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## No One Wants To Work Anymore

*The truth behind this unemployment benefits myth*

- \* US employees are concerned about safety, others have caregiving responsibilities and some are using their job loss as an opportunity to find other work
- \* Millions of unemployed in US face hardship under Republican benefit cuts
- \* At least 22 Republican-led states have announced plans to cut extended benefits, affecting more than 3.6m people



Story on  
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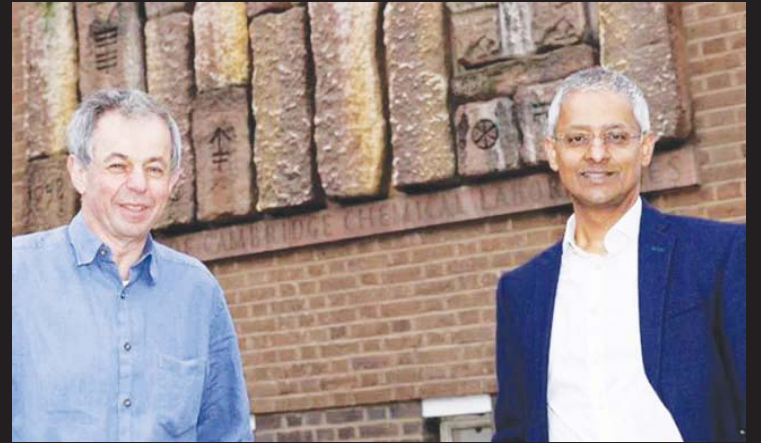
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# Indian-Origin Chemist Among Tech 'Nobel' Prize Winners For Revolutionary DNA Technique

**President of the Republic of Finland Sauli Niinisto, who is the Patron of the prize, presented the award to the scientists in a virtual ceremony on Tuesday.**



(News Agencies)-Cambridge University chemists Shankar Balasubramanian and David Klenerman were on Tuesday declared the winners of the 2020 Millennium Technology Prize, a prestigious global science and technology prize awarded for their development of revolutionary sequencing techniques which means DNA can now be read in super-fast times.

The prize, awarded by Technology Academy Finland (TAF) at two-year intervals since 2004 - when Sir Tim Berners-Lee was honoured for his discovery of the World Wide Web - to highlight the extensive impact of science and innovation on the wellbeing of society, is worth Euro 1 million.

Sir Balasubramanian, an India-born British professor of medicinal chemistry, and Sir

Klenerman, a British biophysical chemist, co-invented the Solexa-Illumina Next Generation DNA Sequencing (NGS), technology enabling fast, accurate, low-cost and large-scale genome sequencing - the process of determining the complete DNA sequence of an organism's make-up, which is proving crucial in humanity's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

The duo went on to co-found the company Solexa to make the technology more broadly available to the world.

"This is the first time we've received an international prize that recognises our contribution to developing the technology - but it's not just for us, it's for the whole team that played a key role in the development of the technology and for all those that have inspired us on our journey,"

the winning scientists said in a joint statement.

President of the Republic of Finland Sauli Niinisto, who is the Patron of the prize, presented the award to the scientists in a virtual ceremony on Tuesday.

The announcement of the 2020 award was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, the technology is being used to track and explore the novel coronavirus viral mutations, which is a growing global concern.

"The future potential of NGS is enormous and the exploitation of the technology is still in its infancy," said Paivi Torma, Academy Professor and Chair of the Millennium Technology Prize Committee.

"The technology will be a crucial element in promoting sustainable development through personalisation of medicine,

understanding and fighting killer diseases, and hence improving the quality of life. Professor Balasubramanian and Professor Klenerman are worthy winners of the prize," said Prof. Torma.

The 2020 prize marks the first time that the honour has been awarded to more than one recipient for the same innovation, celebrating the significance of collaboration.

Professor Marja Makarow, Chair of Technology Academy Finland said: "Collaboration is an essential part of ensuring positive change for the future. Next

Generation Sequencing is the perfect example of what can be achieved through teamwork and individuals from different scientific backgrounds coming together to solve a problem."

"The technology pioneered by Professor Balasubramanian and Professor Klenerman has also played a key role in helping discover the coronavirus's sequence, which in turn enabled the creation of the vaccines - itself a triumph for cross-border collaboration - and helped identify new variants of COVID-19," Makarow said.

## Indian Man In US, Sentenced For Kidnapping, Stalking, Faces Deportation



(News Agencies)-An Indian national from Texas has been sentenced to 56 months in prison and three years of supervised release on the charges of kidnapping and stalking his then wife.

Sunil K Akula, 32, faces deportation to India upon completion of his sentence. Last November, he pleaded guilty to the charges of kidnapping, stalking, obstruction of justice and witness tampering. According to federal prosecutors, on August 6, 2019, Akula travelled from his home in Texas to Agawam, Massachusetts to confront his then wife, from whom he was living apart. He subsequently assaulted his wife and forced her to leave her apartment and get into a car

with him, stating that he was taking her back to Texas. Mr Akula then drove his wife through multiple states, during which time he again assaulted her, forced her to send a resignation e-mail to her employer, and smashed her laptop and threw it on the side of the highway. Federal prosecutors alleged that Akula stopped at a Knox County, Tennessee hotel, where he again beat his wife. Akula later opened the door to leave the hotel room and was arrested by local law enforcement officers. While Akula was held in custody, he made phone calls to family in India instructing them to contact his wife's father to convince her to withdraw her statements to law enforcement, a media release said.



# Josh

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## ਗੱਲਬਾਤ



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# Hyderabad Engineer Bags Job At Microsoft With 2 Crore Package

**Deepthi Narkuti previously worked for American investment bank JP Morgan for three years**

(Insider Bureau)-A Hyderabad-based software engineer has landed a job with multinational tech giant Microsoft for a whopping annual salary of ₹2 crore. Deepthi Narkuti has been selected as a Software Development Engineer, Grade-2 Group at the organisation. According to a report by The Hans India, Deepthi will be working at the company's headquarters in Seattle, USA. She holds an MS in Computers from the University of Florida and was one among the 300

candidates who were offered a job by Microsoft. She received the highest package among those selected by the organisation. Deepthi, who began her work at Microsoft on May 17, has previously worked with JP Morgan as a software engineer. She joined the American investment bank after completing her Bachelors in Technology. She obtained her graduate degree from the Osmania College of Engineering in Hyderabad. Her father is a forensic expert in the Hyderabad Police Commissionerate.

placements, Amazon and Goldman Sachs also offered Deepthi a job.

Deepthi, who began her work at Microsoft on May 17, has previously worked with JP Morgan as a software engineer. She joined the American investment bank after completing her Bachelors in Technology. She obtained her graduate degree from the Osmania College of Engineering in Hyderabad. Her father is a forensic expert in the Hyderabad Police Commissionerate.



Following a three-year stint in JP Morgan, Deepthi resigned from her job to pursue higher studies. The University of Florida also offered a scholarship to pursue her Masters. On her LinkedIn profile, Deepthi has shared her love for working on real-time projects. "I strongly believe that technology can greatly help in solving day-to-day problems, thereby creating a significant impact in transforming the lives of the people," she wrote.

## "India A Major Priority": US Yet To Decide On Allocation Of 80 Million Vaccine Jabs

**A top US official said the allocation decision will be made on the basis of need and collaboration with key partners and COVAX.**



(Insider Bureau)-Noting that India has been a major priority for Washington given the surge of COVID-19 cases in the second wave of pandemic, US President Joe Biden's point-person for global pandemic response has said that no decision has been taken regarding the ultimate allocation of the 80 million vaccines that will be shared with other countries by the US government. Gayle Smith, the United States State Department's coordinator for global COVID-19 response and health security, said that the US response to the pandemic started with the announcement by President Biden earlier this week that the country will be sharing 20 million vaccines from its own stocks in addition to 60 million doses of AstraZeneca, and together 80 million vaccines will

make the US largest vaccine sharer in the world. Responding to the plan for India and doses under consideration for India, Ms Smith said, "I can't tell what allocation we have per country. Given the surge in India, it has been a major priority for us. We look at 100 million dollars in assistance and a mobilised private sector with amazing response. But no call has been taken on ultimate allocation but we will reach out." "We are looking at all regions, given the constraint in vaccine supply everywhere. We have not made a final decision but we are looking at every region. The decisions will be made on the

basis of need and collaboration with key partners and COVAX," she added. Ms Smith also informed that COVAX is undertaking a scientific database in the allocation of vaccines and the US will be working with them to ensure that they can increase their own supplies. On Trade-

Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) waiver for COVID vaccines and therapeutics, Ms Smith said that the US trade representative had already said that this is once in a lifetime situation and every option at the table needs to be looked at.

## Indian-Origin Lettings Firm Director Banned For Improper Funds Transfer In UK

(Insider Bureau)-An Indian-origin director of a lettings company in south-east England has been banned from the promotion, formation or management of a company for seven years for failing to act in the best interests of a business. Ghanshyam Sarup Batra was the appointed director in Harlow, Essex, of Dylan Lettings Worldwide Limited since its incorporation in May 2010. The 58-year-old was under court-imposed restrictions when he transferred almost 106,000 pounds from the company's bank account into his own. Ghanshyam Batra transferred almost 106,000 pounds from the company to his personal account, denying funds owed to creditors. The director stated the monies were owed to him for

outstanding rent and other business-related expenditure, but no rental agreement was in place, Lawrence Zussman, Deputy Head of Insolvent Investigations at the UK's Insolvency Service, said in a statement on Wednesday. This significant ban should act as a warning to other directors who do not act in their company's best interests that we will take action where it is appropriate to do so, he said. Dylan Lettings Worldwide Limited acted as a management organisation for three apartment blocks that had previously been converted from hotels. The freeholds of the buildings were owned by three separate companies, whilst Ghanshyam Batra was the registered leaseholder on all the apartments.

# Josh

## India WebTV

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# International row created, Delhi ministers still insist Singapore Covid variant is real

*Amidst the diplomatic storm that has ensued following Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal's claims of "Singapore variant" of Covid-19, Delhi ministers insist that there is a different strain of coronavirus in Singapore.*

(News Agencies)- As Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's claims of "Singapore variant" of Covid-19 kicked up an international row, Delhi's health minister Satyendar Jain on Wednesday claimed that there was a different strain of coronavirus spreading in Singapore.

Satyendra Jain's comment came after the Singapore government issued a statement, objecting to Delhi CM's comment about the "Singapore variant" of Covid-19, labelling it "unfounded assertions".

Satyendra Jain, however, continued to defend Kejriwal's remark and said that the Covid variant found in Singapore is different. "There are many strains of coronavirus in India at present... Their presence is ascertained through genome sequencing. It is a different strain (in Singapore) indeed. Whether it is from Singapore, Delhi, America or London, what's important is that the strains are different," Satyendra Jain told reporters on Wednesday. "It is wrong to say it is not a different variant... The

picture will be clear in some time. We will inform you about it," he added.

The Delhi health minister said that the state government had also called for the cancellation of flights from the UK last year. "Then also, it was considered an unwarranted demand. I think we should do whatever possible to protect the country," Satyendra Jain added.

**SISODIA DEFENDS KEJRIWAL, ACCUSES BJP OF PLAYING CHEAP POLITICS** Meanwhile, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia also



defended Arvind Kejriwal and accused the Centre of playing "cheap politics" over the issue. He said, "Kejriwal talked of Singapore variant and the children. The issue is not Singapore but children." Manish Sisodia claimed that the BJP-led government was more worried

about its image than about the well-being of children in India. Clarifying Arvind Kejriwal's remark, Manish Sisodia said that the Delhi CM's comment was to raise the alarm about the rising number of children being infected with Covid-19 in Singapore so that India can prepare accordingly.

## India logs 13 per cent fall in new Covid-19 cases in week, still highest globally: WHO



*India registered a 13 per cent decrease in new Covid-19 cases in the past week but the number of fresh infections was still the highest around the world, the WHO has said.*

(News Agencies)- India registered a 13 per cent decrease in new Covid-19 cases in the past week but the number of fresh infections was still the highest around the world, the WHO has said. The number of new cases and deaths continued to decrease with just over 4.8 million new cases and just under 86,000 new

deaths reported globally in the past week, a 12 per cent and five per cent decrease respectively compared to the previous week, according to the Covid-19 Weekly Epidemiological Update Data received by the World Health Organization from national authorities as of May 16. It said that the highest number

of new cases were reported from India (2,387,663 new cases), a 13 per cent decrease over the previous week. This was followed by Brazil (437,076 new cases; three per cent increase), the United States of America (235,638 new cases; 21 per cent decrease), Argentina (151,332 new cases; eight per cent increase) and Colombia (115,834 new cases; six per cent increase). Covid-related new deaths reported highest in India. The highest numbers of new deaths were reported from India (27,922 new deaths; 2.0 new deaths per 100,000; a four per cent increase), Nepal (1,224 new

deaths; 4.2 new deaths per 100,000; a 266 per cent increase) and Indonesia (1,125 new deaths; 0.4 new deaths per 100,000; a five per cent decrease). According to data received by the WHO from national authorities as of May 9, India had recorded the highest numbers of new cases at 2,738,957, a five per cent increase over the previous week. As per the WHO estimates, cumulative cases in India currently stand at about 24.68 million and total deaths are at about 270,284. The data added that the South-East Asia Region reported over 2.5 million new cases and over 30,000 new

deaths, a 12 per cent decrease and a seven per cent increase respectively compared to the previous week. Covid-19 cases dipped after 9 weeks in India. Case incidence decreased after nine consecutive weeks of increases, although the absolute number remains at its highest level since the beginning of the pandemic, it said, adding that death incidence continued to increase for a ninth consecutive week. Globally, despite a declining trend over the past three weeks, the incidence of cases remains at some of the highest levels since the start of the pandemic.

## Goa court defers verdict again in Tarun Tejpal case to May 21

*The District and Sessions Court at Panaji, Goa has deferred its verdict in the Tarun Tejpal case to May 21, 2021.*

(News Agencies)- The District and Sessions court in Goa on Wednesday said it will pronounce the verdict in the Tarun Tejpal case on May 21.

The former Tehelka editor-in-chief is accused of sexually assaulting a woman colleague inside the elevator of a luxury hotel in Goa in 2013. The additional district court was to pronounce the verdict on April 27, but judge Kshama Joshi had then adjourned the verdict to May 12, then May 19.

The court had earlier deferred the verdict due to lack of staff due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"The judge said they are operating with only 15 per cent staff and there was lot of material to go through before pronouncing the verdict," public prosecutor Francisco Tavora said.

The Goa Police had registered an FIR against Tejpal in November 2013 following which he was arrested. He has been out on bail since May 2014.

The Goa crime branch had filed

a charge sheet against Tejpal.

He faced trial under IPC sections 341 (wrongful restraint), 342 (wrongful confinement), 354 (assault or criminal force with intent to outrage modesty), 354-A (sexual harassment), 354-B (assault or use of criminal force to woman with intent to disrobe), 376(2)(f) (person in position of authority over women, committing rape) and 376(2)(k) (rape by person in position of control).

He had earlier moved the



Bombay High Court, seeking a stay on the framing of charges against him, but his petition was dismissed.



# He saved so many lives, we couldn't save him: Dr KK Aggarwal's daughter

**As soon as the news of renowned cardiologist and Padma Shri awardee Dr KK Aggarwal's demise surfaced on Monday, tributes started pouring in from all quarters on social media.**

(News Agencies)-Naina Aggarwal, the grieving daughter of noted cardiologist Dr KK Aggarwal who died of coronavirus infection, on Tuesday said her father "saved so many lives, but we couldn't save him".

Aggarwal, 62, was admitted to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in Delhi and was on ventilator support since the past week. He died at 11.30 PM on Monday after a lengthy

battle with Covid-19, a statement on his Twitter handle said. As soon as the news of his demise surfaced, tributes started pouring in from all quarters on social media.

"He saved so many lives, but we couldn't save him," his daughter Naina said.

The eminent cardiologist, who was also a Padma Shri awardee, had gained more prominence with his informative videos about Covid-19 on social media.

The death of Aggarwal amid the brutal second wave of the pandemic in Delhi has shocked his family, associates members of the medical fraternity and beyond.

Noted dentist and Padma Bhushan recipient Dr Anil Kohli, termed Aggarwal's death a "personal loss".

"He was a friend and never thought he would leave us like that. It's a great loss to our fraternity too, and to the people,



he served with an open heart and to him, and condolences to his a congenial nature. My tributes family," he said.

## Why daily deaths spiked when Covid-19 infections started declining



(News Agencies)- Based on the trends over the past week, the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic is retreating in India. After reaching the peak of over 4.16 lakh new Covid-19 cases on May 6, India has seen the daily caseload decline to around

2.65 lakh this week.

However, with the decline in Covid-19 new cases, a spike has been seen in the daily death toll. On April 18, when India reported more than 2.75 lakh cases, the death toll for the day was 1,620.

A month later, on May 18,

**Covid-19 cases have declined in India in the past one week. However, the country has seen a spike in the daily deaths due to Covid-19. Read on to know why Covid-19 cases and fatalities follow different graphs.**

when India reported 2.67 lakh cases, the number of people who died of Covid-19 was reported at 4,529 — a new peak in itself.

In fact, India has reported over 4,000 daily Covid-19 deaths on seven of the past eight days (May 11-18). It was when daily Covid-19 cases fell, first below 3.50 lakh and then below 3 lakh a day. The reason for such a spike in the daily death toll, while new infections started declining, is a general lag of two weeks if the graph of new cases is compared with the death toll.

People who lose the battle against Covid-19 usually undergo treatment for two weeks or more. Their cases are managed medically after their immune system was overwhelmed by the virus.

This battle for life against a deadly pathogen takes time. Remember, most Covid-19 patients recover from the illness on their own in two-three weeks. The immune system of unfortunate ones also tries to fight off the virus for several days. There is another reason. It involves administrative

processes. Unlike cases of confirmed Covid-19 as tested by a pathological lab, reporting of deaths takes more time. All labs report their data to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the local bodies. However, deaths are reported separately by individual states.

This process causes a delay of up to two-three days in reporting of deaths. Often, states clear backlog of death records showing a spike in fatality figures on a day when actual deaths could be lower.

## PM Modi's approval rating falls as India struggles to contain second Covid-19 wave: US firm

**Approval ratings of PM Modi have fallen to a new low as India grapples with coronavirus pandemic, according to a US data intelligence company. Narendra Modi's overall ratings this week stand at 63%, his lowest since the firm began tracking his popularity in 2019.**

(News Agencies)- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's approval ratings have fallen to a new low, a survey showed on Tuesday, as the country struggles to contain a devastating second wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

Narendra Modi, who swept to power in 2014 and was re-elected in 2019 with the biggest majority of any leader in three decades, has long fostered the image of a powerful nationalist leader.

But India's Covid-19 caseload surged past 25 million this week, exposing a lack of preparation and eroding Modi's support base, according to US data intelligence company Morning Consult's

tracker of a dozen global leaders. Narendra Modi's overall ratings this week stand at 63%, his lowest since the US firm began tracking his popularity in August 2019. The big decline happened in April when his net approval dropped 22 points. That sharp fall came as the pandemic appeared to be overwhelming large urban centres such as Delhi, where hospitals ran out of beds and life-saving oxygen and people died in parking lots, gasping for breath.

Bodies piled up in morgues and crematoriums and anger grew on social media over the suffering and perceived lack of government support. The situation has since

eased in Delhi and Mumbai as cases have fallen but the virus has penetrated deep into India's vast hinterland where public health facilities are weaker.

"The people of India — or at least the vast majority — have... come to the conclusion that they have to rely only on themselves, and their families and friends, to protect their lives," said P Chidambaram, the Congress leader.

