or circular migration, where some members of families migrate for a period of the year to another rural area or urban centre, falling agricultural incomes, rural communities across South Asia is also leading to a combination of incomes from agriculture and remittance sent by migrated members of their family. "Political failure to limit global warming to below 2 degree C, as per the Paris agreement goal, is already driving 18 million climate migrants from their homes in 2020. New analysis, released today, estimates climate migration will treble in South Asia alone, a region badly affected by climate disasters including floods, droughts, typhoons and cyclones, a statement by CANSA said. Harjeet Singh, global climate lead at ActionAid said that the migration patterns emerged from the 2011 census have been used to model impacts of climate change on movement of people for the report. "The Indian government hasn't woken up to the reality of climate change yet.

How climate change is affecting winter storms.

By John Schwartz
for The New York Times

The major winter storm that hit the Eastern United States on Wednesday and Thursday probably prompted some people to ask, "What happened to global warming?" But although it's becoming increasingly clear that climate change does have an effect on storms, the relationship can be complex and, yes, counterintuitive. "There were these expectations that winter was basically going to disappear on us," said Judah Cohen, director of seasonal forecasting at AER, a company that provides information to clients about weather and climate-related risk. Although winters are becoming warmer and somewhat milder over all, extreme weather events have also been on the increase, and especially in the Northeastern United States, as Dr. Cohen pointed out in a recent paper in the journal *Nature Climate Change*. From the winter of 2008-9 until 2017-18, there were 27 major Northeast winter storms, three to four times the totals for each of the previous five decades.

One of the factors potentially feeding storms is a warmer



atmosphere, which can hold more water vapor; not only can that mean more precipitation, but when the vapor forms clouds, "it releases heat into the air, which provides fuel for storms," said Jennifer Francis, a senior scientist at the Woodwell Climate Research Center. Also potentially important, but less understood, she noted, is "the increased tendency for the jet stream to take big swoops north and south," setting up weather phenomena like the

dreaded polar vortex. Does that mean this particular storm has been fueled by climate change? Jonathan E. Martin, a professor in the department of atmospheric and oceanic sciences at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, cautioned against drawing quick conclusions. Dig deeper into the moment. Because of the "enormous natural variability" in storms and the weather they deliver, "I think it is a dangerous business

attributing individual winter storms, or characteristics of them, to climate change," he said. And this storm in particular, he added, is getting a lot of its moisture from water vapor evaporated off the Atlantic Ocean, which complicates the picture. Dr. Francis agreed that any connections are complex, but added, "all storms now form in a greatly altered climate, so there's little doubt that the same storm decades ago would not be

the same." John Schwartz is a reporter on the climate desk. In nearly two decades at The Times, he has also covered science, law and technology. @jswatz o Facebook Does that mean this particular storm has been fueled by climate change? Jonathan E. Martin, a professor in the department of atmospheric and oceanic sciences at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, cautioned against drawing quick conclusions. Dig deeper into the moment. Because of the "enormous natural variability" in storms and the weather they deliver, "I think it is a dangerous business attributing individual winter storms, or characteristics of them, to climate change," he said. And this storm in particular, he added, is getting a lot of its moisture from water vapor evaporated off the Atlantic Ocean, which complicates the picture. Dr. Francis agreed that any connections are complex, but added, "all storms now form in a greatly altered climate, so there's little doubt that the same storm decades ago would not be the same."

Earth may be even closer to 1.5°C of global warming than we thought



Global carbon emissions may have warmed Earth by 18 per cent more than previously thought, raising the prospect of the world having less time than expected to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement and avoid catastrophic climate change. The global average temperature is

thought to have climbed about 1.07°C since the industrial revolution, up from a previous estimate of 0.91°C. This update brings all three of the world's key temperature data sets in line, suggesting the true temperature rise is at the upper end of previous ranges.

The finding means governments may have less time to curb carbon emissions to hold the temperature rise to 1.5°C or 2°C under the Paris deal, and current estimates of future warming may rise too.

"Climate change hasn't suddenly got worse. It's just our estimate of how much warming has taken place has improved," says Tim Osborn at the University of East Anglia, UK, who today published a paper with Met Office colleagues on the fifth update to the data, known as the Hadley Centre Climatic Research Unit Temperature (HadCRUT5).

The 18 per cent increase is the biggest in years of HadCRUT revisions, but brings it roughly in line with the two other main data sets used to track global

temperatures, run by US agencies NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

It is notable how closely these three independent data sets now resemble one another, says Kate Marvel at Columbia University, New York, who wasn't involved in Osborn's paper. The change was overdue, say climate scientists. "Honestly, many of us have long recognised that the HadCRUT data set underestimated the warming," says Michael Mann at Pennsylvania State University. There are two main reasons for the 0.16°C upwards revision in past warming. The biggest was changes to how the HadCRUT team looked at sea surface temperatures, specifically how it was measured by ships taking

the temperature of sea water in their engine rooms.

The other is that gaps in the data set's coverage of the Arctic, which has been warming two to three times as fast as the global average, have been filled in. Previously, grid squares for the region were left empty if there was no observational data - now they are estimated with data from nearby squares. The new research may effectively shrink the world's carbon budget, the amount that can be emitted without breaching temperature targets. The UN's climate science panel, the IPCC, said in 2018 that global emissions need to roughly halve by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050 to have a two-thirds chance of staying under 1.5°C.

Global rich must cut their carbon footprint 97% to stave off climate change, UN says



But some particularly polluting activities remain the province of the global rich. At the top of the list: international air travel, which, if it were a country, would be the eighth-largest emitter in the world.

While flying has become more democratized in recent years, "Aviation remains the preserve of high-income earners," the UN said. A study last month in the journal Global Environmental Change found that just 2% to 4% of the world's inhabitants boarded an international flight in 2018, and half of all emissions from commercial flights come from 1% of the world's population. (That's not accounting for private flights, which are even more intensely polluting.) Per capita emissions are one more manifestation of the tremendous inequality that's a fact of life in our society that we need to address," said Taryn Fransen, a senior fellow with the Global Climate Program at the World Resources Institute. Galloping inequality Inequality is also a fact of life within the wealthiest countries that pollute the most. (Nearly 80% of global emissions came from the member states of the G20, the UN said.) For instance, a household in the U.S. that makes more than \$150,000 has a carbon footprint four times the size of a household that makes just \$9,000.

If there is a silver lining in these figures, it may be the possibility of tackling both climate disruption and economic inequality in one fell swoop.

Economists' favorite tool for this is a carbon tax, which would make the most polluting activities (such as flying) much more expensive and thereby less popular. Leading inequality scholar Thomas Piketty has proposed solutions like taxing airplane tickets or creating a global fund for climate restoration projects, with the biggest polluters contributing most.

The U.N. report focuses on the importance of lifestyle change: Choosing less polluting forms of transportation, like bikes, trains and buses, and moving to plant-based diets. However, it's unlikely that large numbers of people will voluntarily shift their consumption patterns without help from the governments and corporations that encouraged those patterns in the first place.

"People are not driving a car because they want a carbon-intensive lifestyle - people are driving a car because that is the access to transportation that our society provides," Fransen said. "It's the responsibility of policymakers to support alternatives that give people the goods they need without destroying the climate."

Policymakers have not done so, historically, because the wealthy

people who do most of the polluting also have the greatest ability to shape economic and environmental policies. This year's economic crash could help jump-start climate measures by spurring environmentally beneficial investment - for instance, funding a large expansion of public transit, which has taken an unprecedented hit thanks to COVID-19, or adding bike infrastructure. Lawmakers could also make financial relief for polluting industries conditional on meeting environmental goals. Too few countries have done so, the U.N. says, instead choosing to double down on polluting industries. For instance, while the drop in air travel during the pandemic can be seen as a positive development for the planet, the U.S. and most European Union countries bailed out airlines with no environmental requirements, although the U.S. deal included temporary worker protections.

Changing social norms could also play a part, albeit a small one. If, post-pandemic, large numbers of people continue to work from home and conduct business on Zoom, rather than flying, it could make an impact.

"At some point, air travel is the most CO2-intensive activity that we do," Caron said. "Any dent into that could have a long-lasting positive effect."

This year's economic shutdowns have done little to reduce the world's carbon emissions. While pollution has dipped, greenhouse gases keep accumulating in the atmosphere, locking in future decades of climate disruption and extreme weather. A recent United Nations report says the so-called emissions gap - the "difference between where we are likely to be and where we need to be" on climate policy - is as big as ever. As for who's chiefly responsible for the gap, it's the global rich, the report says. Just 10% of the world's population emits nearly half of the world's carbon pollution. The top 1% of income earners around the world, a group that includes 70 million people, account for 15% of emissions - more than the 3.5 billion people in the bottom 50%.