"In the battle against Covid-19, the state, especially the central government, has withered away," Chidambaram said. Narendra Modi's government has said it is doing its best to tackle the "coronavirus storm", calling it a



once-in-a-century crisis.

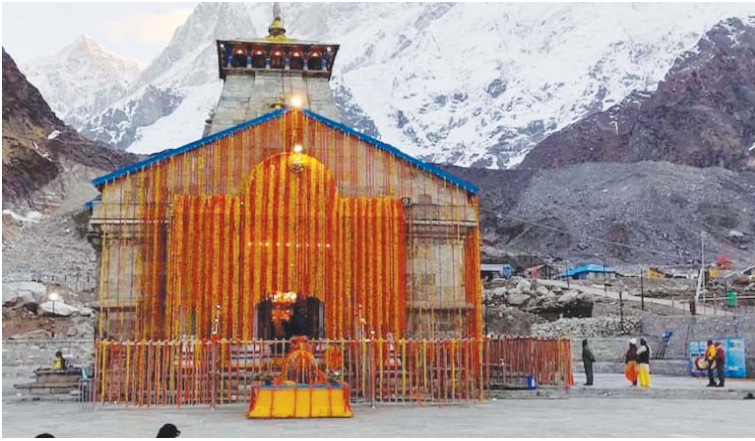
A survey among urban Indians by polling agency YouGov this month showed public confidence in the government's handling of the crisis has plummeted since February when the second wave began. Only 59% of respondents at the end of April believed the government was handling the

crisis 'very' or 'somewhat' well, down from 89% a year earlier during the first wave, it showed. Narendra Modi does not face a national election until 2024 and despite the criticism he faces, the opposition is yet to mount a credible challenge to his authority, political analysts say.



## Uttarakhand's Badrinath temple reopens with religious rituals after winter break

*The famous temple of Badrinath in Uttarakhand opened after the winter break early on Tuesday.*



including the priests, the Dharmadhikari and administrative officials, attending it in compliance with the Covid-19 standard operating procedure (SOP). In normal circumstances, thousands of people turn up at the high-altitude temple dedicated to Vishnu to witness its opening ceremony.

For the second consecutive year, the temple witnessed a simple, thinly-attended opening ceremony. The temple was decorated with around eight quintals of marigolds on the occasion. With the opening of Badrinath, all the four Himalayan temples known as char dham are now open in Uttarakhand.

(News Agencies)-The famous temple of Badrinath in the upper Himalayan region of Uttarakhand opened after the winter break early on Tuesday amid traditional rituals. The chief priest of the temple, Ishwar Prasad Namboodiri, opened the portals of the temple at 4.15 am chanting Vedic hymns and praying for the well-being of all. However, the opening ceremony was a subdued affair with only a limited number of people,

## Chitrakoot jail shootout: NHRC asks UP police chief, other officials to submit report



(News Agencies)- The National Human Rights Commission has sought a report from the Uttar Pradesh DGP, the district magistrate and two other officers over complaints on the killing of three inmates in an alleged shootout in Chitrakoot jail, officials said.

On May 14, a prisoner had allegedly snatched a pistol from a prison personnel and killed two other prisoners. Subsequently, he was also killed

in firing by the jail staff, the NHRC said in a statement.

The commission asked the DGP, Chitrakoot district magistrate and superintendent of police, jail superintendent to submit an action taken report within 10 weeks, it said.

It has also asked the Uttar Pradesh State Human Rights Commission to inform the date of cognisance, if any, taken by them in this matter, it added.

## Rebellion against Punjab CM Capt Amarinder Singh within Congress ranks, row erupts over sacrilege case year before polls

**A year before polls, rebellion has erupted within the Congress against Punjab CM Captain Amarinder Singh over the sacrilege case. His opponents say they are being targeted for raising their voices against the govt.**

(News Agencies)-Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh's opponents have accused him of targeting them for speaking against his government's "failure" to expose the real faces behind the sacrilege case and the recent quashing of the SIT mandated to probe them by Punjab and Haryana High Court.

Congress MLA Pargat Singh on Monday accused an aide of Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh of threatening him for

questioning the state government over the sacrilege row. The MLA alleged that Sandeep Sandhu, political advisor to Amarinder Singh, threatened him by saying that "papers" have been collected against him and that he "will be set right". CMs political advisor Sandeep Sandhu called me on Thursday night and said that we have collected papers about you and will take you to task. I tried to reconfirm it from Captain and

felt very bad to hear it," Pargat Singh said. Pargat, who had remained captain of the Indian hockey team, said he was ready to face any "punishment" for speaking the truth and raising the issues of sacrilege and review of power purchase agreements. Pargat Singh is not the only Congress leader who has allegedly been targeted for raising the issue. Vigilance probes have also been opened against Navjot Singh Sidhu and his aides, including personal assistants after



Sidhu became vocal against the Punjab government. Captain Amarinder Singh had even challenged him to fight assembly election against him. Interestingly, Punjab state women's commission

has also sought a report from the state in a two-year-old "me too" case against cabinet minister Charanjit Singh Channi who was accused of sending unwanted messages to a lady IAS officer.

## Stalin Seeks Support of NRIs in Fight against covid

**BY PRAKASH M SWAMY**

CHENNAI: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Muthuvel Karunanidhi Stalin has appealed to Non Resident Tamils living all over the world to contribute generously to Chief Ministers Public Relief Fund even as Covid-19 cases touch new heights in the southern State of India.

"At a time when there is a medical and financial crisis, you should come forward to associate yourselves with the task of protecting people," he said in a video message to Non Resident Tamils.

He assured that the contributions would be used only for the purchase of beds, vaccines and

medicines. "The details will be made public and such donations will be exempted from Income Tax," he said.

Tamil Nadu reported 31,892 new Covid-19 cases and 288 deaths on May 14, pushing the number of active cases in the state to nearly 2 lakhs. The cumulative case tally crossed the 15-lakh mark while the toll was revised to 17,056. While health experts say it is too early to see the effect of lockdown on fresh cases, the vaccination centers are facing the heat. On March 14, 52,730 people took the vaccine compared to 92,732 the previous day.

Hospitals scrambled for supplies



of lifesaving oxygen as Tamil Nadu reported a spike in Covid-19 cases and deaths, straining the state's resources, overwhelming the healthcare system and leaving doctors and nurses exhausted.

In Chennai, there were tense moments overnight at the VHS hospital, which has more than 50 oxygen-dependent patients, 30 of them in the ICU, as oxygen supplies fell to dangerously low levels — just enough for 20 minutes — a little before midnight. The oxygen truck arrived in the nick of time and supplied 1,000 liters of liquid medical oxygen.

As the State reels under the second wave of Covid-19 infection, a rare fungal infection threatens patients who have recovered from the viral infection, especially those who are diabetic and received oxygen or steroids support.

Specialists at Aravind Eye Hospital (AEH) in Pondicherry said they have so far encountered at least a dozen of patients, who recovered from Covid-19 infection, but contracted the black fungus infection (mucormycosis), in the last three or four weeks.

"We have seen about a dozen patients from Pondicherry and Karaikal and Cuddalore, Thanjavur and Nagapattinam districts in Tamil Nadu with black fungus infection. The patients came to us after the infection spread from their sinus to the eye orbit affecting their vision. Five of them lost vision in one of their eyes due to the infection.



# Covid second wave to end in July, third wave after 6 months: Govt panel

*According to a three-member panel of scientists set up by the central government, India's second wave of Covid-19 will decline by July this year. A third wave can be expected after six to eight months.*

(News Agencies)-India's second wave of Covid-19 is expected to decline by July this year. A third wave of the pandemic is expected in about six to eight months. These are the fairly optimistic projections made by the three-member panel of scientists set up by the Department of Science and Technology under the Science Ministry of the Government of India.

Using the SUTRA (Susceptible, Undetected, Tested (positive) and

Removed Approach) model, the scientists predicted that the end of May will see about 1.5 lakh cases per day and the end of June will witness 20,000 cases on a daily basis.

**WHICH STATES HAVE PEAKED?**

"States like Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Kerala, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, Gujarat, Haryana besides Delhi and Goa have already seen their peak," said Professor Manindra

Agarwal from IIT Kanpur, a member of the panel.

**WHICH STATES ARE YET TO PEAK?**

The model suggests that Tamil Nadu will see its peak between May 29 and 31 while Puducherry will witness its peak on May 19-20. States in east and northeast India are yet to see their peaks. Assam may peak by May 20-21. Meghalaya could peak on May 30 while Tripura is likely to peak by May 26-27. In the north, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab



are witnessing a surge in cases at present. Himachal Pradesh may see a peak in cases by May 24 and Punjab by May 22.

**THIRD WAVE?**

According to the model, a third wave is expected in six to eight

months. The impact of the same can be cushioned.

"It will be localised and many people will not be affected because they will enjoy immunity thanks to vaccination," Professor Agarwal said.

## Cyclone Tauktae: 49 still missing, high-level committee to probe how ONGC vessel was stranded

(News Agencies)-After Barge P-305 sank 35 miles off Mumbai on May 17 as Cyclone Tauktae made its way across the western coast, the union Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas has set up a three-member panel to investigate the events that led to the vessel getting stranded.

The panel is to submit its report in one month. With 49 crew members still missing, the Indian Navy's search and rescue (SAR) operations in the incident continued for the third day on Wednesday. The naval ships and aircraft are



attempting to rescue the missing crew members the accommodation barge. **SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS-** So far, a total of 186 survivors have been rescued and the mortal remains of 26 others have been recovered. The

barge was servicing ONGC offshore operations when it sunk. INS Kochi, INS Kolkata, INS Beas, INS Betwa, INS Teg, P81 maritime surveillance aircraft, Chetak and Seaking helicopters are involved in the rescue operations. On Wednesday, INS Kochi entered the harbour to disembark 125 survivors and the mortal remains of four crew members. The ship was immediately sailed out again the same evening to continue the search effort. #CycloneTauktae #Update #SAR Ops - Barge P305.

188 survivors incl two ex tug Varaprada rescued & 22 Brave #NaturesVictims #BNV recovered so far. #INSKochi returned to #Mumbai with survivors/BNV. #IndianNavy #SAR effort continues for the remaining personnel. @DefenceMinIndia pic.twitter.com/qeETMnN8HE

## Cage gates left open, tigress at Arunachal zoo mauls cleaner

(News Agencies)-A 35-year-old zoo attendant was mauled to death by a Royal Bengal tigress at the Biological Park in Itanagar, an official said. Poulash Karmakar, a native of Dhekiajuli in Assam's Lakhimpur district was killed by the tigress when he was entering her cage to clean the water pond on Tuesday, zoo curator Raya Flago said.

"The incident occurred at 2.30 pm on Tuesday. I was informed of the incident by one of our animal attendants. When I reached the zoo along with a doctor and other staff, Karmakar was already dead. He was found bleeding from the face," Flago said.

"There are three gates that lead to the cage and all of them were left open. We are assuming that this led to the tigress attacking the zoo attendant," Flago said, adding that a police investigation has been launched in the case. Deepest condolences to the bereaved family of late Poulash Karmakar, mauled by a Tigress yesterday at Biological Park, #Itanagar. Visited the zoo to take stock. Govt. will duly compensate for the irreparable loss. Prayers for the departed soul @ArunachalCMO @ArunForests pic.twitter.com/vIPxEE2ITG - Mama Natung (@NatungMama) May 19, 2021

## Cyclone Tauktae: PM Modi announces Rs 1,000 crore aid for Gujarat; Rs 2 lakh ex-gratia for kin of deceased

(News Agencies)-Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday took an aerial survey of Cyclone Tauktae-affected areas in Gujarat and announced financial assistance of Rs. 1,000 crore for immediate relief activities in the state. Expressing solidarity with those affected by the cyclone, the prime minister also announced Rs. 2 lakh Ex-gratia for the next of kin of the dead and Rs 50,000 for the injured.

The prime minister undertook an aerial survey of the cyclone-affected areas in Una (Gir-Somnath), Jafrabad (Amreli), Mahua (Bhavnagar) in Gujarat & Diu. He was accompanied by Chief Minister Vijay Rupani and other officials during this visit. He also chaired a

meeting in Ahmedabad to review the relief and rehabilitation measures being undertaken in the cyclone-hit areas. The Centre will also deploy an Inter-Ministerial team to visit the state to assess the extent of damage in the State, based on which



further assistance will be given. PM Modi assured those affected by the cyclone of closely working with the state government at this difficult time and to extend all possible assistance for restoration and rebuilding of the infrastructure in the affected areas. During his visit, he also took stock of the Covid-19 situation in the state and stressed the need to ensure that preventive measures are being taken.



## BJP MP cleans dirty toilet at Covid centre in MP's Rewa

(News Agencies)-A video of a BJP MP cleaning a dirty toilet at a Covid-19 care centre in Madhya Pradesh's Rewa district on Tuesday has gone viral. BJP MP Janardan Mishra from Rewa was on an inspection of Kunj Bihari Covid care centre in Mauganj Tehsil when he spotted the clogged toilet. Irked over the condition of the toilet, the MP put on his hand gloves and started scrubbing it without asking for any help. He also asked officials to keep the toilet clean and encouraged them to practice safe hygiene at the centre, failing which strict action will be taken. Speaking to India Today TV on

phone, Janardan Mishra said, "No work is small or big. Everybody's working in this pandemic-from doctors to sweepers. The toilet was dirty so I cleaned it in order to make people aware and understand the importance of self-sufficiency." This is not the first time the BJP MP showed his support to the Swachh Bharat mission. In 2018, Janardan Mishra was seen cleaning a school toilet in Rewa's Khajuh village after he found out that it was clogged and students were unable to use it due to the accumulation of soil. He had also cleaned the streets of Rewa district.



## Haryana man who performed last rites of over 300 Covid-19 victims succumbs to virus



(News Agencies)-An official of the Hisar Municipal Corporation, who ensured a dignified funeral for over 300 Covid-19 victims ever since the outbreak of the pandemic, succumbed to the disease barely two days after testing positive, a spokesperson said on Tuesday. Praveen Kumar, 43, died at a private hospital on Monday night, the spokesperson of the municipal corporation said. Kumar was the head of the team formed by the municipal corporation to cremate

the bodies of coronavirus patients. "He had cremated over 300 Covid bodies so far since last year. He tested positive two days ago. He was admitted to a private hospital, where his oxygen level kept dipping due to which he died," the spokesperson said. Kumar was also the president of Municipal Corporation Safai Karamchari Union here. His last rites were performed at a cremation ground in Rishi Nagar here on Tuesday as per the Covid guidelines.

## In bid to shoo Covid, Rajasthan locals mark village periphery with cow urine, milk

(News Agencies)-Despite the exponential rise in Covid-19 cases, several people in rural parts of Rajasthan have been indulging in behaviour that could prove inimical to their own health rather than obliterate the risk of infection caused by the virus.

In Rajasthan's Pali district, scores of villagers turned up on Saturday to observe a ritual they believed would save their lives from the menace of coronavirus. As per the ritual, villagers gathered at midnight on Saturday in Akeli village, 8 kms from the district headquarters. They used a concoction of raw milk, cow urine and water from the Ganges to draw a 3 kilometre-long line along the periphery of the village. Villagers claimed that the tradition will protect them from Covid-19.

The entire ritual went on for three



hours from 12 am till 3 am on Saturday. Villagers claim it's a decades' old tradition as per which a line using the concoction is drawn around the village boundary to protect its residents from any trouble. However, even as villagers in Akeli

village in Rajasthan's Karauli went on with the ritual, Covid protocol and safety precautions including social distancing and wearing of masks were tossed out of the window by several who had gathered there.

## Will face sedition charges if I speak too much: BJP MLA on Uttar Pradesh govt's handling of Covid

(News Agencies)-ABJP MLA from Uttar Pradesh joined the list of ruling party lawmakers in Uttar Pradesh who have expressed resentment over Covid-19 management in the state when he said he might have to face sedition charges if he spoke too much.

Speaking to reporters, BJP MLA from Sitapur (Sadar) Rakesh Rathore also claimed that legislators have no say in the functioning of the Uttar Pradesh government.

"Vidhayakon ki haisiyat kya hai. Hum jyada kahenge to desh droh, raj droh humpe bhi to lagega [What

is the status of an MLA? [If we speak too much, then we will have to face sedition charges]," BJP MLA Rakesh Rathore told reporters last week, according to a video clip that surfaced Monday. "Do you think any MLA can put forward his point of view?" Rakesh Rathore's remarks came in response to a query about the trauma centre project in Sitapur district, which is still non-operational. Coronavirus Updates on May 18

On being asked why the lockdown wasn't being strictly enforced in Uttar Pradesh, which continues to grapple with



coronavirus infections, the BJP MLA said, "Everything is going very well...nothing better can be done." "I am not the government. But I can definitely say that whatever the

government is telling you, it should be considered as correct," he said.

Asked why the district administration is lacking in efforts to control the crisis, the MLA said the government and administration are two sides of the same coin. Rakesh Rathore has questioned his party several times in the past and has even been side-lined for his anti-party statements.

Last year, the BJP MLA was served a notice by the party after he was allegedly heard saying in a viral audio clip that the idea of beating plates to defeat the coronavirus as "breaking the

record for foolishness". He was questioning the call made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to beat thalis and light lamps during the first wave of Covid.

Other members of the ruling BJP in Uttar Pradesh too have questioned Yogi Adityanath's handling of the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

On May 9, Union Labour minister Santosh Gangwar complained to the chief minister about the situation in his Bareilly constituency, saying officials don't take calls and government health centres send back patients for 'referrals' from the district hospital.

## UP village takes to open-air Covid care under tree as locals die with no oxygen

(News Agencies)-In a village in northern India engulfed by Covid-19, the sick lie on cots under a tree, glucose drips hanging from a branch. Cows graze all around, while syringes and empty medicine packets are strewn on the ground.

There is no doctor or health facility in Mewla Gopalgarh in Uttar Pradesh, a 90-minute drive from Delhi. There is a government hospital nearby but it has no available beds and the villagers say they cannot afford private clinics.

Instead, village practitioners of

alternative medicine have set up an open-air clinic where they distribute glucose and other remedies to patients with symptoms of Covid-19.

Some believe lying under the neem tree, known for its medicinal properties, will raise their oxygen levels. There is no scientific basis for this belief or for some of the other remedies being offered.

"When people become breathless, they have to go under trees to raise their oxygen levels," said Sanjay Singh, whose 74-year-old father died a

few days ago after developing a fever. Singh said his father was not tested and died in two days. "People are dying and there is nobody to look after us," he said. India's devastating second wave of infections, which has brought even hospitals in big cities such as Delhi to breaking point, is ripping through the country's vast rural hinterland where healthcare is threadbare. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is facing criticism for failing to prepare for the second wave, said in a speech last week that the pandemic was spreading fast in the villages and



urged people not to ignore the symptoms. "Get the test done, isolate yourself and start medication on time," he said. But in this village, people are making

do as best they can. One woman had borrowed an oxygen cylinder from a neighbour whose condition had improved slightly, her family said.



# Narada sting case: HC to hear bail plea of 3 TMC MLAs, former Bengal minister on Thursday

**The Calcutta High Court will continue the hearing of Narada sting case from 2 pm on Thursday.**

(News Agencies)-The Narada sting case will be heard at Calcutta High Court from 2 pm on Thursday. The four Bengal heavyweight politicians were on Monday arrested in the 2016 Narada sting operation case. The case related to the transfer of case to another state has not yet been heard by the court. Acting CJ Rajesh Bindal and Justice Arijit Banerjee were hearing the case on Wednesday. Firhad Hakim and Subrata Mukherjee were represented by

counsel Abhishek Manu Singhvi. Madan Mitra and Sovan Chatterjee were, however, represented by Siddharth Luthra. An enclosure by CBI in the chargesheet mentions the list of all individuals in the Narada case, including Mukul Roy and Suvendu Adhikari.