The upshot: When it comes to cutting their emissions, "The richest 1% would need to reduce their current emissions by at least a factor of 30, while per capita emissions of the poorest

50% could increase by around three times their current levels on average," the U.N. says. That translates into a reduction of 97% in carbon emissions for the wealthiest people.

More money, more pollution Researchers have long known that carbon emissions are closely tied to income. "Higher income per capita means higher emissions per capita, most of the time," said Justin Caron, an environmental economist and professor at HEC Montreal, the University of Montreal's business school.

"It's not true of other pollutants," he added. "Rich countries tend to be cleaner on other things, have cleaner water and air, but that's not true for CO2." That's partly because wealthier people consume more: They buy more goods, own more cars, have larger houses that take more energy to heat and cool. Carbon emissions are effectively embedded across much of the global economy, so consuming in general is akin to polluting.

2020's Worst Environmental Disasters, and How Climate Change Played a Role

In a year of unprecedented disasters, much of the damage done to our planet in 2020 was self-inflicted. From devastating oil spills in sensitive areas to deadly wildfires that consumed record acreage to failing dams that flooded entire towns, the worst environmental disasters of the year showed the influence of humans. That influence is clearly evident when a tanker slams into a coral reef and spills thousands of barrels of oil. It's less obvious when climate change is a factor behind raging wildfires across the Western U.S. and Australia. Particularly in California, human-caused global warming, decisions on forest management

and fire suppression, and expansion of homes and businesses into less-developed areas have combined to make the 2020 fire season one of the most destructive in recorded history. "Humanity is waging war on nature," said António Guterres, the secretary-general of the United Nations, according to the Guardian. "This is suicidal. Nature always strikes back - and it is already doing so with growing force and fury. Biodiversity is collapsing. One million species are at risk of extinction. Ecosystems are disappearing before our eyes. ... Human activities are at the root of our descent toward chaos. But

that means human action can help to solve it." Below is a more detailed look at some of the worst environmental disasters of 2020. Oil Spill in Russia's Arctic Region Russian President Vladimir Putin declared a state of emergency after some over 125,000 barrels (20,000 tons) of diesel fuel spilled from a collapsed storage tank on May 29 at a power plant in the Siberian city of Norilsk, above the Arctic Circle. The oil flowed into the Ambarnaya River and turned a 7.5-mile stretch crimson. The river feeds Lake Pyasino, which flows into another river that leads to the Arctic Ocean. The oil also contaminated the Daldykan



River. The former deputy chief of Russian environmental watchdog Rosprirodnadzor, Oleg Mitvol, said there had "never been such an accident in the Arctic zone," according to BBC.com. He said the cleanup could cost \$1.5 billion

and take as long as 10 years. Rosprirodnadzor confirmed that Lake Pyasino was contaminated and it asked Nornickel, the company that owns the plant, to pay a record \$2 billion in compensation, CNN reported.

Seven Solutions to the Climate Crisis



It's no secret - here in the United States, there's an election coming up. It's soon. It's a big decision for American voters. And it's a big deal. It's also not the only decision with global consequences this fall. Because at the same time the US campaign season was getting into the business end of things, more and more leaders all around the world were deciding to stand up to climate change and sign on to the historic Paris Agreement. In fact, 86 parties (representing over 61 percent of global emissions) have already joined this landmark agreement - which will now go into effect on November 4, four days before the US votes. Interesting timing, don't you think?

Coincidence or not, the timing of the two events highlights what's at stake for our planet in these decisions and why - more than ever - we need to speak out loud and clear in support of leaders taking action on climate change. Because if we've learned anything after months and months of way too many ads, speeches, and debates, it's that politicians go where the voters tell them. So let's make the climate issue their issue, the one they can't afford to ignore. And not just this year, but in every year that follows.

Why now? Because with the Paris Agreement becoming official, we finally have the framework to fight climate change together as one planet in a way we never have before. And with all the incredible progress we're seeing in renewables and other areas of solutions, we finally have the tools and technology to make a

global shift from fossil fuels to clean energy, affordably and effectively. Want proof? Here are seven reasons we're hopeful for the future, because the solutions are out there:

1. RENEWABLES ARE GROWING AND GETTING CHEAPER

Due to declining costs and improvements in renewable technologies, solar and wind projects are being built in more places around the globe more cheaply than any time in history. On top of that, if the price of photovoltaic cells continues to drop as rapidly as it has over the past 10 years, solar power could be as cheap as coal almost everywhere by as early as 2017! Some studies estimate 100 percent of the world's energy needs could be met with renewable sources by mid-

century, as long as the right, supportive public policies are put in place to help implement them. That's where our elected leaders come in - and where you come in too.

2. COST OF ROOFTOP SOLAR IS COMPETITIVE

In many places across the United States, not only is solar power becoming more affordable than ever before, it's actually becoming cost competitive with most utility rates for energy from fossil fuel. When solar power costs the same (or less!) as purchasing power from the grid, it's called solar grid parity, and it's an important milestone in demonstrating the cost-

effectiveness of harnessing the power of the sun. The US is well on the way to achieving the SunShot Initiative's 2020 goal of solar grid parity - with several major regions following suit.

3. REMARKABLE PROGRESS IN ENERGY STORAGE

How we create energy with renewables is important. How we store this energy - so we can use it when needed - is just as critical. That's because the sun doesn't shine 24 hours a day every day, nor is it always windy. The good news is this: we're



seeing incredible progress in energy storage. For example, a bill for California's energy storage mandate passed unanimously, instructing the state's investor-owned utilities to greatly expand electricity storage capacity. And since then, the state has expanded the mandate to allow even more energy storage. Similar policies in Japan and Germany are spurring similar growth in energy storage overseas.

4. THE ELECTRIC GRID IS EVOLVING

Just like energy storage is important for renewable energy to thrive, a smarter and more flexible electric grid is critical too.

Smart grids improve energy efficiency, save money, and can improve reliability - all great reasons to move away from fossil fuels towards cleaner sources of energy. And since the grid is evolving and more renewables are being introduced, there is huge potential to revolutionize the energy market - for the benefit of the environment and economy.

5. THE ELECTRIC VEHICLE MARKET IS BOOMING

Sure, the news that Tesla was releasing its cheapest electric car yet threatened to break one

corner of the internet, but that's not the only sign the electric vehicle industry and market are booming. Just look at China: the government has expanded incentives for electric vehicles, waiving or even cutting sales

taxes. And plug-in cars are even changing the face of auto racing! Just last year, Miami hosted a Formula E race, where all the race cars were electric. How cool is that?

6. TRANSPORTATION IS MORE EFFICIENT AND PUBLIC TRANSIT IS GROWING

A recent survey by Consumer Reports found that the overwhelming majority of Americans (84 percent, in fact) believe automakers should keep making cars and trucks more and more fuel efficient. And automakers are listening - and not just in the US. At the same time use of public and mass transportation is growing rapidly.

Technical improvements for new vehicles could avoid about 1.4 gigatons of CO2 annually by 2030, several countries are implementing eco-driving programs, and emissions mandates on cars in the US and EU are saving drivers at the pump in a big way. Meanwhile, huge investments in public transportation in countries like India and Colombia are helping contribute to energy conservation, land preservation, reduced air pollution, and so much more.

7. ENERGY EFFICIENCY IS IMPROVING AND SAVING YOU MONEY

The more efficient you are at a task, you're wasting less time to complete it, right? It works the same way with energy: the more efficient energy is, the less you'll waste. Listen to this: a study across certain countries showed in just five years, energy efficiency measures avoided the consumption of 570 million tons of dirty energy. In other words, without these measures, energy use across these countries would have actually increased by 5 percent.

HELP MAKE CLIMATE SOLUTIONS A REALITY

There you have it. Solutions to the climate crisis undoubtedly exist, and for the first time in history, our leaders have the framework to make these climate solutions a reality. You can help by supporting those leaders today. Add your name below to pledge your support for leaders who make climate solutions a reality. Stay tuned later this week for proof that people everywhere are getting on board with climate solutions like these and so many more.

PM Modi, Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina to discuss connectivity, trade



Modi and Hasina will jointly inaugurate the Haldibari-Chilahati rail link which is aimed at fostering people-to-people connectivity on both sides.