**WHAT HAPPENED ON MONDAY**

The Calcutta High Court issued a stay order on the bail of the four All India Trinamool Congress leaders who were arrested on

Monday in the Narada sting case. The accused will remain in Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) custody till Wednesday.

All four arrested have been moved to special cells in Presidency Jail in Kolkata. The CBI has reportedly moved a special requisition to keep the four TMC leaders in a safe place.

Earlier on Monday, a special CBI court in Kolkata had granted bail to the four leaders - ruling TMC ministers Firhad Hakim and Subrata Mukherjee, TMC MLA



Madan Mitra and ex-Kolkata mayor Sovan Chatterjee. However, they were not immediately released.

Shabba Hakim, daughter of West Bengal minister Firhad Hakim, took to Twitter to allege that the four accused were being held illegally and the verdict of the court was being disregarded by CBI.

The four had remained in custody because the CBI had moved the high court pleading that the matter be transferred out of the special CBI court in Kolkata and shifted outside West Bengal

**TMC PROTESTS**

The arrests on Monday sparked massive protests outside CBI's office. As TMC supporters shouted slogans and pelted stones outside, West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee went inside the CBI office and demanded to be arrested along with her leaders.

**NARADA STING CASE**

The four TMC leaders were arrested for allegedly "demanding and accepting illegal gratification to show favour to a private person who was posing as a representative of a fictitious company"

## Open forest land new cremation ground for Covid victims in Uttarakhand after locals protest

(News Agencies)-A new cremation ground has been set up near government land in open forest areas in Uttarakhand after locals raised objections over cremating the bodies of Covid victims at the traditional crematoriums in Almora. With no help from the authorities or government, the relatives of Covid-19 victims are cremating the bodies deep in the hills. Heart-wrenching images of pyre burning have come to the fore from the state and with Covid spreading like wildfire, many believe that number of dead is set to rise in coming weeks.

The state has only one Covid hospital for every 1.2 lakh people. At present, the fatality rate in Uttarakhand stands at 1.73 per cent. In the last week, Almora witnessed 40 deaths. The cremations, however, are being done by patients only as they receive no support from authorities. For 35-year-old Munna Lal, the last 10 days were a nightmare. His father was suffering from fever and could only bring him to the hospital --- which is far away from his place --- after nine days of severe illness. His family, too, has tested positive for the virus. Worse, just 24 hours

after admission, Lal got to know that his father was no more. When India Today TV spoke to Munna Lal, he was seen cremating the body all by himself without any support from the authorities.

## 22 bodies brought to Mumbai after barge sank due to Tauktae, 65 missing

(News Agencies)-Twenty-two bodies have been recovered and brought to the Mumbai dockyard two days after barge P-305 sank 35 nautical miles from Mumbai. As many as 185 people have also been rescued. Commander Operations, Western Naval Command, MK Jha confirmed the number of deaths and said identification is underway. However, said it is yet to be ascertained whether all the casualties were reported from P-305.

Altogether 65 personnel onboard accommodation barge P-305 are still missing, sources said on Wednesday. The Navy said its personnel, battling extreme weather, have so far rescued 186 of the 273 people who were onboard barge

P305 and also two from tugboat Varaprada.

Search and rescue operations are still on and we haven't lost hopes of bringing them ashore,' an official said. However, the chance of finding survivors is getting bleaker as the hours pass by, he added.

All personnel on board two other barges and an oil rig rendered adrift hours before the "very severe cyclonic storm" made landfall on the Gujarat coast are also safe, a Navy spokesperson said.

The 22 bodies, which the spokesperson called Brave Nature's Victims (BNV), were brought to Mumbai along with 125 of the barge P305 survivors, he said.



# Josh

## India WebTV










## News Analysis & Commentary



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## How Biden Can Be a Leader in an Israeli-Palestinian Conflict That Has None

Despite Benjamin Netanyahu's vow that Israeli airstrikes will continue in "full force" and an unremitting barrage of Hamas missiles, this round of fighting, which has killed 200 Palestinians and 11 Israelis, will end as all others have-without having achieved any discernible or lasting political goals. Historically, war, insurgency and violence have produced breakthroughs in the Arab-Israeli conflict. But those breakthroughs were initiated by the kinds of leaders who are glaringly missing from the current scene.

There is no Menachem Begin, Anwar Sadat, Yitzhak Rabin, King Hussein, Shimon Peres or even Yasser Arafat. The leaders, such as they are, are not equal to the task. The Israeli government is led by a prime minister driven primarily by his own political survival and who doesn't care what others think about its actions in Jerusalem or Gaza. Hamas has exploited Jerusalem to lay claim to leadership of the Palestinian national movement on the wings of thousands of rockets fired indiscriminately to kill civilians in Israel.

The Palestinian Authority's president is in the 16th year of a four-year term, recently canceled Palestinian elections and has no actual control over Palestinians in Jerusalem, Israel or Gaza. As a result, the violence will end in little more than a de facto cease-fire. Hamas will rearm, money will pour into Gaza to rebuild, and yet Gaza will remain an open-air prison

caught between Hamas' incompetence in governing and Israel's blockade; and the 2 million Palestinians enmeshed in this trap will continue to suffer. Israel will replenish its arsenal, study the lessons of this round of fighting, and prepare for the next round. Israeli leaders will return to what they like to do best these days: play nasty politics with each other, avoid decisions, and back into yet another, fifth election, or worse, witness the continuation of Netanyahu in power.

The truly challenging issues-extremist provocations in Jerusalem, the dispossession of Palestinians from their homes; police incompetence and aggressive actions on the Haram al Sharif / Temple Mount during Ramadan-will go unaddressed in an Israeli political system dominated by the right wing and absorbed by its political machinations and maneuvering. In the face of so much dispiriting predictability, it is difficult to imagine that the Biden administration, which is so preoccupied with a suite of major domestic problems, would want to engage deeply with the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. But there is a role for robust American diplomacy even now, and there is a way to implement it that could make meaningful changes on the ground in the Middle East and even quiet the mounting criticism at home that President Joe Biden is not sufficiently concerned with a mounting humanitarian crisis and Palestinian deaths in Gaza.

## KP Oli dethroned and returns as Nepal's PM after 3 days

K P Sharma Oli recently lost a vote of confidence in Parliament, leaving the country's politics under uncertainty. However, the tables were turnaround when his party returned to power just after three days. He has become Prime Minister for the third time and the 43rd Prime Minister of Nepal. The Communist Party of Nepal- Unified Marxist-Leninist (CPN-UML), formed a minority government under the leadership of Mr. Oli after the opposition parties failed to form a coalition. This return of Oli to the centre stage will influence the country's future political course. This continuity in the Government will significantly impact the geo-political power balance in Indo- China relationship.

The Kathmandu Valley is now witnessing several diplomatic possibilities of Himalayan proportion. The world has been keenly observing the high-profile ambassadorial visits from India and China, the neighbouring countries. A couple of months before Chinese Defence Minister and State Councillor, Wei Fenghe and Indian Foreign Secretary, Harsh Vardhan Shringla were present in Nepal within a gap of two days. There is ripening speculation of a significant geo-political stance in South Asia and beyond. Interestingly, they have aimed to strengthen the bilateral cooperation with the landlocked Himalayan nation. Both have chosen a time of visit when the country was very sensitive and longstanding internal intra-party dispute was threatening its peace. During Oli's two tenures, there was a strain in Nepal-India relations. Firstly, it was the blockade at a crucial crossing on the border with India, which had halted oil and other essential

supplies blocked-in Nepal obtained from its neighbour, India. This year, ties between Nepal and India hits irregular waters unprecedentedly over the Kalapani border, which Kathmandu now claims to be under its territory. It had also released a new political map showing the disputed regions of Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura as their own, which India rejected. China is already taking advantage of the antagonistic relationship between Nepal and India. China has enhanced its presence in Nepal, increasing its investment and grants, especially after 2006. It is in revenge with India and western countries (including the US) aligning Nepal's pro-democracy parties to bring about radical changes. Several countries have widely criticized India's interest in Nepal's internal politics. Nepal and China have vowed to progress on the trans-Himalayan connectivity projects under Beijing's mega Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Both the countries have announced a new height for Mount Everest, the tallest peak in the world. At a virtual event, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his Nepalese counterpart Pradeep Kumar Gyawali announced the new height of Mount Everest at 8,848.86 meters. Kathmandu said it is an "age-old symbol" of their ties. This announcement does not surprise India since the talks regarding Mt Everest's height were going on for a while between Nepal and China. Instead India feels that the move is an "assertion by the Chinese" in India's immediate neighbourhood and their growing ties with Kathmandu.

**Susmita Ghosh**

## The country is paying for the government's unscientific attitudes

The WhatsApp message from an old acquaintance was usual for the times we are in - friends enquiring about your family's and your welfare. I had tested Covid-positive a few days ago and was in isolation, and replied with updates on my health. The person immediately called and after the usual enquiries, urged me to give up all medicines and start using Coronil instead. Coronil, for the uninitiated, is the "wonder" anti-Covid drug, made by Patanjali, the pharma company of yoga guru Baba Ramdev. The fact that the drug had not gone through the standard procedure for the approval of drugs for human consumption, Phased Control Trials for Safety and Efficacy, does not seem to bother millions of the yoga guru's devotees who have started imbibing it. The lies and half-truths being spread through sections of the media, in fact more effectively through social media portals, seem to have increased its popularity. But why blame uninformed folks like my acquaintance for believing in an unproven and possibly harmful concoction? After all, we have been witnessing an astonishing lack of scientific temper among senior functionaries of the present dispensation.

Ministers (even the PM) have claimed the use of in-vitro fertilisation techniques and plastic surgery in ancient times. Three years ago, a minister in charge of education had objected to the theory of evolution and said that we shouldn't teach it in schools. Another minister, then holding the portfolio of science and technology, had claimed that the Vedas had better scientific theories than Einstein. Last year, the Department of Science and Technology reportedly offered to fund research to study the benefits of cow urine and cow dung, while a former CM has claimed that the cow is the only animal which exhales oxygen. One can cite many such examples. Such lack of scientific temper - indeed, a definite anti-science attitude - might sound funny, even innocuous. But these are not statements on your family WhatsApp group; they are well-thought-out proclamations by people responsible for framing policies. That has disastrous consequences, some of which we are witnessing currently. The fact that many of our politicians, bureaucrats and indeed scientists privately believe in things that are patently unscientific is not something unique to this dispensation.



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# Why the United Nations is stuck on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

The deadly ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the kind of challenge you might think the United Nations could address. After all, it played a major role in establishing Israel as a state more than 70 years ago, what Palestinians refer to as the Nakba or "catastrophe." But it's not doing much on this one.

The UN's powerful 15-nation Security Council is charged with preserving international peace and security. But continuing a decade-long deadlock, that credo has not been upheld. The council has held one public meeting for speeches and at least three private sessions since heavy violence broke out in Israel and the Palestinian territories last week. Humanitarian agencies and NGOs have pleaded for the council to do something. A statement submitted by Norway and backed by other countries appeals for a de-escalation in fighting. But the United States keeps using its veto power to block any formal reaction by the council, saying it prefers to use its own diplomatic powers to calm things down. "The United States has been working tirelessly through diplomatic channels to try

to bring an end to this conflict," US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield has told the council, echoing what other US diplomats are telling ministers around the world. The US is one of just five countries that have veto power over any action they don't like in the council. Those powers exercise control over spheres of influence on a regular basis: Today, it's the US backing Israel. Another day, it's China supporting military rulers in Myanmar. Or Russia stopping council action on troops near Ukraine. Countries big and small know the game. That's why you don't see diplomats throwing themselves atop the historic horseshoe table and demanding the US get with it. Some of the nonpermanent council nations are also fearful of publicly attacking such a powerful country. But frustrations are evident; as one UN diplomat told CNN, "We are also disappointed, like many other countries in the council."

In a somewhat rare public criticism, even China's foreign minister told the council Sunday that the US should join the others to speak up on the Middle East. "The Security Council has not been able to speak in one voice till today because of the



obstruction by one single country. We call upon the United States to shoulder its due responsibilities, take a just position," Foreign Minister Wang Yi said. China has joined a geographic troika trying to get around the US block by issuing their own statement. "Norway, Tunisia and China expressed deep concern about the situation in Gaza and the rising number of civilian casualties, and called for an immediate end of hostilities, full respect for international law, including international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians, especially

children," Norway's UN Ambassador Mona Juul said. The overall 193-country membership of the UN is largely disposed to line up against Israel. Non-council member Pakistan summed up the mood, with Ambassador Munir Akram telling CNN, "It is most regrettable that the Security Council has remained paralyzed in this crisis. The world expects that at the very least the council will call for an immediate halt to the hostilities and prevent the killing of more innocent children, women and men." The US, through emails and phone calls, passed the word Monday that it

would hamstring yet another attempt to pass a statement condemning the violence, though it did agree to another private discussion on Tuesday. But don't get your hopes up. The Security Council has issued many statements on the Middle East over the years, and they rarely stop the so-called parties on the ground from starting trouble or persuade them to end it. These days, even if a Security Council statement were approved, without strong diplomatic backing and a willingness on both sides to lower tensions, the impact will be minimal.

## Covid-19: Don't clamp down on criticism



Last week, Delhi Police arrested 25 people in 13 police stations for putting up posters critical of the Prime Minister and

the Centre's Covid-19 vaccination policy. Nearly 1,800 posters - which read "Modiji humare bachon ki vaccine

videsh kyon bhej diya? (Why did Modi send vaccines meant for our children to foreign countries?) - were found in

several districts in the capital. All the cases were registered under sections 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) of the Indian Penal Code and other sections, including section 3 of the Prevention of Defacement of Property Act. A majority of those arrested were released on bail by Sunday. The police are trying to ascertain if the posters were printed at one press, and whether the order for the posters was given by an individual or any political party. Some news reports have alleged some opposition leaders were behind the posters. The Centre's Covid-19 approach has become a major political faultline. However, this case isn't about the merits of a critique of a government policy (in fact, this newspaper believes that, in principle, vaccine maitri was a good

initiative); or what is an acceptable form of the critique; or who facilitated and encouraged it. It is about the constitutional right of every citizen to have a political view on an issue of national importance and propagate that view as a citizen or a member of a party. A full and free debate, including political narratives and counter-narratives, on Covid-19 will also ensure accountability, enable citizens to articulate and aggregate differences democratically, and provide the system with feedback. From political inputs to public sentiment to expert views, the State needs all the help it can get, and should see a distinct viewpoint as helpful. A clampdown on discussion and debate - even if in the form of political posters - is both wrong and unwise.



# The Sangh-BJP dynamic

***Mohan Bhagwat has sounded a note of caution to the government, but the Sangh broadly stands with the Centre***



The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is grappling with not just the most serious health emergency this country has ever seen, but also an emerging political crisis. For the first time

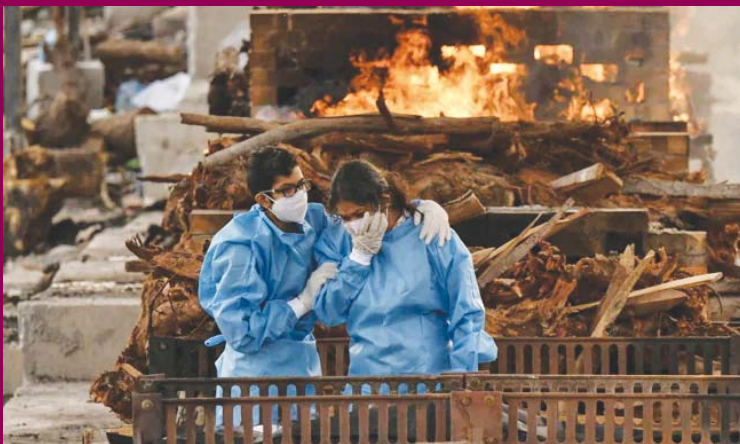
in seven years, there are voices within the ruling party's ideological and political ecosystems asking tough questions to the government about its preparations for the

second wave, the absence of medical infrastructure, and the slow vaccination drive. Supporters of the party - just like other Indian citizens, irrespective of political affiliation - have suffered and lost

loved ones, and there is a defensiveness that has crept into the party's response to the criticism. In this backdrop, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) supremo Mohan Bhagwat, considered the moral guardian of all Sangh affiliates (of which the BJP is one), and who was infected with Sars-CoV-2 himself last month, made his first public remarks on the second wave. Mr Bhagwat claimed that the government, administration and citizens had all become complacent. But that was, broadly, the limits of his criticism, hedged with how society had to share the blame with the State and repeated encouragement to all citizens to stay positive in these difficult times. Mr Bhagwat's statement has been interpreted as either the Sangh taking a muted, but adversarial, position to warn the government, or a supportive approach, which takes into account the prevailing public sentiment, but actually

underscores the need to stay united behind the government in this battle. What appears to be the case, though, is that Mr Bhagwat is accommodating the voices of discontent which have emerged from within the Sangh parivar to alert the government about public sentiment - but without upsetting the broader equation between the Sangh and the party. There remains close ideological synergy between the Sangh and the BJP; Sangh functionaries have benefited from an affiliate being in power; and while the Sangh would like the government to be more proactive, it is clear that it will stick to the government's broad narrative and not cause public embarrassment and add to its challenges. The BJP will be satisfied with this sign of support, and the party clearly hopes that the mood will shift as the second wave ebbs, but both the Sangh and the government must realise that citizens will continue to yearn for accountability for what has happened.

## From Atma Nirbhar to Parmatma Nirbhar



If we look at the events of the past one and a half years, we realize that the misappropriation of the Covid crisis has shattered the very framework of our society. Fourteen months down the line, we are struggling for beds in hospitals, oxygen, medicines and ventilators. And that's not all. Unaccounted for deaths, bodies mixed up in hospitals, mass cremations/burials - and the loss of hope. Though help is being rushed to us from all over the world, those who have lost their loved ones now fear losing more. Can it get any worse? The catch phrase "Atma Nirbhar" has become "Parmatma Nirbhar" (God dependent). With the lockdown came, a migrant crisis was created with workers leaving cities and walking hundreds of miles to reach their villages. Where things were worse because of the absence of any sort of medical facilities. There were no trains for them and those that were subsequently introduced bled these migrants of their last pennies. It was made mandatory that tickets had to be bought. And the "blame game" started between the Railway Minister and states. We will not easily forget that while these trains

were belatedly introduced, for the Kumbh Mela, trains were made easily available.

Organized presumably in keeping with the agenda of Hindutva, the Kumbh Mela turned out to be a giant wrong, held a year ahead of schedule and with crores in attendance. Last year, it was the Tablighi Jamaat that was attacked by sections of people for being super-spreaders, when that congregation collected a fraction of the people allowed to convene for the Kumbh Mela. Is this what we believe to be a balanced society with acceptable statistics? In the same vein, the government explored the possibility of allowing the Amarnath Yatra with thousands of people, while there was bullheaded and mortifying opposition to allowing more than 50 people per mosque to offer daily iftaar during the period of Ramadan. In parallel, BJP's "Mission 200" for Bengal became a greater objective than controlling the pandemic. War of egos, words and all else in between. All the energies of the political stalwarts

were directed at defeating Mamata, and they were spectacularly unsuccessful, in part because of the mishandling of the pandemic.