(News Agencies)- Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina will hold a virtual bilateral summit on Thursday and hold discussions to improve trade and connectivity between both nations. Modi and Hasina will jointly inaugurate the Haldibari-Chilahati rail link which is aimed at fostering people-to-people connectivity on both sides. The rail link is also expected to enhance connectivity and trade between Assam, West Bengal and Bangladesh. During the summit, the two leaders will hold comprehensive discussions on

the entire spectrum of the bilateral relationship, including further strengthening cooperation in the post COVID era," the Ministry of External Affairs was quoted as saying by news agency PTI. India and Bangladesh have both been very keen to restart the six pre-1965 rail links between both countries. There are five links that are currently operational between both nations - Petrapole (India) - Benapole (Bangladesh), Gede (India) - Darshana (Bangladesh), Singhabad

(India)-Rohanpur (Bangladesh) and Radhikapur (India)-Biroi (Bangladesh). The rail link between Akhaura and Agartala is also being quickly developed to further increase trade in that region. Both the leaders will also launch a stamp to commemorate the birth centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who led Bangladesh to its independence from Pakistan in 1971. Pakistan lost the war to the Indian Army and Bangladesh's Mukti Bahini on

December 16. India celebrates December 16 as Vijay Diwas to commemorate the victory. The summit will also see the launch of the Bangabandhu-Bapu Digital Exhibition to celebrate the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The exhibition will be available for viewing in New Delhi, Dhaka, Kolkata, the United Nations and in 18 other locations. A Ba-Bangamata wall, celebrating the lives of Kasturba Bai and Sheikh Fojilatunnesa Mujib, will also be inaugurated by both prime ministers.

Pakistan approves tough anti-rape law amid outcry over victim blaming

Pakistan's president has approved a tough new anti-rape law that includes the establishment of special courts to speed up rape trials and the chemical castration of serial rapists.

(News Agencies)- The legislation, which must be approved by parliament to remain in effect, requires courts to conclude the trials of alleged rapists and issue verdicts within four months. It also prohibits the disclosure of the identity of rape victims and will create a national sex offenders' register.

Rape crisis cells will also be established to ensure victims undergo a specialist medical examination within six hours of reporting the incident. Officers who are found to be negligent in investigating rape cases could face a three-year prison

sentence. The move follows outrage over the gang-rape of a woman in front of her children in September after her car broke down by the side of the road in Lahore. It prompted protests after the investigating police officer appeared to blame the victim for travelling alone. Before the new law, rape cases could drag on for years, mainly because of faulty investigations and flawed laws, making it difficult for victims to come forward to share their ordeal. While rights groups celebrated the law, Amnesty International expressed concern at the inclusion of a chemical

castration punishment for repeat rape offenders, a process that involves an injection to lower testosterone levels. Rimmel Mohyidin, south Asia campaigner at Amnesty International, accused the government of attempting to "deflect attention" from the root causes of sexual violence in Pakistan. She said: "Forced chemical castrations would violate Pakistan's international and constitutional obligations to prohibit torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Punishments like this will do nothing to fix a flawed criminal



justice system." The new law comes months after the prime minister, Imran Khan, promised to remove deficiencies in existing legislation to expedite justice for rape victims. Khan and his cabinet approved the legislation last month, and the president signed it into law on Tuesday,

bringing it into force. The government now has 120 days to get the measure approved by parliament and have it permanently passed into law. Nearly 1,000 women are killed in Pakistan each year in so-called "honour killings" for allegedly violating conservative norms on love and marriage.

Taliban team in Pakistan as calls grow for Afghan cease-fire



(News Agencies)- A Taliban team, led by the co-founder of the insurgent movement, arrived Wednesday in Islamabad for talks with Pakistani government leaders amid growing calls for a reduction in violence in neighboring Afghanistan. The visit came as the Taliban unleashed a wave of attacks in Afghanistan, striking in northern Baghlan and southern Uruzgan province late on Tuesday and early Wednesday. At least 19

members of the Afghan security forces and 11 Taliban fighters were killed in fierce battles, officials said.

Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar and his delegation were summoned to Islamabad from Qatar, where they have been negotiating since September with Afghan government representatives, officials close to the talks said. The visit comes on the heels of U.S. peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad's quick trip on Tuesday to Pakistan's military in the garrison city of Rawalpindi. The Pakistani military has wielded significant influence over the

Taliban and has had links with some of their leaders - then part of the U.S.-backed mujahedeen - dating back to the 1980s and the former Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. The Taliban emerged in 1994 in response to runaway corruption and violence of mujahedeen warlords who took power from the former communist regime in 1992. Pakistan was key in getting the Taliban to the negotiation table with the United States in 2018. Those talks eventually led to the U.S.-Taliban deal that was signed in February, providing for the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO

troops from Afghanistan. The deal also paved way for the start of talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government, which began in September in efforts to hammer out a roadmap for post-war Afghanistan. The talks, after some recent procedural progress, have been suspended till early January and there is speculation the resumption could be further delayed. Kabul has called for the talks to resume inside Afghanistan while the Taliban insist they continue in Doha, Qatar, where they maintain a political office.

10 US states, including Texas, sue Google for 'anti-competitive' online ad sales

Ten states on Wednesday brought a lawsuit against Google, accusing the search giant of "anti-competitive conduct" in the online advertising industry, including a deal to manipulate sales with rival Facebook.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton announced the suit, which was filed in a federal court in Texas, saying Google is using its "monopolistic power" to control pricing of online advertisements, fixing the market in its favor and eliminating competition.

"This Goliath of a company is using its power to manipulate the market, destroy competition, and harm you, the consumer," Paxton said in the video posted on Twitter. Google, which is based in Mountain View, California, called Paxton's claims "meritless" and said the price of online advertising has fallen over the last decade.

"These are the hallmarks of a highly competitive industry," the

company said in statement. "We will strongly defend ourselves from (Paxton's) baseless claims in court."

Paxton led a bipartisan coalition of 50 U.S. states and territories that announced in September 2019 they were investigating Google's business practices, citing "potential monopolistic behavior."

Now Texas is bringing the suit along other Republican attorneys general from Arkansas, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota and Utah. The complaint targets the heart of Google's business - the digital ads that generate nearly all of its revenue,

as well as all the money that its corporate parent, Alphabet Inc., depends upon to help finance a range of far-flung technology projects.

As more marketers have increased their spending online, those digital ads have turned Google into a moneymaking machine. Through the first nine months of this year, Google's ad sales totaled nearly \$101 billion, accounting for 86% of its total revenue. And now the states contend Google intends to use its alleged stranglehold on digital ads to choke off other avenues of potential competition and innovation. The company struck an illegal deal with Facebook, a



major competitor for ads, to manipulate advertising auction, according to the complaint. Facebook declined to comment. "Google has an appetite for total dominance, and its latest ambition is to transform the free and open architecture of the internet," the suit alleges. In the "ad tech" marketplace that brings together Google and a huge universe of online advertisers and publishers, the company controls

access to the advertisers that put ads on its dominant search platform. Google also runs the auction process for advertisers to get ads onto a publisher's site. Nine of Google's products in search, video, mobile, email, mapping and other areas are estimated to have over a billion users each, providing the company a trove of users' data that it can deploy in the advertising process.

Two SolarWinds investors sold \$280million in stock six days before it was hacked in 'Russian cyber-attack' along with six federal agencies



Two investment firms that together own 70 percent of SolarWinds sold off \$280 million in stock just six days before it was revealed the technology company had been the subject of a huge hack hitting federal agencies.

On December 7, Silver Lake - a Silicon Valley investor - sold \$158 million in shares, while Thoma Bravo - a San Francisco-based private equity firm - sold \$128 million in shares on the same day.

Three executives from each firm sit on the board of SolarWinds and they have been the largest investors in the company since it went public in 2018.

In November, outgoing SolarWinds CEO Kevin

Thompson also offloaded more than \$15million shares in the company, according to the Washington Post.

The news has raised questions as to when SolarWinds was aware its software had been infiltrated by suspected Russian hackers, leaving government agencies at risk, as some call for an insider trading investigation.

SolarWinds is a Texas-based software company that provides vital computer network monitoring services to corporations and government agencies around the world.

On Sunday, the United States issued an emergency warning, ordering government users to disconnect SolarWinds software

which it said had been compromised by 'malicious actors'. It was reported that suspected Russian hackers had used hijacked SolarWinds software updates to break into multiple American government agencies, including the Treasury and Commerce departments. Six federal agencies have so far

revealed they were hit in the attack: the Pentagon, the State Department and the National Institutes of Health, as well as the Treasury, Commerce and Homeland Security departments. The company said up to 18,000 of its customers had downloaded a compromised software update that allowed hackers to spy

unnoticed on businesses and agencies for almost nine months. Moscow denied having any connection to the attacks.

Sunday's revelation resulted in a massive drop in the share price of the previously relatively unknown tech company, falling 23 percent since its role in the breach as publicized.

All aboard the billionaires' bitcoin bandwagon?

Now that Bitcoin has topped \$20,000 for the first time, should you shift your hard-earned cash into digital currencies? History suggests caution should be your watchword, no matter how strong the fear of missing out may be.

News on Wednesday that One River Asset Management has set up a fund company that will have about \$1 billion in Bitcoin and fellow digital coin Ether by early next year suggests that institutional investors

are starting to take cryptocurrencies more seriously.

There's clearly serious money involved. Chief Executive Officer Eric Peters told our Bloomberg News colleague Erik Schatzker that billionaire hedge fund manager Alan Howard is buying a stake in the new business, called One River Digital Asset Management. But before you race to open a digital wallet, look back to what happened to Bitcoin last time it approached

these levels. A surge of 1,000% in 2017 took its value to \$19,000. A year later, it had dropped to less than \$3,500.

Hedge fund managers can afford to dabble in crypto. The language Peters used to describe the trade is the stuff of macro hedge fund shop

talk, such as the "convexity" of volatile trades that soar in relation to other indicators like interest rates. That's reminiscent of other wealthy investors climbing aboard the bandwagon, such as

Paul Tudor Jones, who compared Bitcoin to "investing in Google early." Even if they get burned on a big bet, it's money they won't miss. But the Robinhood crowd - retail investors who may have made out like bandits this year by trading US stocks from their sofas - should beware a bonfire of their vanities. While Bitcoin is great as a billionaire's speculative plaything, it's hardly a useful digital currency or safe haven investment for the average punter.





As Biden waits in wings, Pakistan takes a preemptive swipe at India

Nuclear arch-rivals India and Pakistan have for decades sought to score knockouts against each other on the international stage, trading accusations of terrorism and destabilization.

So, when Pakistan's foreign minister and the military's public relations chief recently presented world powers with a thick dossier of alleged Indian-sponsored terrorist activities on Pakistani soil, the initiative was not seen as totally new, though its level of detail - names of accused Indian agents, audio wiretaps, money transfers - was unusual.

What did raise questions was the timing - why now?

In the eyes of some regional experts, it was simply a case of the pot calling the kettle black. India has for years accused Pakistan, and offered proof, of harboring terrorist groups and coordinating their attacks inside India.

Crucially, the dossier, which was also shared with United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres, comes as India prepares to take a rotating two-year seat on the U.N. Security Council in January. And it's also squarely aimed at the incoming administration of President-elect Joe Biden, a not-so subtle message that India may not be a reliable security partner and democratic exemplar.

Pakistan's campaign comes as India has bulked up its

international profile, emerging over the past decade as an ever-closer security partner of the U.S. and becoming something of an Asian democratic counterweight to Communist-ruled China. At the same time, Pakistan has seen its importance to the U.S. and other powers diminish as the U.S. winds down its presence in Afghanistan.

"It's no surprise Pakistan would be coming out with such a dossier, especially as India is about to take a seat again on the Security Council," says Karl Inderfurth, an assistant secretary of state for South Asian affairs during the Clinton administration. "Pakistan has watched from the sidelines as India has only grown in regional importance, so I see them acting to remind the powers on the council that one of their partners has a history of stirring up trouble in the region."

India has successfully painted itself as the innocent target of terrorism, says Pakistan's ambassador to Washington, Asad Khan. But it is time the world understood not just India's destabilizing activities in the region but also its attacks on democratic governance and human rights at home under the current Hindu nationalist government, he adds.

"A certain narrative has been built around Indian victimhood - how India has suffered at the hand of terrorists - and much of

that blame has been thrown at us," Ambassador Khan says.

"Indian fingerprints"

In an interview with the Monitor over Pakistani tea, Ambassador Khan noted that his country has successfully brought down the number of terrorist attacks inside Pakistan over the last decade and wrested control of large parts of the country from non-state actors.

But over the last two years Pakistan has faced a resurgence of attacks and "unfortunately we see the Indian footprint and Indian fingerprints all over the place," he says.

India has dismissed Pakistan's claims as lies and repurposed accusations from the past aimed at diverting attention from Pakistan's own

failings. Pakistan and its dossier "enjoy no credibility," India's permanent representative to the U.N., T.S. Tirumurti, said in a tweet. The Indian mission to the U.N. in New York said in a statement that Pakistan "cannot change the fact that they are the epicentre of terrorism." As the two rivals toss accusations back and forth, the reality is that India has broadly seen its star rise in global affairs as Pakistan's has languished. U.S.-India relations have been on an upward trajectory for two decades, with the Trump administration's renaming of the Pacific Command to the Indo-Pacific Command in 2018 just one tip of the cap to India's growing

strategic importance. Another key player is China, which has a growing economic footprint in Pakistan but tense relations with New Delhi that include a longstanding border dispute that flared again this summer.

Indeed Pakistani officials accuse India in their dossier of trying to destabilize Pakistan's economic cooperation with China by fomenting terrorist attacks against Chinese-financed development projects, including a deadly assault at a luxury hotel in Gwadar, a port city in southwestern Pakistan. Seeking traction in Washington But where Islamabad appears to be hoping its accusations against India gain some traction is in Washington.

"We see the U.S. as perhaps the only country in the world that is in a position to play an important and critical role on this issue," says Ambassador Khan. "We are hopeful the engagement of the U.S. could work to support peace and security for our region."

In particular, Pakistan would like to see the U.S. pressure India over its revocation last year of the disputed Kashmir region's autonomous status and the repressive measures Prime Minister Narendra Modi continues to enforce there.

But most regional experts are skeptical that the Biden administration will rush to take Pakistan's side and prioritize human rights over security ties

with Mr. Modi's government. "We may see the U.S. taking a little tougher stance toward India over its human rights record, but basically we'll continue to court India as a counterweight to China," says James Dobbins, who served as a special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan in the Obama White House. "And overall I don't think we'll see the Biden administration taking a very different approach to Pakistan than the Trump administration did."

Allegations of Indian support for separatists in the Balochistan region might indeed have merit, says Mr. Dobbins, a senior fellow at the Rand Corp., since India has been suspected of such activity in the past. But Washington is more concerned about Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan and with the Afghan Taliban, as it tries to wind down its longest war and implement a fragile peace plan struck by the Trump administration. Mr. Dobbins says he's pessimistic that Pakistan will use its influence over the Taliban to support this plan.

Fear of encirclement

The reason goes back to India. Pakistan's overriding concern is that an increasingly powerful India would become an influential power in postwar Afghanistan. That in turn could lead to a dreaded "encirclement" of Pakistan by its chief adversary, says Mr.



How Pornhub - one of the world's biggest sites - caused untold damage and pain

Last week, on 11 December, the credit card giants Visa and Mastercard announced that they would no longer allow cardholders to make transactions on Pornhub, the online giant of user-uploaded pornography that is one of the most-visited sites on the internet. The companies' decision came just days after the New York Times published a lengthy investigation by the opinion columnist Nicholas Kristof on 4 December, which found large numbers of videos on the platform depicting rape, the molestation and abuse of minors, violent sexual abuse of women and other nonconsensual content. Like other social media sharing platforms, such as YouTube, Pornhub has historically allowed any user to upload any video they want to the site. But unlike other such platforms, Pornhub also allowed users to download the material and re-upload it elsewhere on the internet. The Times investigation found that the company' under-prioritized and understaffed content moderation division was often slow to taking illegal content down and ineffectual at preventing it from being re-uploaded, either to Pornhub or to other pages. This combination of factors had made the site into a harbor for rape tapes, child sexual abuse images, revenge porn and spycam videos, and a wellspring from which such content was spread across the internet. Almost immediately following the publication of the Times report, Pornhub and its parent company, the Montreal-based pornography conglomerate MindGeek, announced changes to the platform. Users would now need to be verified in order to upload videos, making it easier to hold those who upload to the site accountable for the way the videos are obtained and produced. The "download" button was also removed, making it harder for videos of rape and

child molestation to be reuploaded or spread. These changes will hopefully go a ways toward mitigating future harm from the child sexual abuse images and taped assaults that will inevitably still get uploaded to the site. They will make it harder to upload illegal content with impunity, and harder to steal and spread it. But the changes come a bit too late for the women Kristof interviewed for his investigation. They include Serena Fleites, who at 14 sent nude videos to an older boy she had a crush on; he distributed the videos to his friends, and they wound up on Pornhub. She petitioned the company to take the images down, but they would quickly get re-uploaded; one video of her at 14 has more than 400,000 views. The cascading effects of the harassment and trauma that followed led her to leave school and fall into addiction to cope; she is now sober and living in her car. Another woman, known only as Taylor, was secretly taped by a boyfriend performing a sex act when she was 14; he also sent the video to his friends, and that also wound up on Pornhub. Taylor is now 18. In the intervening four years, she has attempted suicide twice. A British teenager named Nicole says that she was blackmailed into sending more and more nude content to a boy when she was 15; the videos have been posted and reposted to Pornhub. She's now 19; she, too, says she has had multiple suicide attempts. Like the other survivors, Nicole is caught in a dark game of whack-a-mole with the company. She can report the videos of herself to the content moderation department, and often, they are eventually removed. But then they are re-uploaded again. And again. All the while, Pornhub profits from the hurt and indignity imposed on these women, who were not only abused, but who now have

to live with the knowledge that images of that abuse are enjoyed by strangers as entertainment - strangers who often know or suspect that the videos are nonconsensual or depict minors, and who find that to be a significant part of their appeal.