Next year, we will have more state elections including UP, and the target will be "Mission 300" while people will struggle for beds and oxygen, and the dying will not get a dignified send-off. This is what we have become.

There are other huge mistakes. The Covid vaccination story is the biggest collapse of the government. The world over, people have realized that vaccination is the only game-changer. India watched, pondered and deliberated, while other countries bought vaccines in large orders. And so, while we prided ourselves on being one of the world's largest vaccine manufacturers, we were out of the race. Now we are begging foreign manufacturers to send vaccines to India. It was elementary and uncomplicated arithmetic, we knew that we have to vaccinate more than a billion people. And yet, we bungled it up. When the

government realized that there was going to be an acute shortage, they postponed the administering of the second shot and announced that everybody above 18 would be vaccinated. The universal vaccination program is, however, a mirage in a desert. The Health Minister recently said that there was no shortage of vaccines, however, it is clear that there is no truth in that statement since no slots are available on the much-touted Cowin site paraded as the registering platform. Many states have also made fervent requests to the government citing shortages of vaccines, but to no avail. Those with the first shot need continuity and the others are praying fervently for God's grace till they are vaccinated. The Urban Development Minister in his tweet said that we are spending two times the cost of the Central Vista on health. If he were to be believed, then we would not have people dying from a lack of oxygen and ventilators.





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# Letter To An Indian Healthcare Hero From A US Doctor



India is all too familiar. The trauma of death and the emotional toll of illness is like déjà vu.

Now you stand where I stood. Supplies are short, hospitals in chaos, and bodies burning. You feel a monumental betrayal by the crumbling health care system.

When this peak passes, a sigh of relief will be felt but right now, you're scarred with the wrath of COVID-19. No matter how badly you want to escape the Coronavirus, you can't. Because you have a personal vendetta against it.

When it seems it's over, it's not. This humanitarian crisis is unfolding in various phases around the world with new highly infectious variants emerging with a cure still absent and vaccination efforts slow. Your fear is that it may come back again. This vicious cycle of surges needs to end. Vaccination is the only glimmer of hope but the world hesitates and conspiracies circulate. Vengeance consumes

you. The impulse to fight is visceral.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) will occur but you will experience post traumatic growth as well. When your heart can't get bigger, it does. When you don't want anything to do with COVID-19, you can't help but do more to fight against it. You will want to quit but you can't. You will volunteer even when exhausted. You will find a louder voice that didn't previously exist to preach science. You will advocate for vaccines and speak about public health in a way you never have before, because now it's truly personal. It's a matter of survival versus 3.3 million deaths. The work always mattered but somehow now it's a ticking bomb and only your words or actions can deactivate it because healthcare heroes are the trusted messenger.

It becomes an addiction that you pray goes away. But something from within energizes you to keep working. When you first put

on the white coat, it was a moment of pride. Now, whether it's on or off, you are always on. Dear Indian Healthcare Hero, keep going. You'll make it through and know an army of white coats around the world stands by you. Allow those tears to flow, anger to rage and frustration to scream because these are the only things that will heal you. You are part of a sacred tribe that never really relied on each other but this pandemic has bound us together through the unbreakable bond of tragedy. Vaccines have brought this pandemic under control in the United States and it can for India too. We've found our voice for public health advocacy and we won't stop shouting until we are heard. We can't stop, because the COVID-filled world depends on us. Vaccines can and will end this pandemic globally. The public must trust us as we risk our lives for their well-being. This is why we keep marching like soldiers until the gruesome war we never signed up for is over.

Dear Indian Healthcare Hero, We are methodical, hopeful and optimistic. We don't give up easily and thrive under pressure.

But COVID-19 is something we never trained for. One minute a patient is breathing, the next he is gasping for life. No amount of delivering bad news would prepare you for this. I've been there. You longed to see your patients' faces and for them to see your smile. But a face-shield and mask divide you. The social cues have disappeared from the art of medicine. We went from

wearing white coats to hazmat suits.

The world is shaken with fear. So are you, but you keep going. Struggling to breathe behind the PPE, you often feel numb. Your ears hurt from the desperate cries of mothers, fathers, siblings, children. You try to sleep at night, but you keep seeing their faces.

I too would see patients' faces, after working in the COVID wards at the epicenter of the pandemic in the worst hit country at the time, the United States. What is occurring in

## Vaccine Best Weapon Against Covid And Its Secondary Effects



perspective on changes in care because of the treatments they offer for cancer and other diseases. Here are just a few examples:

GlaxoSmithKline Plc: The British drugmaker found that since last summer (the third quarter), debulking surgeries

procedures used to reduce tumor masses in ovarian-cancer patients - had fallen 20%, which impacted the number of patients initiating chemotherapy, according to Luke Miels, president of global pharmaceuticals. That in turn had a knock-on effect in reducing the use of its drug Zejula, which is used in patients after they have had surgery and chemotherapy with a significant survival benefit.

Merck & Co.: "In oncology, since the start of the pandemic, there has been an unfortunate reduction in the level of cancer screenings, which has resulted

in fewer patient diagnoses and reduced new patient starts for many oncology agents, particularly in areas like lung cancer," noted Frank Clyburn, executive vice president of human health. This impacted the use of Merck's most important drug, Keytruda, which has breathed new life into the therapy of many cancers by unleashing the patients' own immune system to attack tumors.

AbbVie Inc.: The drug giant cited "lower new patient starts" in treating chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL), with the market remaining "below pre-Covid levels." CLL is a slow long-term blood cancer that has a high response rate to drugs such as AbbVie and J&J's Imbruvica and AstraZeneca Plc's Calquence. Further, a U.K. study by Cancer Research U.K. and Cardiff University found that 45% of those with potential cancer symptoms didn't seek medical advice between March and August of 2020. Combined with the disruption to routine cancer screenings caused by the pandemic and delays such as

those described by the drug giants, these findings suggest there could be a longer-term health impact, with a potential higher incidence of cancer including late-stage cancer for years to come - all stemming from those crisis months of 2020. The good news, for the drugmakers but also public health, is that the pharmaceutical companies said they expected that rates of diagnosis and treatment would return toward pre-Covid levels as vaccinations helped to reduce the health threat, allowing a return to more normal routines such as checkups. But the grim pandemic statistics are a reminder of what's at stake in the virus fight and the wider health risks that any fresh outbreaks of Covid-19 would pose. The bottom line: For the love of your family and friends who are at risk of cancer and other serious diseases, if not your own protection, go and get yourself and your family vaccinated as soon as possible. This is the best weapon we have against the pandemic and its plethora of secondary effects.

The Covid-19 vaccination rollout has gained momentum in many parts of the world, increasing hope - despite hotspots in India and elsewhere - that we have the tools to tame the virus and the pandemic. But even in places such as the U.S., where mass inoculations have helped bring down infections, hospitalizations and deaths, significant patches of the population still say they have no intention of ever getting a shot.

The problem with choosing not to take a vaccine goes far beyond personal protection; it's also about protecting our

communities so we do not have to go through the secondary, but very serious, effects of the pandemic again - quite apart from the inconveniences of lockdowns. I am talking specifically about the toll it has taken on people who delayed doctor's visits, screenings and treatments and may have missed early diagnoses of diseases such as new or recurrent cancer, allowing conditions to fester.

The evidence of this was clear in the latest round of earnings calls by some of the biggest pharmaceutical companies, which have a ground-level



# To Deal With Third Wave, Government Needs To Be More Transparent

At a time when the country is going through its worst crisis since Partition, we must also contend with a crisis of confidence: no one believes the government, its numbers, and actions.

Mindless claims that we have reached 170+m vaccinations faster anyone else, of 180 districts (of a total of nearly 700) have no cases. Who cares? Our population is 1.3 billion - has 11% had one shot? How long will it take for the rest? And what about the 538 other districts with a high positivity rate?

Why have three states - Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan - got more than their share of oxygen, Remdesivir and Vaccines? (this is based on the government's filings in court). Perhaps Maharashtra's outbreak justifies its allocation, but what about Gujarat and Rajasthan? Are they under-reporting cases as local media claims in near-daily reports - and is this why get are getting more? Or is there another explanation for why Gujarat and Rajasthan get the same allocation as UP?

The government has the means to be transparent. The Cowin

website is so granular that you can track the number of vaccines given on a day by the hour at a centre anywhere in the country. Let's also have a public website showing the movement of oxygen, the exact distribution of all foreign aid, of crucial drugs like Remdesivir. It isn't that hard - every truck today has GPS and can be tracked. Similarly, there is so much talk of the 160+ oxygen plants sanctioned last year but where are they? There should a site sharing the daily progress for these as well as the new ones that were recently cleared. With thousands monitoring these sites, there will be no room for politics.

On vaccines, we seem to have lost the early wins and need to seriously look at what we are doing.

As some states have suggested, split the Cowin site by state, with separate servers to bring down the load so the site doesn't keep crashing. Separately, the current system for the 18-45 age group is absolutely wasteful. Since they have to register and are not allowed walk-ins, they have to try and log in everyday to try and find a slot. Why can't it be simplified:

register for a place/district/area and you are put in a queue. (Intezaar keeje). Whenever your chosen location has a slot, you'll get an SMS. It will stop millions of the most productive age group spending hours everyday chasing the few slots available.

Moderna, Pfizer and Johnson and Johnson have been given to vast numbers in the US and UK. Both these countries have large India/south Asian ethnic populations, who would have received one of these doses. That should be enough evidence to allow their emergency use immediately. And since no one in the world seems to be really using Johnson and Johnson, we should incentivize them hugely, because as a one-shot vaccine, its usage can enable us to double the pace of vaccination. In fact, incentives are needed all vaccine manufacturers to step up production. We need to have more than 250 million doses a month, that's four times the current production and 50% more than the target for July. Only at that level will we be able to fight off the third wave. With the Finance Ministry saying it has set aside ? 35,000 crore for vaccines,



it can afford to open its potli and encourage manufacturers to come in and mass produce. We are going to need vaccines for a long time. Covid mutations aren't going away in a hurry, so we will need reinoculations next year and beyond.

Genome sequencing also needs big-time funding. Over a year after the pandemic broke out, our ability to genome sequence is running at a level close to or below that of Bangladesh.

With numbers in some key states showing a decline, the inevitable question that arises is how do we open up after being locked down in most parts of the country? We cannot go back to the open-for-business model we followed in February until we have

reached a vaccination number pf close 700-800 million. If we do, the third wave is going to hit us very hard. We have to recognize that Covid is an airborne disease and closed quarters are a recipe for disaster until the vaccination campaign reaches an appropriate number - and this number has to be factored in by office, factory, business or district.

It's essential to recognize that outdoors is safest. (NYT reports that less than 1% of cases of Covid have been in open air; though whether they have looked at the transmission after India's political and religious rallies is not clear. We don't need confined, air-conditioned spaces like malls, cinema halls and even restaurants.

## We, The Pained People Of India



If pain is personal and individual, which is so often the case, it can drag us down a solitary hole. But when it becomes shared and collective, pain can lift us out, extracting us from solitude into the company of those who are suffering as well.

For days, I nursed my pain deep within me. Being the elder son who had to look after the ill parents, mourning the loss of their loved son-in-law to Covid,

I didn't have the time and space to process my emotions. I had to be strong for my sister and her two teen children who lost their partner and father in the cruelest fashion. I couldn't cry in front of them. Could I?

I vented one day in a Facebook post. I had to recount each and every horrid detail that I and my sister went through to clear the burden in my heart. That post was me crying out loud. Writing, as they say, Is cathartic.

Then came a deluge of calls, messages from friends, from people I know, as also from total strangers. Thousands poured their hearts out. They showed support, they shared my pain. I got some of the most poignant and emotional messages from people that I had lost touch with or haven't met or spoken to in years. I welled up reading some of those.

Many shared their own horrid experiences and what they have been going through. I felt their pain. We became one.

Our timelines and inboxes are a tide of grief and suffering. Who would have thought that condolences, RIP, broken heart emojis would become the top prompts on our phone keypads. All around us is a deluge of pain, desperation. Everyone is overwhelmed. We ought to share it. Tell others about ours and listen to theirs.

No one will emerge unscarred

from this pandemic. Everyone has been hit in some way.

My heart cries for kids orphaned in a sudden, brutal stroke. A dear friend, who is part of a counseling collective, was asked to talk to a 5-year-old who lost both his parents to Covid. The child tells her that everyone around is mourning and hasn't had the time to talk to him. "But I have lost my parents, no?" Just five. What can anyone tell that boy to make him feel better?

I cry with a professor friend whose husband is battling for his life in the ICU. She couldn't properly mourn a friend she just lost. "I have to stay strong for my son and husband," she tells me sobbing over the phone. I let her cry for some time. There are a few people in front of whom you can cry your heart out; for others, who look up to you for strength, you put on a brave face.

What do you tell a single mother

who loses her only son, just 17, to Covid? Will any words ever bring any closure for her? You can only share and feel her pain. A very close relative looks after a special needs child at home while his wife is struggling for life in ICU. He himself is unwell, but cannot think about his own health. The child asks him "Is mamma going to become a star?" Thankfully, her mother came back home.

On a video call arranged by a good doctor, a young kid sings "Tera mujhse hai pehle ka naata koi..." to his mom breathing her last. Final goodbyes, no matter how painful, are very important. Can you ever listen to that song again without shedding a tear?

A 19-year-old nephew, who recently recovered from Covid, goes to donate plasma in the middle of the night to a total stranger after an appeal on a social media platform.



# Is the Gates divorce any of our business?

Bill and Melinda Gates, darlings of the philanthropy world, are suddenly under the lurid gaze of a public hungry for more details about the onrushing divorce of one of the world's very wealthiest couples. What's coming out as journalists investigate doesn't look great for Bill Gates. According to reports in The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal, most of the details of which are attributed to anonymous sources, Gates made advances to women he met on the job, had an affair with a Microsoft employee 20 years ago, made questionable decisions when it came to his money manager's sexual harassment case, and spent a little too much time palling around with the convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Melinda Gates, on the other hand, seems to have been an advocate for women in private as well as in public, and even when it was inconvenient for her husband, illustrating the importance of having people who actually live their values in positions of power. Their divorce touches on

several of our most salient cultural and political issues, and puts the focus on some of our most rapidly-changing social norms.

But how much of this is the public's business?

The couple's impending split, and Bill Gates' reported behavior in particular, walk into a gray zone of post-#MeToo reporting and discourse. "Bill Gates Had a Reputation for Questionable Behavior Before Divorce," the New York Times headline announced -- not illegal or predatory behavior, just "questionable." The behavior, according to the Times account (citing "people with direct knowledge of his overtures"), involved Bill Gates having an affair two decades ago and awkwardly asking other women out to dinner.

Of the 2000 affair (which prompted an internal investigation in 2019 by Microsoft, followed by Gates' resignation from the board of directors), a spokesperson for Gates told the WSJ, "there was an affair almost 20 years ago which ended amicably. Bill's

decision to transition off the board was in no way related to this matter." The other women he asked out were reportedly uncomfortable and either ignored him or said no, and there apparently were no personal or professional repercussions. In one instance, Bill Gates reportedly told a woman he was pursuing that she could "pretend it never happened" if she asked him out. She reportedly did just that. Gates' spokeswoman has objected to the coverage, telling the Times, "It is extremely disappointing that there have been so many untruths published about the cause, the circumstances and the timeline of Bill Gates' divorce," adding that the "claim of mistreatment of employees is also false," and that "the rumors and speculation surrounding Gates' divorce are becoming increasingly absurd and it's unfortunate that people who have little to no knowledge of the situation are being characterized as 'sources.'" Gates' alleged behavior may put him squarely in the category of a lout breaking his marital vows -- although it's



unclear whether his wife knew or cared about his behavior, or what the rules of their marriage were -- but it doesn't appear to put him in the same category as a Harvey Weinstein or other sexual predators unmasked by the #MeToo movement who made women's careers contingent on offering them sexual favors. Complicating matters is the fact that behavior characterized as questionable hewed closely to Bill Gates' approach in meeting and marrying Melinda Gates in the first place: She was a 23-year-old fresh out of an MBA program; he was in his early 30s and her boss, and he pursued her at work. That became part of their

meet-cute origin story. In one telling, this is evidence of "questionable" behavior to come: a 30-something boss pursuing a 20-something new employee, using his position for romantic gain. In another, though, the judgment of his alleged actions is evidence of an emerging streak of puritanism among progressives, the repurposing of a consensual relationship that culminated in marriage as exploitative because it involved a boss and an underling. A big difference between now and then, of course, is that Bill Gates was single when he pursued Melinda French, and married when he pursued other women. And that is indeed a moral wrong.

## Andrew Yang's Israel tweet shows what's changed in NYC politics



As the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was growing more intense and deadly last week, Andrew Yang, a leading candidate for the Democratic nomination in New York City's mayoral race, shifted his focus to the Middle East. "I'm standing with the people of Israel who are coming under bombardment attacks, and condemn the Hamas terrorists," he tweeted. "The people of NYC will always stand with our brothers and sisters in Israel who face down

terrorism and persevere."

That sentiment would not have been out of place in a tweet, press release or on-the-record comment by almost every major candidate for mayor of New York since the founding of the state of Israel in 1948. New York City has a large Jewish population of almost a million and deep connections to Israel. Yang's tweet may have been based on genuine sentiment or it may have been pandering, but for most of the last more than 70 years, it

would have been good politics.

In 2021, things seem to be different. Yang's tweet was immediately attacked by Dianne Morales, one of his Democratic opponents, as well as by many other New York City progressives, including Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Morales has expressed a degree of support for the Palestinian people, and condemnation of Israeli actions, that would have been unimaginable from a major mayoral candidate even a decade ago. At the same time, other candidates in the race, such as Kathryn Garcia, who recently received the endorsements of The New York Times and the Daily News, and Scott Stringer, the only Jewish major candidate for mayor, offered support for Israel tempered by nuance and expressions of sympathy for the Palestinians. Two other candidates, Eric Adams, one of Yang's closest rivals, and Ray McGuire, who is on the fringe of the race, offered strong pro-Israel statements similar to Yang's.

The fact that Yang's statement, on an issue with little bearing on the future of New York City, generated so much controversy, and the breadth of views candidates have on the conflict, is part of a broader development in New York City politics. In essence, the city appears to be moving away from the ethnic tribalism that has defined the city for decades. In most recent mayoral elections, candidates have sought to consolidate their ethnic base and build out a coalition grounded in identity-based appeals to Jews, Italian Americans, Irish Americans, Latinos, African Americans, LGBTQ voters and others. Similarly, many primaries looked more like censuses with African American, Latinos, white Catholics, Jews voting as a bloc for candidates who in many cases shared their heritage. For much of this time, it was expected that candidates for mayor would visit the "three I's" of Israel, Italy and Ireland, during election years or risk losing one of the major ethnic groups in New York. Those days

are now firmly in the past.

None of this year's candidates this year are running these kinds of identity-based campaigns. Morales, who is on the left flank of the race, would be the first Latinx mayor of New York, but that has not been the focus of her campaign. Although Adams has a strong base among African American voters in Brooklyn, his campaign is not based primarily on appeals to African American voters, not least because he is one of four Black candidates, along with Morales, McGuire and Maya Wiley, in the race. Yang's status as a leading candidate -- he was the clear frontrunner until the race tightened last week -- is only possible in post-tribal New York. While Yang has made efforts to become the choice of New York's sizable Orthodox Jewish voting bloc, the rest of his campaign has been built around name recognition from his presidential campaign, his upbeat personality and his penchant for big ideas, albeit ideas that his critics assert are rarely fleshed out.