In a parallel but less morally urgent trend, Pornhub's historic policies surrounding uploads from unverified users and free downloads have also created a strain on consensual porn performers. These women are in a different class, both morally and legally, from the nonconsensual sexual abuse victims whose images reappear on Pornhub again and again.

But these workers, too, stand to benefit from Pornhub's proposed changes: the download and unverified user upload features on Pornhub created a widespread piracy issue that made it difficult for these women to control and monetize their own image. As a performer called Dee Siren told Rolling Stone, the changes will "stop pirated content from being allowed and it will make sure people have to pay to download content from models ... We have been pushing to have this happen for over 10 years." Neither of these groups' concerns was unknown to Pornhub: survivors and consensual sex workers alike have advocated for verified-user only uploads and the removal of the download button for years. But until last week, the company was resistant to the change. Since the problems with Pornhub's platform have been known for years, why was the company so slow to implement the necessary changes? Perhaps because before the Kristof piece was published early this month, those outside the sex worker and survivor communities were disinclined to push them. Pornography has been a touchy subject for those on

the left for years, despite the various labor and gender justice issues that the industry presents. Sex workers do an admirable job of advocating for themselves, but outside their movement, feminist and workers rights advocates have been reluctant to criticize the porn industry. Part of this is because porn embarrasses people; part of it is because many men can be fiercely defensive of pornography, and aggressively hostile to those who criticize it. For their part, feminists often do not want to interrogate the porn industry for fear of being seen as regressive, puritanical, or anti-sex. And more delicately, people of all genders can be sensitive and defensive around the areas of private sexual life that they feel have been subjected to unfair and damaging stigma. The result is that there are a mosaic of worker and gender exploitations in the industry that have gone largely ignored by left wing advocates too timid to confront them. The rightwing has no such squeamishness, and has monopolized public conversation around the need to regulate and reform the porn industry, spouting theories about trafficking, sexual exploitation and moral degradation with little basis in fact. Lawmakers like the archconservative Josh Hawley have been at the forefront of pushing for investigations of the company; Republicans have been eager to partner with anti-trafficking organizations that depict taped sex and sex trafficking as violations perpetrated by shadowy, faceless strangers, rather than what experts, and Kristof's investigation, have revealed it to be: a much more intimate violence, inflicted not by strangers but by friends, boyfriends, and family members of the victim - people, usually men, who she trusted not to treat her as cruelly as they did.

America's last wilderness is about to go to the highest bidder for oil drilling



Language is everything.

Those who argue for oil drilling in the Arctic national wildlife refuge, a place of stunning wild beauty in far north-east Alaska, seldom call it what it is - a refuge. Instead, they reduce it to an acronym: ANWR.

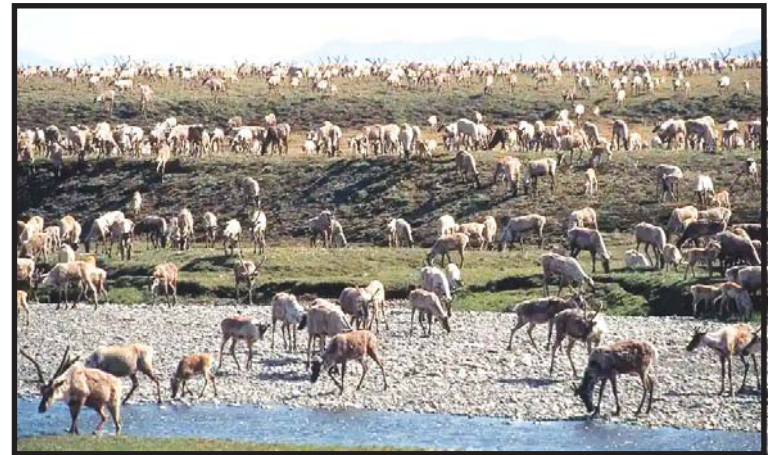
They talk about "opening it up", as if it is closed. It's not. It is public land. They talk about "exploring" for oil because that is what we do. We find stuff, dig it up, process it, sell it, then burn it or eventually throw it away. They talk about drilling in an "environmentally safe" manner without mentioning the hundreds of oil spills in Prudhoe Bay and along the Trans-Alaska Oil pipeline, including a 267,000-gallon spill that went undetected for days. They talk about

America's "can-do spirit", and invoke President Calvin Coolidge, who said, "After all, the chief business of the American people is business."

On 6 January, the Bureau of Land Management, directed by the Trump administration, is scheduled to hold a virtual oil and gas lease sale - an "aggressive, competitive exploration and development program" - for drilling in ANWR. More specifically, in the 1.5m acre coastal plain, the refuge's biological heart: the birthing grounds of the Porcupine caribou herd, the prime denning area for the Beaufort Sea population of polar bears (a threatened species, numbering only 900), and the breeding sites for birds that every year fly across oceans and continents to raise

their young on undisturbed, flower-embroidered tundra.

Ten thousand years of natural beauty and balance - America's last great wilderness - will soon be "open" to the highest bidder, beginning at \$25 an acre. The winner could initiate seismic testing: shaking the earth with massive vibration trucks, awakening polar bears in their dens. If the testing shows a strong promise of oil (which is presently unknown), they may build an industrial complex of roads, well pads, desalinization plants, airstrips and pipelines, all tied into Prudhoe Bay, some 80 miles to the west. If not, the seismic testing alone will produce many scars visible for decades. How can this happen? Easy. On the final page of the



massive 2017 feed-the-rich federal tax bill, the Alaska senator Lisa Murkowski added oil and gas exploration as a "purpose" of ANWR. She and her Republican colleagues said it would pump significant revenue into the treasury, a claim which Taxpayers for Common Sense, a nonpartisan federal budget watchdog organization, has called "blatantly irresponsible and fiscally reckless".

This is how beauty dies, how places change forever, how traditional ways of life disappear. All for money, in the absence of the sacred. "Why is it that the destruction of something created by humans is called vandalism," the author Edward Abbey once asked, "yet the destruction of something created by God is called development?"

Months ago, when five major banks - JP Morgan Chase, Citigroup, Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley and Wells Fargo - announced they would not finance fossil fuel extraction in

the Arctic refuge, the cheese came off the cracker of the all-Republican Alaska congressional delegation. Alaskan Republican politicians accused the banks of, in effect, discrimination. It was a desperate move made by oil addicts. The little-known federal Office of the Comptroller of the Currency then proposed a new rule to prevent financial institutions from refusing to lend to specific sectors in the name of "fair access". Another desperate move, its folly obvious when Bank of America joined its brothers.

"Arctic refuge drilling makes zero sense in today's reality of high oil market volatility and with every major US bank and many international banks unwilling to invest in risky, expensive Arctic oil projects," Adam Kolton, the executive director of the Alaska Wilderness League, has said. "The administration is simply rushing to sell off one of the wildest places left on earth for pennies on the dollar before President-elect Biden takes office in January."

Our fossil fuel economy is, in the long run, suicidal. But in politically conservative Alaska, where oil finances 85% of the state's operating budget and every resident gets an annual oil dividend check, many people refuse to acknowledge this. They prefer a comfortable delusion to the hard truth. I know. I live here. The dividend check is no longer a gift; it's an entitlement.

When the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a recent conclusion based on more than 600 peer-reviewed scientific studies, Elizabeth Kolbert, writing in the New Yorker, said, "The findings ... were almost universally - and justifiably - described as 'dire.'" We must cut our CO2 emissions in half by 2030, and leave 80% of all known oil reserves in the ground, unburned.

Cosmetics, cellphones, guitar strings: where we found 'forever chemicals'

The thousands of chemicals known as PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) are called "forever chemicals" because of their extreme resistance to degradation, called "persistence". Each of us carries these chemicals in our bodies, and people will continue to be exposed for generations to come. Many PFAS can affect our health. Exposures have been linked to kidney and testicular cancer, elevated cholesterol, ulcerative colitis, thyroid disease, liver damage, low birth weight, reduced immune responses and other negative impacts. So why - since we know that PFAS are harmful - are they still being produced and used? And why are we not protecting ourselves from further exposure by eliminating



or at least reducing some uses? We decided to look into how widely these chemicals are being used to better understand whether all these uses are really needed. We sought inspiration in the UN Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer definition of "essential uses" - uses considered essential to

health, safety or the functioning of our society, for which alternatives do not yet exist. The key idea in the Montreal Protocol was to phase out non-essential uses of ozone-depleting substances. We realized that the protocol's idea of "essential use" could serve as a model for how to

pragmatically control chemicals in general - illustrated in the case of PFAS.

Our thinking was that while some specific uses of PFAS, such as occupational protective clothing, might be considered essential as long as there are no sufficiently performing alternatives, there might be many non-essential uses of PFAS that could be eliminated without major disruptions to product safety, efficacy, or efficiency.

What we found is deeply disturbing.

PFAS are used in almost all industry branches and in a much wider range of consumer products than we expected. Altogether, we found PFAS in more than 200 use categories. We already knew about PFAS in

Where the Possibilities are Endless

'Salon under the sea' submarine dives to 1,000 meters



It is the stuff of a James Bond blockbuster: a young, attractive woman lures a rising political star into a romantic web, all the while collecting critical information to trickle back to her handler or big bosses back home. Axios revealed this week that more than six years ago Rep. Eric Swalwell, D-Calif., began a relationship with a woman suspected of being a Chinese espionage operative. He was alerted by federal investigators in 2015 and given a "defense briefing," which resulted in him breaking off ties to the suspect. However,

Swalwell wouldn't be the first or last political figure to be "honey-trapped" - with multiple former intelligence officials surmising that such schemes carried out by Chinese spies have long played out on U.S. soil, and remain ongoing.

"I can say with a high level of confidence that there are many more of these women out there," Daniel Hoffman, a retired CIA Senior Clandestine Services Officer, told Fox News. "China's MO is to flood the zone." While several current and former intelligence and security officials and experts interviewed by Fox

News said that it was impossible to put a number on just how many honey trap scenarios might be in motion at present, one former defense and intelligence operative noted that it could be well into the hundreds - if not thousands. Such spies are assumed to be at top universities, known to speak perfect English, and routinely use social media platforms such as LinkedIn and Facebook to connect with their prey. But it is not only about enmeshing big names - it is about having an eye for talent, and starting when one's star is about to begin rising.

In Swalwell's case, he was seemingly ensnared by a woman named Christine Fang or Fang Fang, who helped raise money for his 2014 congressional re-election campaign and recruited at least one intern in his office. However, U.S. investigators in the northern California Bay Area believe Fang was also circling close to numerous up-and-coming politicians between 2011 and 2015, engaging in sexual relationships with at least two mayors in other states. According to the report,

Fang was sent to gather information and attain influence on those rising in the ranks at the direct behest of China's Ministry of State Security, with a "handler" based out of the San Francisco consulate. In 2015, her most high profile associate - Swalwell - became a member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. However, around that time, Fang abruptly fled the U.S. as the FBI was homing in. But unlike Fang, whose communications with the consulate came under scrutiny, Hoffman asserted that there are likely many more who have zero links to any officials. "The goal is to become a trusted Indeed, the California Democrat is seemingly not alone in having fallen for the bait.

"The females who are employed in this tactic place themselves in a position where they come into contact with the targeted individual.

Thailand partners with Tinder for matchmaking trips



Summer flings have long been a happy, occasional perk of travel.

But the Thai tourism authority is partnering with dating app Tinder to offer tour packages specifically for matchmaking purposes.

Emmanuel is a civil engineer who worked extensively on one of the most transformative infrastructure projects in Nigeria. Watch what

happened. Though Thailand's borders are technically open to foreign tourists -- at least those who are willing to quarantine in a hotel room for two weeks and pay for a visa application -- the "Single Journey" initiative is aimed at locals as a way to encourage domestic travel.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), the country's

official travel body, is planning nine itineraries throughout the country and is launching with three pilot trips. The first, which will take place on December 20, is a cruise along Bangkok's Chao Phraya River for up to 100 singletons. The day-long experience includes sightseeing, dinner and a talk from a Feng Shui expert "who will share tips on

how to pay homage to Buddha and ask for blessings," which should invariably give tongue-tied daters something to talk about.

The other two pilot experiences are a beachside party and concert in Phuket and a train trip to the Pa Sak Jolasid Dam in Lopburi, both in January 2021 and accommodating up to 50 people each. Bookings

open on December 15 and can be made through the Sneaksdeal website (in Thai). "The 'Single Travel Route' targets solo travelers who prefer to travel alone to various destinations in Thailand," TAT Governor, Mr. Yuthasak Supasorn, said in a press statement.

The "Single Journey" initiative is just the latest idea to stimulate domestic tourism amid the coronavirus pandemic. In November, Thai Airways -- Thai Smile's parent company -- operated a one-off "flight to nowhere" that departed from and returned to Bangkok and flew over 99 sacred Buddhist sites across the country along the way.

Elsewhere, Taiwan's EVA Airlines had a similar idea of its own. The "Love Is In the Air" promotion has scheduled three flights -- on Christmas Day, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day -- with on-board speed dating, followed by a romantic afternoon tea or candlelight dinner back on solid ground. Just one question -- if a couple makes a love match while on one of these trips, will the tourism board also sponsor their future honeymoon?

Durgamati movie review:

Bhumi Pednekar deserves better, and this film deserves to be burned at the stake

Durgamati movie review: Starring Bhumi Pednekar and Arshad Warsi, it's the sort of film in which the scary sequences are hilarious, and the attempts at humour are positively terrifying.

Durgamati

Director - Ashok

Cast - Bhumi Pednekar, Arshad Warsi, Jisshu Sengupta, Mahie Gill

The mere thought of watching another Hindi remake of a south film is scarier than anything that Durgamati could possibly offer. But, for what it is worth, the new Amazon original is certainly funnier than all the Housefull films combined.

How did they think we'd react to a shot of a voodoo tray that appears to contain a fistful of Haldiram's Aloo Bhujia, or an unbelievable moment in which one character blows a raspberry at another in the middle of a supposedly scary scene? Durgamati, a remake of Bhaagamathie, is the sort of film in which the 'scary' sequences are hilarious, and the attempts at humour are positively terrifying. The entire thing revolves around corrupt politicians trying to frame an honest counterpart by concocting the most asinine

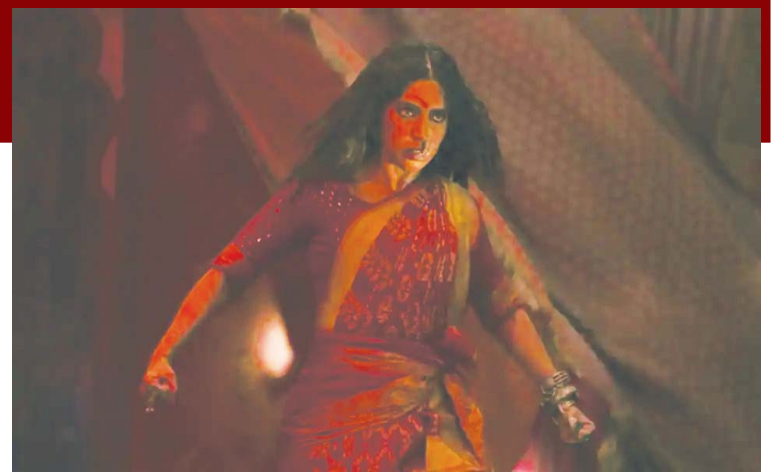
scheme. They decide that the only way to eliminate Ishwar Prasad (Arshad Warsi) is by getting a false confession out of his former associate, an IAS officer named Chanchal Chauhan (Bhumi Pednekar). But what they hadn't anticipated was that Chanchal, while being kept in isolation at a haunted 'haveli' (lol, what), would get possessed by the spirit of a vengeful woman.

There's a subplot involving stolen idols, and some vague rambling about dynastic overlords, black money, and battered Hindu pride - all signs of the film's pointed political leanings - but these threads are left dangling. Durgamati is more concerned with laying out its premise in excruciating detail, and then diving into explanatory flashbacks every time a character makes a revelation that is meant to shock. Despite her formidable talents - she was simply stunning in Lust Stories and Sonchiriya - this isn't a good Bhumi Pednekar performance. While she plays

Chanchal/Durgamati with a straight-faced seriousness, literally everyone else is operating with cartoon intensity. Normally, it would be the filmmaker's job to strike a tonal balance, but since director Ashok has proven his incompetence, Pednekar sticks out like a sore thumb.

There are long stretches in which the actor, as Durgamati, launches into elaborate lectures about the character's backstory - it's like watching a terrible one-woman play, chained to your chair by Jigsaw. And on other occasions, as if to satiate your unquenchable thirst for Coolie No 1, Ashok peppers the movie with David Dhawan-style 'comedy'.

Jisshu Sengupta is the only one who knows what sort of movie he's in; but then again, he has Sadak 2 under his belt. He's a war hero, and we thank him for his service. Ironically for a film that already has a talented Bengali actor in its cast, they decided that Mahie Gill should play the CBI officer Satakshi Ganguly, whose idea of



playing a Bong is limited to messing up genders.