# The Great Unmasking is finally upon us, but not everyone is happy

For young Americans, normal healthy people, the risk of dying from the coronavirus is still minuscule. For example, a typical 22-year-old in New York has around a 0.6 chance out of a million of dying from the virus. Your odds of drowning in a bathtub or being hit by lightning are significantly higher than that. So it's a very low risk. And that's good news, you'd think all of us would be happy to hear it.

Well, the Great Unmasking is finally upon us! But not everyone is happy about it. Suddenly, in neighborhoods littered with signs about BLM and climate change, we have a new public health emergency on our hands - it's a mental health crisis.

Amazingly, many Americans don't want to stop wearing masks. They want to continue to hide behind paper. Why? There's no science behind this. It's a neurosis, just like obsessive hand-washing. But it appears to be spreading fast, like its own virus. Just last Thursday, an anchor on "CBS This Morning"



may not remember a time before we were all wearing masks and remaining far apart. It's going to take a bit of time for them to emotionally unravel this tangle of anxiety." Is there anything sadder than that? Other outlets are noticing the same phenomenon. The New York Times ran a piece on people refusing to get rid of their masks. The story began by focusing on one man, Joe Glickman. According to the Times, Glickman wears an "N95 mask over his face and tugs a cloth mask on top of it" whenever he goes to the store. He then "pulls on a pair of goggles." Joe Glickman has been vaccinated.

admitted that she, too, is suffering from debilitating anxiety at the thought of showing her face in public:

GAYLE KING: Dr Fauci please help us with the mask situation. I know we were told we don't have to wear it outside but I'm telling you, I was in New York where I live, walking down the street I just stopped a random lady and I said have you been vaccinated and she

said yes. I said "Me too. Why are we wearing our masks?" and she goes "I don't know." I said me too, ma'am, me too. I think we all feel either guilty or we feel it's not time. Monkey see monkey do. Do you really think it's ok?

This is not an isolated phenomenon. CNN just published a piece by a psychologist named John Duffy. Duffy describes his patients' "anxious nightmares"

over going maskless. Some patients, he reported, "feel obsessive or compulsive about mask-wearing and distance, and are concerned that obsession will not simply abate because of the CDC announcement." The announcement telling them they don't have to do this. Duffy added that children are also suffering from the condition. It's the saddest part. "Some of our youngest kids

He's also had the coronavirus, so he has natural antibodies which are more effective than the vaccine. He still plans to wear his multiple face coverings at least for the next five years. Now, we're not mocking him - obviously, our hearts go out to him. The problem is there are a lot of people like him in the country. So what do we do about it?

# The standoff in West Asia continues

**At the moment, a recommitment to a "peace process" seems unlikely. Arab countries which normalised relations with Israel don't have the heft to intercede effectively**

Israel's prime minister (PM), Benjamin Netanyahu's remark that an end to hostilities with the Palestinians was not likely soon is alarming, even as many countries including India have urged restraint. The only credible restraining force on Israel, which has engaged in heavy aerial bombardment after Hamas, which controls the Gaza strip, launched rocket attacks on it over a week ago, is the United States. However, the Joe Biden administration has not gone beyond calling for a de-escalation in violence. Over 198 people have been killed in Gaza, with 10 casualties in Israel. The violence comes at a time when the political situation in Israel and Palestine is unstable. The PM's position is weak, while the Palestinian National Authority has lost ground to a violent Hamas. Both sides to the conflict



have resorted to extreme support. At the moment, a process" seems unlikely. Arab countries which normalised

relations with Israel don't have the heft to intercede effectively. While Israel must take the lion's share of the blame for the casualties in this round of violence, the Hamas has done Palestinians no favours with its rocket attacks and its inability to provide economic growth or any other benefits to Gaza's beleaguered population. Israel's hopes that it will break the back of Hamas with this round of bombardment are not likely to be realised, going by past experience. But what is clear is no third party has a quick-fix to the problem. The only hope is for the Palestinian Authority to reassert itself under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas and for Israel to realise that this violence may only breed further alienation and anger among Palestinians.



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countries than we had used for our own people. We took pride in the fact that India was the pharmacy of the world and our self-sufficiency was never in doubt. Now that the vaccine drive has collapsed, and people in India are criticising the exports, the government and BJP spokespersons are bending over backwards to claim that the bulk of exports were made under licensing agreements, and there was no option except to export these quantities. These are typical BJP tactics: tails I win and head you lose. So, when it suits them, they will take credit for helping the world as a Vishwa Guru, and cite international legal obligations when it does not. The arrest of activists in Delhi for putting up posters against the PM's decision to export vaccines represents the diminishing space for questioning the government. The Prime Minister lapped up the undeserved praise. Did he say then, as is being claimed now, that the exports were on account of legal agreements? Boasting and celebrating too soon is part of the Modi DNA.

Today, Covid is raging all over the country. In Yogi's Uttar Pradesh,

there is no dignity even in death; dead bodies are being thrown in the Ganga; Yogi's famed administrative skills, like those of the Prime Minister and Home Minister, have been exposed like never before. Everyone agrees that the antidote to the virus, apart from masking and physical distancing, is the vaccine. The PM has made his singular contribution to this effort by promptly putting his photograph on the vaccination certificate. The carefully-nurtured image of the Prime Minister as a tough, no-nonsense person with a 56"-chest, which he himself claimed he possessed, has been fully exposed in this crisis because it was nothing but bombast. The Home Minister, equally artificially propped up, has been equally exposed. After the miserable defeat of the party in West Bengal, he seems to have vanished from the scene. The general feeling is that India today is a country without a government. The Indian media, still reeling under fear, has been muted so far, but the foreign media has gone hammer and tongs for the government hammer. Modi's international image, cultivated so carefully, is

in tatters. I feel diminished as an Indian when I find the country's Prime Minister under such vicious attack abroad.

Modi seems to be losing the social media war too. Earlier, when I issued tweets critical of the Prime Minister, I was abused left, right and centre by the 'bhakts'. Now, there are many more likes than abuses. The tide is turning. There is a saying that those who live by the sword die by the sword. In this case, the apt saying should be that those who live by untruths in social media are finished when truth overtakes falsehood.

But my concern is not Prime Minister Modi. People like him will come and go. My concern is the suffering of the people of this country. So, what is the way out? Today, we have an elected government supposedly under a strong Prime Minister, but he has been found wanting. Can an enterprising Chief Minister take the lead, call a meeting of like-minded Chief Ministers and chart out a course of action to tackle the pandemic? The states should not depend on the government of India even for funds and spend from their own treasury.

White House advisor Dr Anthony Fauci, an internationally recognised authority on Covid-19, told a US senate panel earlier this month, "The reason that India is in such dire straits now is that they had an original surge and made the incorrect assumption that they were finished with it, and what happened, they opened up prematurely and wound up having a surge right now that we are all very well aware of is extremely devastating." He added, "One of the important things is don't ever underestimate the situation." Dr Fauci expressed his opinion in measured words. But what was the government of India doing until then? In mid-January, India launched its vaccination drive

against Covid. On January 22, the Prime Minister said, "On the world's biggest need today, we are completely self-reliant. Not just that, India is also helping out many countries with vaccines." On January 28, Modi told the World Economic Forum that India would assist other countries with vaccines. He added that India had saved the world by defeating Covid. The BJP office-bearers described his leadership as 'visionary' in a meeting on February 21. The government of India instructed its representative at the UN to tell the world that we were not only vaccinating our own people but had exported our vaccines to 70 countries. He said in fact, we had exported more vaccines to other

## Mohan Bhagwat's Criticism Shows The New Modi-RSS Equation

Is it true that the RSS is not happy with the overall handling of the Corona crisis?" I asked a senior RSS functionary. His laconic reply: "But what can it do?" His answer sums up the state of affairs in the RSS. It is in a state of utter helplessness. The RSS leadership which, with lot of fanfare, decided to project Narendra Modi as the BJP's Prime Ministerial candidate in 2013 now finds itself feeling dejected. RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's recent statement can be taken in that context. At an event meant to generate "positivity", he said, "We are facing this situation because, whether it was the government, administration or public, everyone dropped their guard after the first wave despite indications from doctors". He added, "We will not be scared. We shall stand like a rock." Then he quoted from religious scriptures and talked about

Samudra Manthan (churning of the ocean) and how the churning produces nectar and poison. In his own style, he gave weight to the accusations of the Opposition that the Modi Government ignored the advice of the scientific community that a second wave of Corona would hit the country and it would be more lethal than the earlier one, but the Modi Government chose to ignore them, made no plan to contain the spread of the virus and that their priority was winning elections rather than saving lives.

The same day, another RSS leader, Ram Madhav, who till recently was serving as General Secretary of the BJP, and has now gone back to his original organisation, wrote a column for The Indian Express. If one reads between the lines, Madhav was critical of the government functioning. He wrote, "Initially, the government looked like 'a deer in the headlights,' as one commentator put it. But it has

come out of that and is engaged full throttle in handling the challenge. A little more transparency, a little more engagement with the public by the political leadership and a little more openness to constructive criticism and enlightened expert opinion from outside the government would further help the government's efforts. After all, the lives of millions of people are at stake." Obliquely, he blamed the Modi government for the mess and spelt out the reasons including the lack of transparency. In the RSS, every word is uttered after much internal debate and discussion. Therefore, the words of Bhagwat and Madhav cannot be taken lightly or wished away as off-the-cuff remarks. A BJP leader told me that the top RSS leadership believes that the government has landed itself in a mess and this allows it to make a point that it has wanted to for some time: that the concept of collective



leadership has been hijacked by the extreme centralization of the decision-making process so that even senior ministers are not consulted on crucial issues; only two people decide all matters. Those who were active in the organisation when Atal Bihari Vajpayee was Prime Minister feel that despite similar murmurs then, the government was at least open to suggestions, in particular from its ideological friends. In 2014, Modi needed the RSS to win the election and become Prime Minister. And the RSS leadership

felt that in Modi, they had found a perfect replacement to Advani, the original Hindu Hriday Samrat. Nobody could question his Hindutva. Since 2007, he had been busy branding himself as the Vikas Purush. Throughout the campaign, he did not utter a word which could be construed as 'communal'. The RSS was ecstatic with his thumping victory, but forgot that during his regime in Gujarat, the RSS and its subsidiary organisations were reduced to non-entities.





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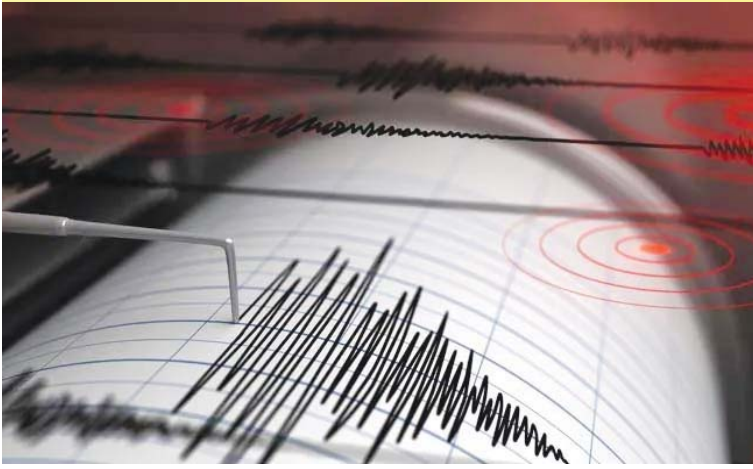
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# Injuries Reported As 5.8 Magnitude Earthquake Jolts Nepal



The centre said that Wednesday's quake was an aftershock of the 2015 Gorkha quake.

Around 20 small tremors have been felt until 10 AM since the first quake hit the district.

According to Inspector Jagdish Regmi of the District Police Office, six people have been injured in the quake.

Three people were injured after a wall of a house gave way while the other three were injured while running away, he said.

All the injured were rushed to a nearby hospital in Lamjung

where their condition is reported to be normal.

The Himalayan Times reported that a woman was found half-buried as her house caved in. She was asleep when the quake struck. Locals rescued her and rushed her to a hospital.

The report said that the people expressed anger over the police's lack of concern after the incident.

Most of the houses damaged in the incident were made of mud, stones and corrugated sheets, the police said.

The jolt was also felt in

neighbouring districts of Manang, Kaski and Gorkha.

The people have come out of their homes due to recurring aftershocks, the report said, adding that they are seen without masks, increasing the risk of virus transmission during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

In April 2015, a devastating earthquake of 7.8-magnitude rocked Nepal, killing nearly 9,000 people and wounding nearly 22,000 others. It also damaged over 800,000 houses and schools.

(News Agencies)-A 5.8-magnitude earthquake struck Nepal's central Lamjung district on Wednesday, injuring at least six persons and damaging dozens of houses, officials said. The epicentre of the quake, which occurred at 5:42 AM (05:27 IST), was located at Marshyangdi Rural Municipality of the district.

The 5.8-magnitude quake damaged around two dozen houses and left six people injured, The Kathmandu Post reported.

According to the National Earthquake Monitoring and Research Centre, two tremors of

magnitudes 4.0 and 5.3 were also recorded in the district later at 8:16 AM and 8:26 AM.

## Philippine President Bars Ministers From Commenting On South China Sea Dispute

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has banned his cabinet from speaking out in public on the South China Sea dispute, after key ministers engaged in a war of words with Beijing. Tensions between Manila and Beijing over the waterway -- which China claims almost entirely -- flared in March after hundreds of Chinese boats were spotted inside the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone. While Duterte has been reluctant to confront China over the issue, his foreign and defence secretaries have repeatedly criticised Beijing for its refusal to withdraw the ships from the disputed waters. Earlier this month, Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin tweeted an expletive-tagged demand for the Chinese



vessels to leave the area. His online swearing prompted a rebuke from Beijing and Locsin later apologised to his Chinese counterpart. "This is my order now to the cabinet... to refrain (from) discussing this West Philippine Sea (issue) with... anybody," Duterte said in a recorded speech late Monday, using the local name for the sea. "If we have to talk, we talk only among us," Duterte told several cabinet members, including Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana who previously described the presence of Chinese boats as an "incursion". Presidential spokesman Harry Roque was allowed to address the issue in public, Duterte added.

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## Pakistan police foil mob attempt to lynch blasphemy suspect



(News Agencies)- Pakistani police said Tuesday they foiled an attempt by a mob to lynch a blasphemy suspect recently arrested on charges of insulting Islam. The mob stormed the Golra police station on the outskirts of Islamabad on Monday night, after police refused to hand over the suspect to the crowd outside for punishment, local police chief Asim Ghaffar said. The suspect, Shaukat Ali, was unharmed while six police officials were slightly injured in the attack, Ghaffar said. Aali is accused of sharing anti-Islam content on social media. Blasphemy carries the death penalty in Pakistan. Rights groups say that in this country, blasphemy allegations have often been used to intimidate religious minorities and settle personal scores. A Punjab governor in Islamabad was shot and killed by his own guard in 2011, after he defended a Christian woman, Aasia Bibi, who was accused of blasphemy. She was acquitted after spending eight years on death row and left Pakistan for Canada to join her family after receiving threats.

## Pakistani MP calls for use of nuclear weapons against Israel

(News Agencies)- Reactions across the Muslim world to Operation Guardian of the Walls in Gaza have varied between burning hatred to deafening silence, for example in Azerbaijan. In Pakistan, however, even the customary blind hatred toward Israel has reached new heights.

On Tuesday, Pakistani MP Maulana Chitrali said on camera that his country should launch a "jihad" (holy war) against Israel. "This is the only option for Pakistan," Chitrali said. He didn't stop there, though, and called on his country to use its nuclear weapons against the Jewish state. "Did we make atomic bombs to show them in a museum? We don't need missiles, atomic bombs or a huge army if they can't be used to liberate Palestine and Kashmir," he said.



Chitrali's comments came after Pakistani Ambassador to the United Nations Munir Akram on Sunday called on the UN Security Council to initiate steps to "hold Israel accountable for its war crimes and crimes against humanity."

"Above all, the Security Council must promote the full implementation of the relevant UN resolutions especially for the realization of the two-state solution through the

establishment of a viable, independent and contiguous Palestinian state with pre-1967 borders and Al-Quds Al-Sharif (Jerusalem) as its capital," Akram told the Security Council.

At the root of Pakistan's foreign policy in regards to Israel is Islamabad's absolute dependency on investments from Turkey, which has been spearheading an extreme anti-Israel stance in international bodies.

## Muslim mob attacks Christian villagers in Pakistan



The local deputy superintendent of police visited the site on May 16 and assured locals of registering a first information report under Section 452 (house trespass after preparation for hurt, assault or wrongful restraint).

Christian activists have been sharing disturbing footage of the attack in Faisalabad Diocese on social media.

"They broke the locks, grabbed our hair and pulled us out one by one. Young girls were assaulted and left with torn clothes," stated a woman lying among the pile of wounded villagers with fractured bones.

According to Father Khalid Mukhtar, parish priest of St. Thomas Catholic Church in Chak 5, the attack was sparked following a May 14 attack on Catholic youngsters.

"The boys were cleaning the church when one of the Muslim landlords, passing by the church, accused them of throwing dust on him. They attacked the boys and then raided 15 houses of our

community the next day," said the priest.

"The weakness on the part of the administration encourages such attacks on religious minorities. The culprits are usually let off scot-free. Religion is used to settle personal scores. The locals fear another attack."

Father Mukhtar conducted a meeting of parish committee members on May 16 at St. Thomas Church, gathered statements of the injured and filed a complaint at the local police station.

In a Facebook post, Father Khalid Rashid Asi, director of the Diocesan Commission for Harmony and Interfaith Dialogue in Faisalabad Diocese, termed it an act of terrorism. It has been shared by more than 50.

Last month two Christian nurses were detained by police after a first information report under section 295-B of the blasphemy law was made by a doctor at Civil Hospital, Faisalabad, who accused them of scratching a sticker inscribed with "Durood

Shareef," a salutation for the Prophet Muhammad. A similar mob gathered at the hospital where a staff member wounded one of the nurses in a knife attack.

In March, an Ahmadi place of worship in Garmola Virkan village in Punjab province was attacked by a mob of clerics with the help of police. They demolished the dome, minarets of the building and desecrated the Kalma (the Islamic proclamation of faith) inscribed on it.

Church leaders and human rights groups say blasphemy allegations have often been used to intimidate religious minorities and settle personal scores.

Pastor Irfan James condemned the recent attacks.

"A famous televangelist, visiting abroad, told foreign news agencies that he loves Muslims and Muslims love him. I wish someone would make such love to him. We face persecution in Pakistan every day. This is our reality," he said.

(News Agencies)- Mangta Masih lost his thumb when a mob attacked his house, a day after Catholic youths were beaten in a Muslim-majority village in Okara district of Punjab province in Pakistan. "We hid our women inside while they tried to break in. One of them grabbed me from behind and another struck with a sickle blade. I tried to prevent the blow with my right hand. I fell down and they kept beating us with batons," the 45-year-old laborer told UCA News. "They were armed with glass bottles, stones, axes, batons and bricks. Others used stairs to climb to our roofs and started breaking our furniture. We pleaded to spare the women but the attack continued for half an hour." Fear has gripped 80 Christian families of Chak 5 village after a mob of more than 200 Muslims raided their dwellings on May 15. Masih, not a surname but used to identify a male Pakistani as a Christian, is one of eight Christians with fractured bones.



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# We have to think big like BJP to succeed, says Congress leader Salman Khurshid

(News Agencies)- Senior Congress leader Salman Khurshid wants his party to think big like the BJP, and refuse to accept "pessimistic view" that the outfit has now become too small, weak and cannot regain its lost ground.

"One take-away that I have from [West] Bengal and Assam [Assembly elections] is: You should never, never accept that you are too small, you are too weak and that you can't make it big in a particular region or State", he told PTI in an interview on Monday.

"I think, BJP has done that [think-big strategy] where they had no existence at all. They tried to do it in other places where they still don't have any existence," Khurshid said. 'Congress should not accept pessimistic view' The Congress, the former Union Minister insisted, should not

accept the "pessimistic view" that it has lost too much ground and it cannot now regain.

"I think with determination and confidence, we can and that's what we should do." Khurshid agreed with analysis in some quarters that there was tactical

"...what do you do with it [tactical voting] as a party for the future, it's something that we will have to consider".

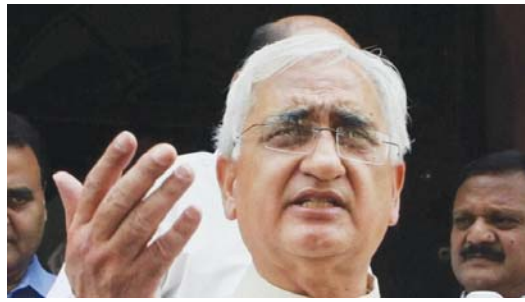
Khurshid was asked about his take on assessment by some of his party leaders who blamed a tie-up with Indian Secular Front

contributing to the rout in West Bengal and those who claimed that the partnership with AIUDF cost the party dearly in Assam.

"Whenever you don't succeed, this is the kind of explanation that you

are given; when you succeed, you are given a different explanation," he said.

"So, I don't think post-hoc explanations are sensible, although they help you analyse your decision-making process and merits of that decision. All I can say is: much can be said on both sides."



voting in the recent Assembly elections in West Bengal, where the Congress and the Left were "wiped out".

"That's true. One analyst said the extent of tactical voting that happened in Bengal may not have happened in Assam but obviously tactical voting happened in both the places," he said.

# Fake remdesivir scam: Indore police summons driver of MP minister's wife

(News Agencies)-The Indore police has summoned the driver of Madhya Pradesh cabinet minister Tulsi Silawat's wife in connection with the investigation into the fake remdesivir scam case. According to the Indore police, the main accused Puneet Aggarwal, who was caught selling fake remdesivir injections,

for the Impetus Travel agency that supplies drivers and vehicles to many government departments in the state.

In another development, the Jabalpur police has arrested the wife of former VHP leader Sarabjeet Singh Mockha for trying to hide evidence in the fake remdesivir scam case.



The Jabalpur Police had earlier arrested Singh along with two others in a fake remdesivir scam case in which over one lakh fake injections were sold to hapless

people trying to save their loved ones during the pandemic. Jabalpur Additional SP Rohit Kaswani said "Mockha's wife, Jasmeet Mockha, and the administrator at his hospital, Sonia Khatri, have been arrested after obtaining relevant orders from the court. The two need to be questioned for unearthing critical evidence in the case."

had revealed during investigation that he acquired some remdesivir injections from Govind, who works as driver for Tulsi Silawat's wife. "Govind will be questioned as revelations made by the main accused needs to be verified and cross-checked as both worked for the same company," police said. Both Puneet and Govind worked

people trying to save their loved ones during the pandemic. Jabalpur Additional SP Rohit Kaswani said "Mockha's wife, Jasmeet Mockha, and the administrator at his hospital, Sonia Khatri, have been arrested after obtaining relevant orders from the court. The two need to be questioned for unearthing critical evidence in the case."

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## ED summons advocate Jayshri Patil to record statement in money-laundering case against Anil Deshmukh

(News Agencies)-The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has summoned advocate Jayshri Patil to record her statement in connection with the money-laundering case registered against former Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh and others.

Jayshri Patil had approached the Bombay High Court seeking an investigation against Anil Deshmukh based on allegations of corruption and extortion levelled against him by former Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh.

In a letter to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on March 20, Param Bir Singh had alleged that Anil Deshmukh had instructed Assistant Inspector Sachin Vaze and ACP Sanjay Patil to collect Rs 100 crore per month for him, largely through extortion.

It was on Patil's petition that the Bombay High Court ordered the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to conduct a preliminary inquiry in this matter. The agency

also registered a case against Anil Deshmukh.

The CBI has already recorded statements of Jayshri Patil, ACP Sanjay Patil, Anil Deshmukh, Anil Deshmukh's personal assistant, Param Bir Singh and others. It has also conducted searches at Anil Deshmukh's house.

As the case progressed, the Enforcement Directorate registered a money-laundering case against Anil Deshmukh and others. Jayshri Patil has been summoned to record her statement in this case.

Sources say following Patil's statement, the ED could summon Param Bir Singh to record his statement soon. Meanwhile, the Justice Chandival Commission formed by the Maharashtra government to probe former Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh's allegation against Anil Deshmukh, has issued notices to all persons concerned connected with the probe.

## As Sidhu-Amarinder rift grows, Congress says no factionalism in Punjab, only diversity of opinions

(News Agencies)-Amid a public war of words between Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh and former minister Navjot Singh Sidhu, Congress Tuesday said it just reflects a diversity of views among its leaders which cannot be termed factionalism. "Why do you forget that democracy is all about diversity?" Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinete told a press conference. "It is wrong to give it the name of factionalism."

She said the priority of the Punjab chief minister is to fight and defeat the Covid pandemic, and not anything else including the alleged infighting. She also said there was no need for the central leadership to intervene in the state unit matters as issues arising out of differences of opinions can be resolved within the party at various levels.

"In Punjab, there is a diversity of

views as there could be differences of opinion between the leaders, but there is no factionalism," she said when asked about the open sparring between Singh and Sidhu.

Amarinder Singh and Sidhu have publicly sparred over the probe into the sacrilege issue after the



High Court quashed the probe report by the SIT headed by Kunwar Vijay Pratap Singh.

Sidhu raised questions over the delay in granting justice in the sacrilege case.

The Congress party believes that the more diversity in views brings better solutions," Shrinete said.

Without naming any leader, she said that at least the CM is not

threatening doctors or bodies are not flowing in rivers in Punjab as the focus is on controlling the pandemic and not infighting.

She claimed that unlike in BJP-ruled states where "leaders are afraid to speak out", Congress members in states ruled by it express their thoughts openly and freely.

There has been alleged infighting within the Punjab unit of the Congress with Sidhu taking up issues with the chief minister on one side and former minister Pargat Singh alleging that he was

threatened by a close aide of Singh in the chief minister's office.

Rajya Sabha MPs from Punjab Pratap Singh Bajwa and Shamsheer Singh Dullo have also been critical of the chief minister and have raised questions on several decisions and issues of governance in the state.

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## Senator Brooks Introduces Bill Making It A Felony To Forge Immunization Records

(Albany, NY) Senator John E. Brooks (SD8) has introduced Senate Bill S6704, an act that would clarify existing forgery related sections in penal law to explicitly make clear that forging or possessing a forged immunization record, including but not limited to the COVID-19 vaccination record card, shall be considered a Class C or D felony.

"Scammers and con-artists are already seeking to take advantage of post-pandemic confusion by creating a black market for COVID vaccination cards and thereby putting our families, friends, and neighbors at a greater risk," said Senator Brooks. "By clarifying these legal codes and prosecuting these crimes as felonies we are further ensuring the health and safety of our shared communities as we transition our way back to a sense of normalcy." A number of recent reports have shed light on the escalating trend of counterfeit or otherwise fraudulent vaccination cards in New York and around the nation. Under these schemes, individuals sell or distribute forged COVID-19 vaccination cards that are normally provided upon immunization and bear a CDC insignia. These falsified cards are concerning because of the deleterious impact on our public health and the public's trust when participating in activities or attending venues that require proof of vaccination.

This bill would make clear that people who engage in the production and distribution of fraudulent COVID-19 cards-or any immunization record normally produced by a federal, state, or local government health organization- are captured by New York's felony forgery statutes. Additionally, existing laws regarding the possession of forged documents are tied to the sections that this bill amends. If this bill were adopted, individuals possessing a falsified COVID-19 card, or other immunization record that they know to be fraudulent, would be guilty of criminal possession of a forged instrument in the first or second degree, depending on the number of forged records (pursuant to penal law sections 170.25 and 170.30).

## Legislator Ellen W. Birnbaum Attends Destination: Great Neck's Multi-Faceted West Egg Street Fest Event



Legislator Birnbaum joins participants in a free community dance class hosted by ConfiDanZe as part of Destination: Great Neck's West Egg Street Fest on Sunday, May 16

New York- Nassau County Legislator Ellen W. Birnbaum (D - Great Neck) attended the West Egg Street Fest in Great Neck on Sunday, May 16. During a daylong event hosted by Destination: Great Neck, Legislator Birnbaum and the community took part in a free dance fitness class on the Village Green presented by local studio ConfiDanZe and attended a street fair, which was

held adjacent to the park on Beach Road.

Recently launched with the mission of bettering and promoting Great Neck and its associated villages, Destination: Great Neck has gotten off to a quick start by hosting community events this spring in the style of West Egg Street Fest.

"The leaders of Destination: Great Neck are doing a

wonderful job promoting our diversified and vibrant business community through immersive events like the West Egg Street Fest," Legislator Birnbaum said. "I'm thankful to this dedicated team of community leaders for their efforts, and would also like to extend my special appreciation to the instructors from ConfiDanZe who led us in an invigorating and fun morning dance class to kick off the day."

## Eric Adams' Campaign raises Nearly \$11M for Mayor's Race

**Adams' campaign raises the maximum amount of public matching funds; will have more than \$7M on-hand for final month after matching funds released**

New York, NY -- Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams' campaign announced today that it has raised more than \$11 million to make him the next mayor of New York City, and will receive the maximum amount of public matching funds allowed.

The campaign will also have more than \$7 million in cash-on-hand once the next round of matching funds are released after raising more than \$900,000 over the past two months, which will amount to more than \$1.6 million raised for the period after all matching funds are dispersed.

Adams was among the first mayoral candidates to qualify for the City's 8-to-1 matching program and has led in fundraising for most of the campaign cycle.

"I am so grateful to the everyday New Yorkers who are supporting my campaign, and who share my vision for a safer, fairer, healthier, more prosperous New York," Brooklyn Borough President Adams said. "Our campaign has always been powered by people--and this historic filing puts us in the best position to win this race and take our movement to City Hall."

Adams has been endorsed by DC37, the Hotel Trades Council, CSEA, OPEIU Local 153, 32BJ SEIU, the Uniform Fire Officers Association, TWU and ATU, as well as more than 50 current and former elected officials, including Borough Presidents Ruben Diaz Jr. and Donovan Richards; Rep. Tom Suozzi; state Sens. Andrew Gounardes, Roxanne Persaud,

James Sanders, and Diane Savino; Assembly Members Peter Abbate, Rodneyse Bichotte Hermelyn, Inez Dickens, Erik Dilan, Alicia Hyndman, Jenifer Rajkumar, José Rivera, Clyde Vanel, and Jaime Williams; New York City Council Members Adrienne Adams, Alicka Ampry-Samuel, Justin Brannan, Selvena Brooks-Powers, Laurie Cumbo, Darma Diaz, Peter Koo, Farah Louis, Alan Maisel, I. Daneek Miller, Francisco Moya, and Ydanis Rodriguez; former Reps. Charlie Rangel and Ed Towns; former New York State Comptroller Carl McCall; former Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer; and former Assembly Members Karim Camara and the late Aurelia Greene.

## City Council District 23 Candidate Harpreet Toor warns against potential for Bias Attacka against south Asians

BELLEROSE, QUEENS, May 18, 2021 — Harpreet Singh Toor, candidate for City Council District 23 in Eastern Queens, held an anti-hate vigil in front of his Hillside Avenue campaign headquarters as part of his awareness raising campaign designed to stem the rising rates of hate crimes. "The number of recent unprovoked, bias-motivated violent acts against Asians, wrongly blaming them for the Pandemic, is shocking," Toor said. "Now, as India has become the focal point for the world Covid crisis I fear that South Asian-Americans will become the next hate target du jour. I urge South-Asians to be on their guard, while working with all Americans to de-escalate the spike in hate crimes." On Sunday, May 16, Toor organized a candlelight vigil in a call to end the hate-crime epidemic. Among the speakers at the vigil were Steve Behar, another District 23 candidate; the current Council member Barry Grodenchik; Queensboro Temple

of Seventh-day Adventist Pastor Kyron Johnson and community leader and former District 23 candidate Satnam Singh Parhar.

"The origins of the tsunami of hate currently sweeping across America run long and deep in some parts of our society," Toor said. "In recent months, years, days, and even hours, we have seen blatant, unprovoked, bias attacks in unprecedented numbers, and with unprecedented violence. I had hoped that with the election of my fellow Democrat President Joe Biden the number of Americans who felt emboldened to practice hate under the Trump administration might decline. But recent headlines prove me wrong. Now is the time for all good citizens to unite in the fight against hate."

Harpreet Singh Toor has identified his efforts to create unity amongst all of the diverse communities of District 23 as a centerpiece of his campaign.



# Family Suspects Video Game Fight Led to Multiple False 911 Calls to Long Island Home

A family on Long Island has been anticipating another knock on the door from police officers because they say someone has been harassing them by making 911 calls to their home --- and it all could be tied to a video game fight. "We live, waiting for the police to knock on our door every day, every night," Lydia de Farias told NBC New York. She says police have shown up to her Hicksville home six separate times since last fall. The first time it happened, the caller told police "my husband killed my son, please hurry." Then someone told police that their 18-year-old son, Andrew, brought a bomb to Hicksville High. The harassment tactic is called "swatting" and

emergency dispatchers are often notified by prank callers of a life-and-death situation occurring at a particular address. The family says they believe that the calls are possibly related to an online gaming fight involving Andrew. Pericles De Farias says police pointed guns at him because they thought he was dangerous based on the phone call. Every time officers showed up, they searched the home to determine that the call was unfounded. The latest incident occurred just last week on May 10 around 1 a.m. Hours later, police responded again. "We don't wanna hurt anybody we just want this thing to stop. We just want peace," Pericles de Farias said.

At least one call was relatively harmless. The family said someone ordered 17 pizzas to their house at 10 p.m. and they had to send the food back, but the family says they're afraid things will escalate. The family believes the same culprit hacked their home computers and renamed their wi-fi "Austin was here."

On April 18, the family says someone came to their home and threw a large rock through a window. A security camera was able to capture images of the suspect but it's unclear if the incident is related to the swatting calls.

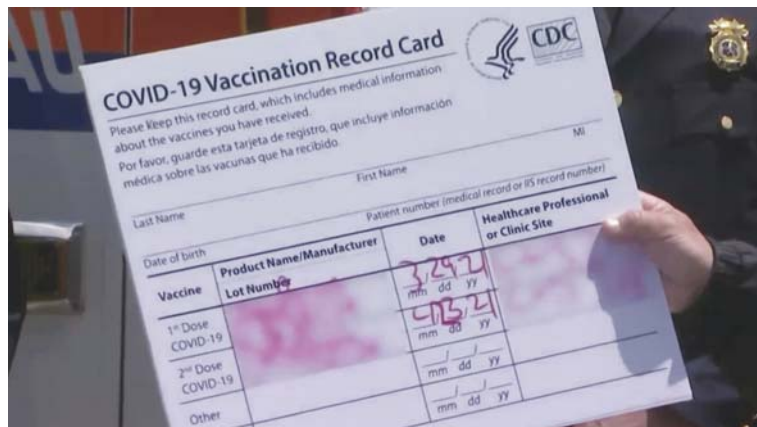
The de Fariases say they're desperate because police can't



seem to find the person who's making the calls. Percicles claimed the detectives told him that, "we don't have million-dollar equipment to be able to find who is responsible." Police confirmed

they responded to the Hicksville home six times in six months, but there have been no leads or arrests at this time. They declined to comment, saying that it's an ongoing investigation.

## Long Island CVS Worker Caught Trying to Give Out Fraudulent COVID Vaccination Cards



(News Agencies)- Thursday marked the first day that children between the ages of 12 through 17 started getting their COVID-19 vaccinations across the country, with the inoculations offering a shot at a return to normal, pre-pandemic life. And now that the CDC announced that those who have been fully vaccinated no longer have to wear

face masks or socially distance in most indoor settings, vaccination cards represent a ticket to freedom, allowing those who have them access to sporting events, concerts and more. However, with that opportunity comes people willing to cheat the system, willing to pay to have those experiences back without getting vaccinated.

The I-Team recently revealed that counterfeit vaccination cards are being sold on encrypted messaging services.

There are other ways to obtain a card illegally. On Thursday, Nassau County police said that a 21-year-old CVS employee was arrested after allegedly pilfering eight pre-filled vaccination cards, just missing the names of the people who would potentially use them, along with 54 blank ones that were found in his car as well. "They were taken within the last couple of days, with the intent to share them with family members and friends, so that they could go into venues and possibly even use them at schools," said Nassau County Police Commissioner Patrick Ryder.

According to court documents, the employee admitted to selling

the cards to kids "so they can go to school." CVS said the worker, who has since been fired, worked at their location on Hempstead Turnpike in Levittown. In a statement, the pharmacy chain said in part that it is cooperating with the investigation. Authorities said the cards could not have been used with New York State's Excelsior Pass - the so-called COVID passport - because it relies on vaccination databases along with the paper card. Zachary Honig was arrested as the county police department's Criminal Intelligence Rapid Response team was checking out a high-crime area. They said that in his car, they also found silver-colored brass knuckles and a controlled substance. County Executive Laura Curran said the scheme is far from a victimless crime - but

rather hurts everyone. "The reason we can get back to normal is because we're getting vaccinated. If you're faking it, it can set the whole thing back," Curran said. Police were working with federal officials, and do not believe that Honig had yet sold any cards. An investigation is ongoing. Curran also said she was filing legislation to send a clear message that making fraudulent vaccine cards is not acceptable. In New Jersey, there is pending legislation that would establish criminal penalties for producing, selling and using a fake COVID-19 vaccination card. Under the proposed bill, those who make, sell or transfer the fake cards could face up to 10 years in prison and a \$150,000 fine; anyone who is caught using a fake one could get five years in prison and a \$15,000 fine.

## Long Island Exec Wants to Send \$375 Direct Payments to Homeowners

A county executive on Long Island has a bold new proposal to distribute \$100 million in direct cash payments to homeowners.

Executive Laura Curran hopes her new plan to stimulate the economy of Nassau County will get approval from the County Legislature to give \$375 payments to residents.

"This is to benefit the middle class," Curran said Monday. "It is my hope that people who receive this check spend this money in Nassau - go to your downtown restaurants, go to the movies."

The county is projected to receive roughly \$380 million from the American Rescue Plan passed by Congress in March, \$200 million of which is getting to Nassau County this year, Curran said. She wants half of that money to go directly into the pockets of county residents.

"In order for us to have a strong economic recovery we must continue to address the economic impact of the virus. Since day one of this crisis Nassau County has focused on providing relief to tax payers whenever possible," she said.

Under the Nassau County

Homeowner Assistance Program, eligible households would be determined by Basic and Enhanced STAR data. Curran estimates 300,000 homeowners in the county would benefit from the program.

The executive highlighted dropping virus cases and increasing vaccination rates in the county's long road back from the pandemic. Nassau County's COVID-19 positivity rate now sits below 1% and health officials recorded four days last week without a single virus death, she added.





## First US-Russia Meeting Before Biden-Putin Summit In Iceland

(News Agencies)-The US and Russian foreign ministers are meeting in Iceland on Wednesday to gauge the enormous gulf between the rival powers and confirm a summit between Presidents Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin. Statements preceding the face-to-face talks on the sidelines of the Arctic Council meeting in Iceland do not bode well for the de-escalation of tensions that the two say they want, with relations at their lowest point since the end of the Cold War. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken seemed to want to make the Arctic -- a new geopolitical issue at the heart of the regional meeting Wednesday and Thursday in Reykjavik -- a laboratory for cooperation focused on common challenges such as the fight against global warming. But his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov issued a strongly worded warning.