Karan Kapadia, meanwhile, plays a dude who apparently watched Swades once and thought to himself, "I could do this. With tattoos." He alternates between being a cutie-pie, a trait that Ashok chooses to highlight with random shots of the actor stroking a bunny and striking dashing poses in a field, and an Angry Young Man. To communicate this point, Ashok simply has Kapadia yell all his lines. He films the simplest scenes in the most complicated manner - multiple cameras zigzag around characters as they make delirious speeches - and spells

out every plot twist as if he's a primary school teacher. And to think of the arrogance that must've gone into insisting that Durgamati should be 154 minutes long - that's more than half-an-hour longer than The Exorcist, and roughly two-and-a-quarter hours longer than your average episode of Scooby Doo. The film is filled with 'pardafaash' moments, where characters abruptly pause the plot to cackle about their ulterior motives. Ashok thinks we're all five years old. His sensibilities are loud, tacky, and, in the film's final moments, downright immoral. Durgamati is a bizarre misfire of Laxmii proportions.

Prakash Jha claims Aashram has raked in 100 crore views: 'People love to watch such content, can't imagine why though'



Aashram director Prakash Jha has claimed that the show, which streams for free on MX Player, has raked in one billion (100 crore) views. Previously, before Part 2 was released in November, he'd said that the first part had raked in 400 million views. In an interview, the filmmaker said that the viewership figures are proof that audiences are liking the show, contrary to what certain controversies surrounding it might suggest. The filmmaker was served a notice, along with actor Bobby Deol, for

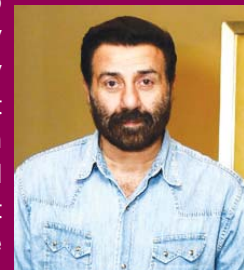
the show's depiction of a godman. "When you make something that affects the masses, a polarised reaction is to be expected," Jha told Mumbai Mirror, adding that no Hinduphobic sentiments are being propagated on the show and that there's no mention of any religion. He said that the viewership numbers prove otherwise. "They kept rising, but I was really surprised to see it cross the 1 billion mark. From this I gauged that people love to watch such content; I can't imagine why though!" he said. "During my

research, all of which is in the public domain, I learnt how these organisations function, and even those who go there exploit such places to absolve themselves of their sins. I had to sift through a lot of mundane stuff to explore the relationships these self-proclaimed godmen have with women, police, investigative agencies, politicians, the youth, and also drug cartels," he added. The filmmaker had taken a similar stance when he was served a notice by the Karni Sena, ahead of the release of Part 2 of the show. "Who am I to make a judgment on their demand? We had 400 million-plus views for the first season. I think viewers are the best placed to decide on 'negative goodwill'. Shall we leave it to them?" he'd said, according to SpotboyE. While the first two parts of the show, in which Bobby plays a 'dhongi baba', were released in quick succession, Jha said that they were shot as one part.

Sunny Deol gets Y-category security, after tweeting in favour of new farm laws: report

Actor and politician Sunny Deol has been given Y-category security by the Central government. The security upgrade comes days after he spoke in favour of the new but controversial farm laws. The new laws have provoked massive protests from farmers, mostly from Punjab and Haryana. Sunny had tweeted to say that the matter ought to remain between farmers and government but insisted some were trying to instigate

our farmers and the government. Do not interfere, because they will find a way after holding discussions. I know that many people want to take advantage of it and create problems. They are not thinking of the farmers and may have their own agenda." The farm protests has seen celebrities being divided on the lines of 'for and against' the laws. Actor Kangana Ranaut and singer-actor Diljit Dosanjh have had bitter Twitter exchanges over the issue. The most



trouble. He is a Member of Parliament from Gurdaspur in Punjab. The security upgrade will mean that he would now have 11 personnel, including two commandos and policemen, always with him, as per a report in NDTV. Tweeting on the contentious issue, Sunny had written: "I request the entire world that this matter remains between

recent interaction happened as Kangana provoked a response from Diljit, asking him where he had disappeared after instigating farmers. In his reply, written in Punjabi, he wrote that he did not owe her an explanation. Kangana has been attacking Priyanka Chopra too, who had said that the farmers' 'fears need to be allayed'.

Engendered's I-VIEW World Film Festival Commenced on International Human Rights Day with Red Carpet & Screening of Deepa Mehta's FUNNY BOY



(New Delhi) To commemorate International Human Rights Day on December 10th, Engendered, a non-profit organization dedicated to creating awareness around issues of gender, sexuality and marginalities, launched the 3rd iteration of I-View World, a global, HYBRID, human rights film festival comprised of shorts, documentaries and feature films from India, Pakistan, Canada, United Kingdom, Italy, Argentina, Sweden, Netherlands, Australia, Turkey/Syria, Iran and Thailand. The festival continues through December 20th and is available to audiences from India and New York City at www.plexigo.com/iviewworld2020.

The opening night screening of Oscar-nominated director Deepa Mehta's FUNNY BOY, also Canada's official entry

to the 2021 Oscars, was preceded by a star-studded, socially distant, COVID-conscious red carpet at DLF Cyber Hub open air Ampitheatre in Gurgaon, Haryana, and followed by Engendered's Impact Awards.

On Friday, December 11th, I-View World host TWO

physical, socially-distant, COVID-conscious screenings of Rohena Gera's



SIR and Faraz Arif Ansari's SHEER

QORMA at the PVR Cinemas in Chanakyapuri Mall, followed by a round

table discussion on "Independent Cinema and the Politics of Representation." And on Sunday, December 20th, I-View World will host a physical, socially-distant, COVID-conscious screening of its closing night film, Sarmad Khoosat's ZINDAGI TAMASHA, Pakistan's official entry to the 2021 Oscars, with the director in attendance virtually. ***For the complete lineup of the 50+ films being shown virtually as part of the I-View World Film Festival, please visit www.plexigo.com/iviewworld2020 for trailers, synopses and schedule. All films are FREE and open to the general public who register on the Plexigo app or through the website. Only audiences in India and New York City will be able to access the programming. Festival Partner.

Classical Musicians from India & North America Perform at The Chaar Prahar Indian Classical Music Festival for a global Audience

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan USA, Sneha Arts, Kolkata Sitar School & Viewcy in association with the Consulate General of India & Dhvani Academy of Percussion Music presented the 2nd Annual Chaar Prahar Indian Classical Music Festival. Adapting to the challenges of the global pandemic, the festival was held online on November 29th & December 5th on the digital platform Viewcy, which enabled us to reach audiences in Asia, Europe & North America. The artist lineup included some of the most recognized names in Indian Classical music as well as rising stars. The concert was streamed in several time zones to accommodate audiences from around the world on both days. The festival was supported by our media partners: TV Asia, World BBTB, Radio Zindagi, Divya Bhaskar & The Indian EYE. Viewers were treated to soul stirring music at this 2 day, 12 hour - festival, which featured 26 musicians from both the Hindustani & Carnatic styles of music. Community of artists & music lovers gathered to enjoy instrumentalists & vocalists from various gharanas (school of music) showcasing their talents & mastery on the sitar, tabla, sarod, esraj, santoor, violin, veena, mridangam, harmonium & vocals. The festival team was particularly enthusiastic about giving a platform to the younger generation of Indian American artists who work very hard to pursue this art form alongside those based in India.

Dignitaries from the music world & the community graced the occasion online to bestow their blessings, not only to the young artists, but also to the organizers for continuing this special initiative. The Consul General of India in New York Amb. Randhir Jaiswal & Deputy Consul General Amb. Shatrughna Sinha, who graced

the occasion, appreciated the work & effort put into presenting the rich music of India through



this festival. Bhavan Chairman, Dr. Navin C. Mehta, joined the festival on both days, commending the music community for coming together for such a special marathon of music. He was thrilled to see such a fantastic line up &

engaging audiences that were enjoying this online festival.

There were countless comments of support & appreciation pouring in during the live streaming of the festival, which encouraged the artists & the organizers. Dibyarka Chatterjee wrote, "What a treat these past 6 hours have been! Congratulations once again to the organizers, not only for being able to continue the festival despite these trying circumstances, but for such a high-quality production. Deepest gratitude to all the performers for bringing light & joy into our homes!" Vineeta Khanna wrote, "Much gratitude to Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Sneha Arts, the brilliant artists & all the folks instrumental in making this event happen! You all are doing great service to the Arts!"

This year's festival had a very special significance to the organizing team of Chaar Prahar, which consists of Minesh Patel, Managing Director of Bhavan USA, Indro Roy Choudhury, Bhavan Sitar guru & Director of Chaar Prahar Festival, and Sunny Thakkar, Founder of Sneha Arts. It was dedicated to the former Executive Director of Bhavan USA, Shri Deepak Dave, who left this world too soon; it was his vision that motivated the team to continue this festival. It was also dedicated to one of the board members, Megha Bhouraskar's father, Shri Digambar Bhouraskar. He was a long time Bhavan supporter & an ardent lover of Indian Classical Music. Long time vocal guru at Bhavan, Smt. Sanjukta Sen & her daughter Shruti Sen, performed the opening invocation for the festival.

Tamannaah Bhatia: Whether you're an insider or outsider, only good work and talent sell



The ongoing negative narratives around Bollywood have seen many actors, directors, writers express their view points. Joining the list is Tamannaah Bhatia, who feels the film industry is an "easy target". The actor is hopeful that this phase too shall pass and says that people with the right understanding can see through things. "I think this the worst phase that the industry is going through. It's wrong and unfair to blame the film industry for anything and everything. Because we're always in the limelight and spoken about it just becomes easy to make statements about it. There are good and bad everywhere," says the actor, who has done Hindi films such as Chand Sa Roshan

Chehra (2005), Himmatwala (2013), Entertainment (2014) and will be seen alongside Nawazuddin Siddiqui in Bole Chudiyan. There are discussions about industry insiders having an upper hand. We ask Bhatia if she has faced any biases as an outsider given that she had earlier spoken about not getting substantial work in Bollywood while southern film industries offered her better scope. "Yes I'm not from the industry, I don't have a godfather or a mentor. I've done everything on my own. I feel extremely grateful for the kind of opportunities, love and adulation I've got from the audience. It was something I never expected. So if you're dedicated, hardworking and talented, you'll survive. Good efforts counts," she adds.

Kareena Kapoor on working through her pregnancy: 'Have always been very proud of being a working mother'

Actor Kareena Kapoor, who is pregnant with her second child, continues to work. In a recent interview, she explained why she chose to not take time off. Kareena had, in fact, worked through her first pregnancy as well. And while she did take a break after her son Taimur Ali Khan was born, she was

back on track and shot for Veere Di Wedding soon after. Speaking to Bombay Times, as she shot for new episodes of her chat show, What Women Want, Kareena shared her thoughts on

pregnancy and how she has dealt with it. Kareena said: "No, there has never been any

plan that I have to do this or that. It's just that I have never been that

kind of a person who would sit at home and say, 'Now I want to put my feet up'. I am doing what I want to do. Working - whether it's during my pregnancy or post-delivery -

has been a point to just say that when has anyone ever said that pregnant women can't work? In fact, the more active you are, the healthier the baby is and the happier the mother is.



Abhishek Bachchan says 'not fair' as film exhibitor takes a dig at other actors while praising Akshay Kumar



Abhishek protested.

When Akshay defended his original statement by saying that the only way to give a boost to the film industry right now is to make films quickly and '(generate) a lot of work', Abhishek said, "Good work begets more work! Cannot be making films for just the sake of making films. In the long run you will end up doing more damage to the industry. It's a bit of a catch 22." On being told that the lack of content could lead to many theatres permanently shutting shop, Abhishek said, "Yes agree, but in unprecedented times like these where people are slowly (and dare I say reluctantly) returning to the cinemas. Bad films could discourage even the few to just wait and see it digitally or on TV." Abhishek also responded to a Twitter user, who claimed he is feeling bad as he himself is 'slow' and advised him to 'work hard and become fast'.

Abhishek Bachchan objected to film exhibitor Akshay Rath's jibe at other actors while complimenting Akshay Kumar for his quick turnaround time when it comes to shoots. Abhishek said that different people have a different pace, and it is unfair to pull them down. In his tweet, Akshay had written, "Amazing how @akshaykumar finishes off the shoot of an entire film in the amount of time that other stars take to learn a skill which they need to act out in a small scene or so! And more often than not, his film turns out to be the bigger hit! More actors need to 'plan' better!" "Not fair! Each to their own. Different people are motivated by different things. And have a different pace at doing things,"

Krishna Shroff posts pic with 'bae', ex-boyfriend Eban Hyams comments, 'Dang u move quick'

Weeks after announcing her split from boyfriend Eban Hyams, Tiger Shroff's sister, Krishna, took to social media to share a picture with the internet sensation, Salt Bae. In November, Krishna had announced on Instagram that she and Eban 'aren't together anymore'.



Late Wednesday, Krishna shared a picture and a video from the Dubai restaurant of chef Nusret, aka the Salt Bae. She captioned the post, "Bae time." In the comments section, Eban wrote, "Dang u move quick." When one person replied to him that he should move on too, Eban wrote back, "I'm not in a rush bro but thanks

haha." Others were convinced that it was all just a joke. "Doesn't mean that's her bf... It can just be a awesome chef she met..." one person commented.

Krishna and Eban were always forthright about their relationship. They'd first met at Soho House in Mumbai on May 11, 2019, and started dating a month later. In May, the two had gone live on Instagram to celebrate

the one-year anniversary of their first meeting. It was then that Eban had hinted at marriage. "This is like our anniversary in a way. We just want to celebrate with you guys. Cheers to you, babe. Cheers to us," Eban had said.

But in November, Krishna took to Instagram Stories and requested fan clubs to not tag them in posts any more. She wrote, "All you fan clubs are cute and all. But please stop tagging me in edits with Eban. We aren't together anymore. So stop associating us."



Year-end: 2020 in protests, riots, scams and scandals in India

(SAI Bureau)-

The Covid-19 pandemic severely restricted public activities throughout the year in India as elsewhere in the world. India has been the second-worst affected country by the Covid-19 pandemic and it implemented the



strictest lockdown reducing public activities further. Still, India saw big protests, two major communal riots, and a few scams and scandals in 2020.

PROTEST OVER CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT ACT

The Citizenship Amendment Act came into being in December 2019. Protests against it erupted thereafter with Assam being the focus where protesters linked it with

the National Register of Citizens (NRC). The protesters opposed the CAA for allowing citizenship to immigrants, who came in after 1971. By January, the focus of the anti-CAA protests had shifted to Delhi, particularly at Shaheen Bagh.

Here, the protesters led the agitation against a provision that made Muslims from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan ineligible to acquire citizenship under the

CAA. They were required to go through normal routes of acquiring citizenship of India. The protest made international headlines with the Time magazine featuring an 82-year-old Bilkis Bano - popularly called Dadi - as one of the most influential

people. The protest broke off in the view of the spreading Covid-19 pandemic and the consequent lockdown.

FARMERS' PROTEST OVER NEW FARM LAWS

At the other end of the Covid-19-impacted year, Delhi became the theatre of yet another public protest - this time by

(Contd on page 29)

The world is changing. India needs to get its priorities right



(SAI Bureau)-With Covid-19, the most common phrase in every webinar on geopolitics is the "new world order". This phrase is used to describe periods of history with dramatic change in balance of power between nation-states. In its most recent avatar, the new world order has been on the anvil since 2007. China's hostile and rapid rise, the economic aftermath of the global financial crisis, networked politics over the internet, and most recently the pandemic, together are transforming international politics.

What will this new world order look like over the next quarter century? More importantly, how can India shape this emerging order to attain peace and prosperity for all Indians?

(Contd on page 30)

CBI books Hyderabad company for loan fraud, amount bigger than Nirav Modi case



(SAI Bureau)- The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has filed a case against a Hyderabad based company, Transstroy (India) Ltd, for allegedly cheating a consortium of banks of Rs 7,926 crore, officials said on Friday. People familiar with the development said that the amount

(Contd on page 30)

Supreme Court says talks with farmers won't work without open mind, may form panel to resolve deadlock

(SAI Bureau)- The Supreme Court on Wednesday heard a bunch of pleas on the farmers' protest and issued a notice to the Centre and state governments over the pleas that sought removal of the farmers from the Delhi border points. The court also suggested forming a panel with farmer leaders, government officials and others to resolve the deadlock with farmers. During the hearing, CJI SA Bobde observed that negotiations with the farmers will fail again if the government doesn't work with an open mind. CJI Bobde said, "Farmers perceive the laws are against them and your negotiation is bound to fail again unless you do so with an open mind."

The court also told Solicitor General Tushar Mehta that a panel may be formed to resolve the issue "because this will soon become a national issue and with government it won't work out it seems". The bench comprising Chief Justice SA Bobde and Justices A

S Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian indicated that the court may form a committee with representatives of the government and the farmer unions from across the country to resolve the deadlock over the farm reform

laws. In the hearing conducted via video conferencing, Supreme Court directed the petitioners to make protesting farmer unions parties to the pleas. The matter has been posted for further hearing on Thursday. "Your negotiations with protesting farmers have not worked apparently till now," the bench told the Centre. Meanwhile, Solicitor General

Tushar Mehta told Supreme Court that the government will not do anything against the interest of farmers. Multiple pleas have been filed in Supreme Court seeking a direction to authorities to immediately remove the farmers, saying commuters are facing hardships due to the road blockades and the gatherings might lead to an increase in the number of coronavirus cases.