"It has been absolutely clear for everyone for a long time that this is our territory, this is our land," Lavrov said at a press conference in Moscow on Monday.

The Russian foreign minister at the same time accused Norway of "trying to justify the need for NATO to come into the Arctic."

He insisted Russian military activity in the region is "absolutely legal."

Mikaa Mered, a professor at French university Sciences Po and a specialist on the Arctic, said that

Russians "always do this sort of posturing before the ministerial summit, but that doesn't prevent the Council from continuing its work on its traditional consensus issues". The Russian warning inevitably drew a response from Blinken, who on Tuesday stressed Washington wanted to "avoid a militarisation" of the Arctic.

## Over 52,000 Palestinians Displaced In Gaza: UN Aid Agency



Laerke, spokesman of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), told reporters.

Laerke said

(News Agencies)-More than 52,000 Palestinians have been displaced by Israeli air strikes that have destroyed or badly damaged nearly 450 buildings in the Gaza Strip, the UN aid agency said on Tuesday. About 47,000 of the displaced people have sought shelter in 58 UN-run schools in Gaza, Jens

132 buildings had been destroyed and 316 had been severely damaged, including six hospitals and nine primary healthcare centres. The UN agency said it welcomed the fact that Israel had opened one border crossing for humanitarian supplies but called for another crossing to also be opened.

## High Traces Of Viagra, Other Drugs Found In South Korea's Seoul Sewers, Shows Research

(News Agencies)-High traces of Viagra and other drugs used to treat erectile dysfunction were found in Seoul's wastewaters, and their presence in the urban area is expected to increase, South Korean researchers say. The presence of the chemicals used in the drugs -- Phosphodiesterase-5 inhibitors (PDE-5i) -- were high on weekends and in sewage treatment facilities in Gangnam, which is home to nightclubs, bars and red-light spots, a new research showed. "We estimated that the amount of PDE-5i consumption was 31 percent higher than in areas with

fewer nightlife spots," the researchers said in the research paper carried by the Scientific Reports earlier this month.

Experts studied the presence of the chemicals in the influent and effluent of two sewage treatment plants (STPs) in the South Korean capital as well as the receiving water bodies.

Their investigation indicated that the existing sewage treatment plants were "unable to handle" the amounts of the residual chemicals. "The PDE-5i in domestic wastewater were barely treated by the STPs and, eventually, discharged into the water environment," the research paper said.

## China Says US Threatening Peace, Stability As Warship Transits Taiwan Strait

(News Agencies)-China accused the United States on Wednesday of threatening the peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait after a U.S. warship again sailed through the sensitive waterway that separates Taiwan from its giant neighbour. The U.S. Navy's 7th Fleet said the Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS Curtis Wilbur conducted a "routine Taiwan Strait transit" on Tuesday in accordance with international law.

"The ship's transit through the Taiwan Strait demonstrates the U.S. commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific. The United States military will continue to fly, sail, and operate anywhere international law allows," it said. A spokesman for China's Eastern Theatre Command expressed strong opposition and condemned the move, which

comes amid heightened tensions between the two powers. "The U.S. actions sends the wrong signals to Taiwan independence forces, deliberately disrupting the regional situation and endangering peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait," he said.

Chinese forces tracked and monitored the ship throughout its voyage, he added.

China believes Taiwan's democratically elected government is bent on a formal

declaration of independence for the island, a red line for Beijing. Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen says they are already an independent state called the Republic of China, its formal name. Taiwan's Defence Ministry said the U.S. ship had sailed in a southerly direction through the strait and the "situation was as normal".



## Single-Use Covid Face Masks Set New Global Recycling Challenge

(News Agencies)- Researchers in Australia want to transform single-use Covid masks into road material. In the United States, the protective gear is recycled into benches. And in France, they are reborn as floor carpets for cars. Used to curb the spread of Covid-19, masks are exacerbating another pandemic: plastic pollution.

Around 129 billion disposable masks are used every month around the world, according to the American Chemical Society. Made out of polypropylene plastic material, elastic and metal, used masks are usually thrown out in garbage bins, destined for

landfills, or incinerated.

They are also littering streets, rivers and oceans, harming wildlife.

But researchers and companies are looking for ways to put masks to good use, though it is not a very profitable venture at the moment.

- Garden chairs -

In Britain, several hospitals have acquired a compactor made by Cardiff-based Thermal Compaction Group which melts protective gowns and surgical masks into blue slabs.

The material is then used to make garden chairs or tables.

In France, Tri-o et Greenwishes, a recycling company, picks up

masks tossed in special bins used by some 30 customers, including Parisian hospitals, TV network TF1 and building materials giant Saint-Gobain.

"We had a lot of demand from our clients" to offer mask recycling services, said company president Matthieu de Chanaleilles.

The company charges fees starting at 250 euros (\$300) per month to collect the trash.

At its recycling plant, staff wearing protective gear stand behind plexiglass to sort through paper tissues, gloves and cups that are thrown in mask bins by accident. Afterwards, the workers are sprayed down with



disinfectant.

The sorting area is sterilized with ultraviolet lamps. Masks are kept in quarantine for a week before being handled.

Two companies based in northern France then shred the masks, disinfect them and extract the

polypropylene, which is transformed into pebbles that are used to make floor carpets or other plastic parts in a car.

Tri-o et Greenwishes has recycled one tonne of masks so far and hopes to have processed 20 tonnes by the end of the year.



# Trump fumes as New York inquiry now a criminal probe

Former US President Donald Trump has lashed out after the New York attorney general said her inquiry into the Trump Organisation was now a criminal probe. Letitia James, the state's top prosecutor, has been scrutinising the ex-Republican president's financial dealings before he took office. A spokesperson for Ms James said the inquiry into Mr Trump's property company was "no longer purely civil". Mr Trump on Wednesday said she was "in desperate search of a crime". Ms James' spokesman, Fabien Levy, told the BBC on Tuesday: "We have informed the Trump Organization that our investigation into the Organization is no longer purely civil in nature. We are now actively investigating the Trump Organization in a criminal capacity, along with the Manhattan DA. We have no additional comment." The offices of the state attorney general and city district attorney are separate and, according to National Public Radio (NPR), have historically been rivals. The fact that they are now co-ordinating their efforts underscores the high profile of their investigation. The two prosecutors are combing through millions of pages of financial information in a search for evidence, reports NPR. The

statement did not say what turned the inquiry from civil to criminal in nature, or whether the former president himself might be personally implicated in any allegations.

Mr Trump accused Ms James and District Attorney Cyrus Vance, both Democrats, of being "possessed" by their political vendettas against him.

A statement from his office rebuked the investigation as "a continuation of the greatest political Witch Hunt in the history of the United States". "After prosecutorial efforts the likes of which nobody has ever seen before, they failed to stop me in Washington, so they turned it



over to New York to do their dirty work. This is what I have been going through for years," he wrote. The former president's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr, condemned the inquiry as

"flagrant abuse of political office". On Twitter, he shared an old video of Ms James promising to pursue all legal options against Mr Trump while she was still campaigning for the attorney general role.

## Engineers Inspect China Skyscraper Day After It Wobbles, Spreading Panic

(News Agencies)- Engineers were inspecting a skyscraper in southern China on Wednesday, a day after it triggered widespread panic when it suddenly began shaking, as people asked online if shoddy construction may have been to blame. The 300-metre (1,000-foot) SEG Plaza in the southern city of Shenzhen near Hong Kong began swaying in the early afternoon on Tuesday, prompting people inside and those on the streets below to flee. Emergency management officials quickly ruled out an earthquake as the cause of the wobble in the tech hub's Futian district. Officials said no further movement had been detected and experts found "no safety abnormalities in the main structure and surrounding environment of the building". The building had stopped shaking by the time people were evacuated, state media reported, and the



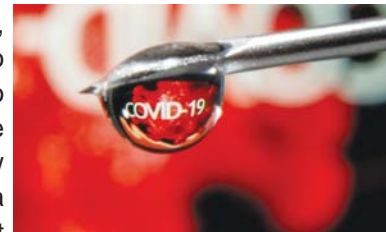
plaza remained sealed off. Building collapses are not rare in China, where lax construction standards and breakneck urbanisation over recent decades has led to buildings being thrown up in haste. Poor construction standards are often linked to corruption among local officials, most recently after the collapse of a quarantine hotel in southern China last year. A day after the building was evacuated, the US Consulate in nearby Guangzhou on Wednesday warned citizens to avoid the area surrounding the tower, warning of "inadequate information to assess the safety risks." Video footage published by local media Jimu News appeared to show some vendors returning to pick up stock from the electronics mall on the lower levels of the building by Wednesday, while higher levels remained closed off and shoppers were blocked from entering.

## European Union Likely To Reopen Borders To Vaccinated Travellers : Report

(News Agencies)-EU member states agreed Wednesday to reopen the bloc's borders to travellers who have been fully vaccinated against the coronavirus, European sources said. Meeting in Brussels, diplomats also agreed to increase the level of new cases a country can hit before being declared unsafe -- a measure that would open up travel into the EU from more places.

The recommendations will be adopted by EU ministers on Friday, they said. Currently,

non-essential travel into the 27-member European Union is banned, apart from a small number of countries deemed safe because of their low Covid case rate. But businesses on the continent are reopening as virus restrictions are phased out and bars, hotels and restaurants are worried about the summer tourist trade. Diplomats said that, under the new rules, travellers who could demonstrate that they had received the required number of doses of an EU-approved vaccine could enter the EU.



## Turkey Rejects US Accusations That Erdogan Made "Anti-Semitic" Remarks

(News Agencies)-Turkey on Wednesday rejected accusations by the United States that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan made "anti-Semitic" remarks in his criticism of Israeli strikes in Gaza, his party's spokesman said. "Accusing our president of anti-Semitism is an illogical and untrue approach. This is a lie said about our president," Omer Celik commented in a series of tweets. The US State Department on Tuesday sharply criticised Erdogan for what it called "anti-Semitic" remarks. "The United States strongly condemns President Erdogan's recent anti-Semitic comments regarding the Jewish people and finds them reprehensible," State Department spokesman Ned Price said in a statement. "We urge President Erdogan and other Turkish leaders to refrain from incendiary remarks, which could incite further violence," he said. Erdogan, a vocal champion of the Palestinian cause during his 18-year rule, has fired salvos at Israel since the start of the violence in Gaza. "They are murderers, to the point that they kill children who are five or six years old. They are murderers, to the point they drag women on the ground to their death and they are murderers, to the point they kill old people... They only are satisfied by sucking their blood," he said.

## "You Can Either Conquer" Or Deter Them: Israeli PM On Gaza Attacks

(News Agencies)-Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Wednesday the bombing campaign on the Gaza Strip aims to deter Hamas but did not rule out a campaign to "conquer" the enclave's Islamist rulers. "There are only two ways that you can deal with them," he said about Hamas in a Tel Aviv briefing for a group of foreign ambassadors. "You can either conquer them, and that's always an open possibility, or you can deter them, and we are engaged right now in forceful deterrence, but I have to say we don't rule out anything." The hawkish premier insisted Israel "didn't seek" the escalation that began on May 10 when Hamas fired rockets towards Jerusalem after demanding that Israeli security personnel vacate the Al-Aqsa mosque compound, Islam's third holiest

site. Netanyahu linked the dramatic surge in violence to a decision by Palestinian Authority president Mahmud Abbas to cancel Palestinian elections that had been scheduled for this weekend. Abbas's secular Fatah movement had reached a deal with its long-term rivals Hamas to hold the vote, but Abbas cancelled it citing Israel's refusal to guarantee voting in annexed east Jerusalem, which Palestinians claim as their future capital. Hamas accused Abbas of perpetrating a "coup" against the agreement, and of giving Israel a veto over the Palestinian right to vote. Palestinian experts have said Hamas is now seeking to establish itself as the real defenders of Palestinians against Israel, and as a more forceful voice than Abbas's Fatah.





# The climate crisis and cyclones

A severe cyclonic storm, Tauktae, intensified on Saturday night into a "very severe cyclonic storm" over the east central Arabian Sea, and affected the Kerala, Goa, Karnataka and Maharashtra coastline over the weekend. According to the India Meteorological Department, it is "very likely to intensify further" during the next 12 hours, and may cross the Gujarat coast on Tuesday. While Tauktae is the first cyclone to hit India this year,

climate scientists at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM) have warned that the Arabian Sea is fast becoming a "cyclone hotbed". Earlier, the Bay of Bengal used to have more cyclones because the sea surface temperature remains consistently above 28 degree Celsius, while the Arabian Sea area remained a degree or two cooler. But sea surface temperatures in the Arabian Sea have increased rapidly during the

past century due to the climate crisis. Now, temperatures are often above the "warm pool threshold", which supports the formation of intense cyclones. According to IITM, widespread extreme rainfall events (above 150 mm/day) have also increased threefold, thanks to the Arabian Sea's warming. In reply to a Parliament question in March, the government confirmed that studies show an increasing trend of cyclonic

storms over the Arabian Sea, based on data between 1965 and 2020. The warming of oceans means cyclones are now intensifying rapidly. While scientists need more investments in monitoring technology to track cyclones, state governments will now have much less time to take measures for evacuation, and, therefore, must bolster their cyclone preparedness plans now. But that is not happening. Reports suggest that the pace

of the National Cyclone Risk Mitigation Project, which aims at reducing the vulnerability of coastal states, is very slow in the western parts of the country. Phase II of the project was approved in 2015 and was to be completed in 2020 for Goa, Gujarat, Karnataka, and Maharashtra. But data shows early warning systems and multi-purpose cyclone shelters are yet to be completed in many of these states.

# Wait, does this mean the pandemic is over for vaccinated people?

Does this mean we can go back to normal?

Though he wouldn't go so far as to say the pandemic is over, for those who are fully vaccinated, the guideline change means a return to something very close to normalcy, Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, told CNN after the announcement.

"Being able to go around without a mask, indoors as well as outdoors, is really a big step in that direction," Fauci said. "I wouldn't want to declare victory prematurely, but I'm saying this is clearly a step in the direction that we want to go."

"If you are fully vaccinated, you can resume activities that you did prior to the pandemic," the CDC says in its guidelines.

"It is an amazing step forward," Dr. Francis Collins, head of the National Institutes of Health, told CNN's Erin Burnett. "It says we are on the right path."

Does this mean I can throw away my masks?

Masks will still be needed for a while, as local, institutional and governmental regulations take precedence over the CDC's guidance.

As the CDC says on its website: "Fully vaccinated people can resume activities without wearing a mask or physically distancing, except where required by federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial laws, rules, and regulations, including local business and workplace guidance."

Masks will still be required for travel, since the Biden administration's transportation mask mandate will stay in place through September 13, US Transportation Security Administration spokesperson Lisa Farbstein told CNN on

Thursday.

Institutions and businesses also could still keep mask requirements in place, as could the states and cities that still have them.



"There are going to be institutions, clearly, that are going to be saying -- and that could be airlines, we know certain colleges are also saying -- if you're not vaccinated, you're not going to come on campus to classes in real time, and there are going to be some institutions that might be saying the same thing," Fauci told CNN's Jake Tapper.

Masks will still be needed for health care settings, the CDC said.

Fully vaccinated residents of long-term care facilities and their visitors may visit in a private room without masks, according to Cristina Crawford, senior manager of public affairs for the American Health Care Association.

Unvaccinated people, including children, also still need to wear a mask to protect themselves and others from getting the coronavirus, of course.

Will the relaxed guidance lead to more people getting shots?

Giving vaccinated people the

freedom to go maskless and get close to others again is exactly the sort of reward pundits have been calling for as real incentives to get vaccinated.

"The incentive for getting

vaccinated should be that you can go into your workplace, that you can go into movie theaters and restaurants," George Loewenstein, professor of economics and psychology at Carnegie Mellon University and co-director of its Center for Behavioral Decision Research, told CNN before Thursday's announcement by the CDC. "And, perhaps, that you don't have to wear a mask all the time."

Collins, of the NIH, said while we should all feel "really good about this" announcement, there are still "a lot of people who haven't gotten that first shot."

"I hope this will encourage them to see this as a wonderful opportunity to be liberated, as I know. I got no mask on, I'm smiling, I'm looking at other people's faces I haven't seen in a while."

Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey said her state "welcomes this good news" from the CDC.

"Finally, we are seeing some encouraging, common sense

guidance from the CDC," Ivey said in a statement. "Aside from the COVID-19 vaccine being safe and effective, it is also allowing us to do the things we love and enjoy."

It may lead to more people getting vaccinated, but that's not why the CDC changed its guidelines, Walensky said. "This may serve as an incentive for some people to get vaccinated, but that is not the purpose here," Walensky said. If the CDC's announcement isn't enough to move people to get vaccinated, here's another reason: Cleveland Clinic said Thursday that more than 99% of people with Covid-19 in its hospitals from January 1 and mid-April were not fully vaccinated.

How will we know whether someone has been vaccinated? Without a vaccine passport or other sort of certification, in a public setting, no one will be able to tell the vaccinated from the unvaccinated.

CNN medical analyst Dr. Leana Wen said she was "shocked by the CDC's abrupt reversal of their guidelines for vaccinated people." "While I agree that vaccinated

can choose what they want to do, this only works if there's a way to check vaccination status. Otherwise, what's to stop the unvaccinated from endangering everyone?" Wen tweeted.

"Essentially, the CDC today eliminated mask mandates and social distancing," Wen told CNN's Anderson Cooper. "They're saying it's all an honor code from now on. And so it's actually going to be a disincentive."

"There are a lot of people who never wanted to get vaccinated, never wanted to wear masks," Wen said. "Now, they could just say, 'Oh, I'm vaccinated.'"

But stopping people at the doors of the grocery store or bowling alley to check for a vaccine card probably won't work, Fauci said.

"I think there's going to be a pushback against questioning somebody when they walk in, because you can never validate or prove that they're telling you the truth," Fauci said.

And questioning people would be "virtually a functional equivalent of a vaccine passport, and I don't think that's going to work," Fauci said.





# Covid Conspiracy Theories, Drawing Inspiration From US, Take Root In Europe

Conspiracy theories, driven by the global health crisis, are taking root in Europe more than ever, drawing inspiration from the QAnon movement in the United States.

Accounts supporting the theories have been purged from Twitter and YouTube after breaking the regulations of the social media giants.

Proponents have taken to other platforms to publish information -- mostly false -- which they claim "mainstream" media are hiding.

AFP reporters spent months looking into this environment of conspiracy theories on the continent, finding everything from adherents of QAnon, ultra-evangelicals and anti-vaxxers, to right-wing populists, the unemployed and even doctors. They make up a disparate mix of movements and views but their growing power is worrying Western European intelligence services who fear that democracies could be destabilised.

"Conspiracy theories have taken off significantly with social networks. We see now that people are organising themselves in clandestine cells. Obviously, it is a threat," said France's national intelligence coordinator Laurent Nunez, acknowledging that QAnon theories have arrived in the country.

European groups affiliated to QAnon or related to the movement are growing on social media.

Some 30,000 subscribers of messaging app Telegram follow the so-called DeQodeurs in France, more than 100,000 follow German conspiracy theory figures Attila Hildmann and Xavier Naidoo, while almost 150,000 follow Briton Charlie Ward, who offers subscribers a near incessant flow of pro-Donald Trump montages.

"There is a cocktail in place," a source in the intelligence community in France told AFP, adding there were grounds for concern over the issue.

The factors include a "weakening of the socio-economic fabric, a strong movement of protesting digital platforms where it is easy to post conspiratorial comment, as well as upcoming elections" in France next spring, said the source, who asked not to be named. "These movements have more or less existed for the last



10-15 years. They feed on the sense of an anti-system conspiracy," a senior French intelligence official told AFP.

The official said that there was overlap with small ultra-right fringe groups, while emphasising that people involved increasingly come from "quite varied backgrounds".

Involvement can tear apart families, with loved ones unable to stop relatives falling into the groups' grasp.

Forty-eight-year-old bookseller Paul -- not his real name -- told AFP how his mother had slowly drifted away.

"She lived as a recluse, she spent an incredible amount of time online, looking for answers to her rage against the injustices of the world.

"She consumed YouTube 24 hours a day, the conspiracy channels were her only window to the world. The lockdown was the last straw and Covid confirmed all her theories about the end of the world," he said.

**Bete noire Bill Gates**

In mid-March, under the low sky of Uithoorn, a peaceful town south of Amsterdam, Lange Frans has a warm welcome for visitors to his recording studio. "No mask here," says the rapper who enjoyed a degree of success in the 1990s, with a tone of mockery, boasting how he had taken part in a concert without any social distancing a day earlier.

In recent years, his podcasts have become hugely popular in the Netherlands.

They take the form of two-hour talk shows, where he invites a personality to take an "alternative" look at the news. Subjects can range from Covid-19 and the disappearance of Flight MH370 to child crime and UFOs -- anything to stimulate the world of conspiracies.

He takes aim at Bill Gates, the Microsoft co-founder who has fought for decades to improve access to vaccines and is a bete noire for conspiracy theorists.

"Take Bill Gates, people should find out about him," said Lange Frans in his studio, dotted with pictures of ACDC and guitars.

"Always look at the money. You can only make money on the cure if people actually believe they are sick.

"He has no medical degree or expertise in vaccines," he insisted.

Gates has ploughed billions of his personal fortune into a philanthropic foundation he heads with his wife Melinda -- they are now divorcing -- that champions basic health care.

For Lange Frans -- a stage name which translates as Tall Frans -- whose YouTube channel is regularly shut down, the Covid-19 pandemic is above all a "soap opera" and a "supermarket flu" that the media serve up all day long.

That Sunday, the day before parliamentary elections in the Netherlands, 3,000 people protested coronavirus restrictions in the centre of The Hague amid a carnival atmosphere closely watched by police.

The Netherlands had been rocked weeks earlier by several nights of highly unusual riots when a curfew was imposed.

In the demonstration, populist activists, critics of a "world government" and promoters of natural medicines stood shoulder to shoulder.

A common denominator united them -- scepticism in the face of the official line on the coronavirus pandemic.

"It's not a virus, it's a tool to use power. The elite of the world has been organising this. Yes, for so many people it's too crazy to

imagine it's true. But they have been working on it for more than 20 years," said Monique Lustig, a restaurant owner.

A little further on, Jeffrey, a 21-year-old student, distributes leaflets denouncing in particular the "Great Reset", a plan by the World Economic Forum to revive the economy after Covid-19.

He alleges it conceals hidden aims of controlling freedoms and reducing populations.

"I want people to know it's not a pandemic, it's a plan to reset the world," he said.

Along with Gates, the founder and chief of the Davos-based Forum Klaus Schwab is another target of conspiracy theorists' anger.

"The globalist elite are taking advantage of the situation to create a new society. There are thousands here convinced that this is not a pandemic," said Ard Pisa, a former banker who has now become an advocate of alternative medicine to cure cancer.

"Eight million children disappear every year, it's part of our world, we must not close our eyes. There are a lot of cases of hushed-up paedophilia," he continued, repeating one of the favourite themes of QAnon supporters.

That figure -- regularly evoked by child protection NGOs -- in fact includes reported disappearances, including runaways.

An overwhelming majority of such cases are ultimately resolved, with the children safe. Europe's QAnon

The gathering in The Hague was not exceptional in Europe.

Protests against limitations aimed at fighting Covid-19 systematically draw large numbers of conspiracy theorists. In Denmark, members of the Men in Black group insist that the coronavirus is just a "scam", while in Berlin, demonstrations against restrictions can rally up to 10,000 people, many brandishing QAnon flags.

"QAnon is a point of convergence for extreme right-wing groups, people who believe in UFOs, those who think that 5G (wireless technology) will be used to control people," said Tom de Smedt, a Belgian researcher and author of several studies on the growth in the movement in Europe. QAnon, which was born in the United States, came to

global prominence with the storming of the Capitol in January during the last days of the Trump administration.

It takes its name from cryptic messages posted by an individual calling themselves "Q", believed to be a senior US official close to Trump.

Very active in the US since 2017, QAnon notably defends the idea that a "deep state", driven by a handful of elites, rules the world order.

The fake Pizzagate scandal, where US Democrats were accused of heading a paedophile network, is one of the keystones of their ideology.

Their false claims can sometimes challenge even the imagination, such as a recent assertion that 1,000 children were freed from the Ever Given ship which blocked the Suez Canal, as part of an international trafficking ring fomented by Hillary Clinton.

**'Control of conscience'**

For Christophe Charret, a French businessman with an affable personality and athletic physique, "the messages of Q are the bible of the conspiracy theorist".

It is the evening when French Prime Minister Jean Castex is about to announce on live television that much of France will be put into a new de-facto lockdown.

But Charret has not bothered to turn his TV on.

Instead, he is in his small office in the basement where he is preparing to appear on the daily news bulletin of the Human Alliance, an association with 12,000 subscribers on Telegram which analyses the news in conspiratorial style.

The opening credits set the tone. Against music worthy of Hollywood blockbusters, images follow one another without pause, using the full gamut of ammunition in the conspiracy theorist's arsenal -- J.F. Kennedy, September 11, 5G, vaccines, Donald Trump, and -- of course -- Bill Gates.

"The world is led by a financial-technological conglomerate which controls the sovereignty of peoples. Technology makes it possible to do troubling things. Control of conscience, in particular, is not a myth," Charret says, an illuminated letter 'Q' glowing behind him.



# World leaders hail Gaza-Israel ceasefire and vow to help Palestinians rebuild

(SAI Bureau)-World leaders have hailed a ceasefire that took hold in the early hours of Friday morning and vowed to help rebuild Gaza, after an Israeli bombing campaign that killed more than 230 people and Palestinian rocket attacks that killed 12 in Israel.

The United Nations secretary general urged Israel and Gaza's Hamas rulers to observe the ceasefire and called on global leaders to develop a reconstruction package "that supports the Palestinian people and strengthens their institutions".

Antonio Guterres said after Thursday's announcement of an end to 11 days of clashes: "Israeli and Palestinian leaders have a responsibility beyond the restoration of calm to start a serious dialogue to address the root causes of the conflict." Few analysts believe there will be progress towards resolving the fundamental issues in the immediate future. There were no signals of an end to Israel's decades-old military grip over

the Palestinian territories and its blockade on the already-devastated Gaza enclave, within which 2 million people live under hardline Hamas rule.

However, Guterres said the UN was ready to work with Israel, the Palestinians, and others to return to "meaningful negotiations" on a two-state settlement based on territorial lines before the 1967 war.

In a televised address from the White House, the US president, Joe Biden, vowed to continue what he called "our quiet and relentless diplomacy" towards a long-term settlement, adding: "I believe we have a genuine opportunity to make progress." The US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, planned to visit the region in the coming days "to discuss recovery efforts and working together to build better futures for Israelis and Palestinians", the state department said.

In the short term, the international effort will be focused on ensuring the truce holds, and beginning the task of

humanitarian relief and reconstruction in Gaza. Palestinians rallied by the thousands early on Friday to mark the truce after a bombardment which Palestinian health officials say killed 232 people, including 65 children. Israeli authorities put the country's death toll to date at 12, including two children.

Cars packed Gaza's main streets, with drivers honking their horns and waving flags from the windows. Mosque loudspeakers hailed a "victory", and men fired rifles into the air, while others set off noise bombs or firecrackers. In Tel al-Hawa in Gaza City people said they were celebrating their safety, and what they viewed as their victory. Fireworks were also set off in Sheikh Jarrah, the East Jerusalem neighbourhood where a long-running legal battle by Palestinian families to stop their forced eviction by Israeli settlers was a key factor in mobilising protesters across the Old City and further afield during Ramadan. The truce took hold

after the Israeli cabinet met to discuss the "mutual and unconditional" ceasefire proposed by Egypt. Hamas and Islamic Jihad also confirmed the "mutual and simultaneous" agreement.

Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, warned on Friday against any further attacks, saying: "If Hamas thinks we will tolerate a drizzle of rockets, it is wrong." He vowed to respond with "a new level of force" against any aggression anywhere in Israel.

Netanyahu, who has faced criticism from his hawkish base for ending the offensive prematurely, said Israel had done "daring and new things, and this without being dragged into unnecessary adventures". He added that Israeli forces had caused "maximum damage to Hamas with a minimum of casualties in Israel".

Biden has been criticised around the world and in his own party for refusing to agree to a joint UN security council call for a ceasefire, and his failure to

directly criticise Israel for the heavy civilian casualties from its bombardment of Gaza, in response to Hamas rockets.

Biden commended Netanyahu "for the decision to bring the current hostilities to a close within less than 11 days". He also hailed Israel's air defence system, which the US helped develop, and which prevented hundreds of rockets from hitting Israeli towns and cities. Biden gave his "full support to replenish Israel's Iron Dome system to ensure its defences and security in the future". The president expressed "sincere gratitude" to Egypt's president, Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, for his mediating role, and said the US would work together with the UN agencies and the Palestinian authority, but not Hamas, to rebuild Gaza. The British foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, said: "All sides must work to make the ceasefire durable and end the unacceptable cycle of violence and loss of civilian life." He added that Britain supported "efforts to bring about peace".

## They recovered from Covid, only to die of 'black fungus.'

### What we know about the disease sweeping India

In early May, doctors in India began raising the alarm about a rise in mucormycosis - a rare and potentially deadly infection also known as black fungus.

Many of those being infected are coronavirus patients, or those who have recently recovered from Covid-19, whose immune systems have been weakened by the virus or who have underlying conditions -- most notably diabetes.

In the past few weeks, thousands of black fungus cases have been reported across the country, with hundreds hospitalized and at least 90 dead. Two states have declared it an epidemic, and the central government has made it a notifiable disease.

Here's what we know about black fungus and its spread in India.

How do you get it, and what are the symptoms?

Black fungus is caused by mold found in damp environments like soil or compost, and can attack the respiratory tract. It is not

contagious and does not spread from person to person.

Several types of fungi can cause the disease. These fungi aren't harmful to most people, but can cause serious infections among those with weakened immune systems, according to the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Black fungus commonly affects the sinuses or lungs after a person inhales fungal spores in the air, and can also affect the skin following a surface injury like a cut or burn. Symptoms depend on where in the body the fungus is growing, but can include facial swelling, fever, skin ulcers and black lesions in the mouth.

The disease "begins to manifest as skin infection in the air pockets located behind our forehead, nose, cheekbones, and in between the eyes and teeth," said the Indian Health Ministry in a statement on May 14. "It then spreads to eyes, lungs and can even spread to the brain. It leads to blackening or

discoloration over the nose, blurred or double vision, chest pain, breathing difficulties and coughing of blood."

"One of the ways mucormycosis travels is by invading the blood vessels," said Dr. Hemant Thacker, consultant physician and cardiometabolic specialist at Breach Candy Hospital in Mumbai. "It compromises the circulation to the distal organ, and thus produces what is called as necrosis or death of tissue, which then becomes black. So it is then given the name black fungus."

In the most severe cases, the infection "goes through the blood vessels into the brain," potentially causing loss of eyesight or creating a "gaping hole" in the face, he added. "If not controlled, not treated, it can have a mortality (rate) of anything from 20% to 50%."

A 2005 study of 929 cases dating back to 1885 found an overall mortality rate of 54%, according to the CDC. The mortality rate also depends on

the type of fungus involved and which part of the body is affected. For instance, it's less deadly for people with sinus infections, but more deadly for those with lung infections.

What is the link to Covid-19? Immunocompromised people are more susceptible to infection -- including Covid-19 patients, diabetic patients, people who take steroids, and those with other comorbidities like cancer or organ transplants, said the Indian Health Ministry.

Covid patients are particularly susceptible because not only does the virus affect their immune system -- treatment drugs can also suppress their immune response. "Due to these factors, COVID-19 patients face a renewed risk of failing the battle against attacks mounted by organisms such as mucormycetes," said the ministry, referring to the fungi that cause mucormycosis.

Covid patients undergoing oxygen therapy in ICUs may have humidifiers in the ward -- which can raise their exposure

to moisture, and make them more prone to fungal infection, said the ministry.

"The fungus takes the window of opportunity, invades the body," said Thacker. "This body has a small opening because of Covid, because of the sugars (high glucose levels), because of the antibiotics -- because of so many other things, (black fungus) gets a foothold."

The ministry cautioned "this does not mean that every Covid patient will get infected by Mucormycosis," as it's uncommon among those without diabetes.

According to India's official National Health Portal, the prevalence of diabetes in the country is as high as 12% to 18% of the adult population, especially in urban areas.

"India is the diabetic capital of the world," said Thacker from Breach Candy Hospital. "We have tropical climates where the fungus festers. So all this has led to the black fungus epidemic."



# How Biden Can Be a Leader in an Israeli-Palestinian Conflict That Has None

yet Gaza will remain an open-air prison caught between Hamas' incompetence in governing and Israel's blockade; and the 2 million Palestinians enmeshed in this trap will continue to suffer. Israel will replenish its arsenal, study the lessons of this round of fighting, and prepare for the next round. Israeli leaders will return to what they like to do best these days: play nasty politics with each other, avoid decisions, and back into yet another, fifth election, or worse, witness the continuation of Netanyahu in power.

The truly challenging issues-extremist provocations in Jerusalem, the dispossession of Palestinians from their homes; police incompetence and aggressive actions on the Haram al Sharif/Temple Mount during Ramadan-will go unaddressed in an Israeli political system dominated by the right wing and absorbed by its political machinations and maneuvering. In the face of so much dispiriting predictability, it is difficult to imagine that the Biden administration, which is so preoccupied with a suite of major domestic problems, would want to engage deeply with the Israeli-Palestinian crisis.

But there is a role for robust American diplomacy even now, and there is a way to implement it that could make meaningful changes on the ground in the Middle East and even quiet the mounting criticism at home that President Joe Biden is not sufficiently concerned with a mounting humanitarian crisis and Palestinian deaths in Gaza. This round of the conflict witnessed unprecedented communal violence between Israel's Arab and Jewish citizens not seen since the pre-state period of the 1920s and 1930s. More than 70 years of discrimination and bias - improving of late, but still deeply entrenched - has taken its toll on Arab citizens. Israeli actions in Jerusalem during Ramadan assaulted their identities as



Muslims and Arabs and years of systemic discrimination made a mockery of their equal status as Israeli citizens under the law. Netanyahu and the right-wing's legitimization of the worst extremists in Israeli society and the Nation-State Law reaffirming the Jewish character of the state finally broke a dam of anger and bitterness among young Israeli Arabs easily exploited by criminal elements. It will take wise leaders to begin addressing this problem, and wise leadership is nowhere to be seen.

So the policy drawing board is empty in all locations, including Washington. Burdened with the greatest domestic challenge since Franklin Roosevelt (though unlike FDR, with the slimmest edges in the House and Senate), it was a foregone conclusion that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would be the lowest of priorities for the administration. There isn't a single foreign policy issue more threatening to the Biden presidency or to the future of the Republic than the crises at home. And the importance of not roiling domestic constituencies is clearly showing during this round of Israeli-Palestinian violence, even among Democrats in Congress. But the

administration's seemingly

unqualified support for Israel's right of self-defense sounds strange when 20 times more Palestinians have been killed and tremendous damage has been done to Gaza's already inadequate infrastructure. One might hope that as Israel's closest ally, the U.S. would understand urgently that no matter how many airstrikes and artillery shells fall on Gaza, Israel will not deal Hamas a strategic blow, let alone a defeat. More likely, Israel will declare "victory" but again settle for a period of quiet until the next round. The administration might try to continue to ignore what's going on and continue the pivot away from the region that began almost two decades ago. But that pivot is bound to fail: Consider how often the U.S. has been drawn into these flare-ups and how often that has upset America's agenda. But getting serious about avoiding the déjà vu all over again character of Israeli-Palestinian violence does not mean a full-blown initiative to resolve the conflict today. It does, however, mean committing to much more robust and active diplomacy than we have seen to date. Let us be clear: This does not involve a major initiative to tackle the final status issues such as Jerusalem; borders; and refugees in some kind of

maximal conflict-ending accord. That's not going to work at this time. But if the administration wants to increase the odds of stopping the current violence and preempting the next bloodletting, and if it wants to preserve the option of future negotiations over two states, it needs to do the following now:

- o Nominate a U.S. ambassador to Israel pronto and appoint a senior representative with experience in politics and diplomacy to work the issue full time and to coordinate with the International Quartet (representatives from the U.N., EU and Russia, and the Arab Quartet (Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates).
- o Start an honest dialogue with Israel on the steps Israel must take even as the Gaza mini-war winds down: cancel home evictions of Palestinians in Shaikh Jarrah; stop demolishing houses, especially in Jerusalem; give Palestinians permits to build or add to their homes; control Israeli extremists and punish them when they break the law by provoking and assaulting Palestinians; stop expanding settlements in Jerusalem to preserve the idea of two capitals for two future states.
- o Reopen a consulate general in Jerusalem, and appoint a consul general to intensify

direct dialogue with the Palestinian Authority and demonstrate that the U.S. relationship with Palestinians is not derivative of U.S. relations with Israel.

o Press the Palestinian Authority to stop its authoritarian practices and human rights violations such as arbitrary arrests. Urge them to hold elections recently canceled by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and to stop incentivizing and inciting violence.

Getting Hamas to disarm is unlikely to happen. But the U.S. and others should work to get Iran and the Arab states that bankroll Hamas to force it to change its behavior. The reality is that rockets and missiles launched from Gaza have done far more damage to Palestinians and Palestinian national interests than they have done damage to Israel and Israelis. Indeed, Hamas' rocket attacks have further weakened Abbas and strengthened the Israeli right and Netanyahu.

We recognize that the Biden administration may decide to avoid even this approach and to continue the pivot away from the region. We do not argue that this issue should rise above the priorities of dealing with a pandemic that has claimed nearly 600,000 lives; racial and political polarization not seen in decades; and repairing an economy still struggling with the effects of Covid-19.

But recurring violence in the occupied territories and recurring Israeli-Hamas flare-ups carry the significant risk of exacerbating already serious crises in the region. And Biden having stood with Israel against Hamas will have leverage and currency in the bank should he choose to use it. Governing is about choosing and the administration would be wise to choose a course of more proactive and robust diplomacy, the kind of diplomacy that will mitigate the risk of more conflict. Otherwise, if not attended to, the conflict will be certain to recur.



# Millions of unemployed in US face hardship under Republican benefit cuts



Millions of unemployed workers face hardship after a wave of Republican governors announced they will seek to cancel federal extended unemployment benefits of \$300 a week in response to claims from the restaurant, food service and hospitality industries that they are experiencing difficulties in hiring workers.

At least 22 Republican-led states have announced plans to cancel the extended benefits, including Montana, South Carolina, Alabama, Iowa, Idaho, Missouri, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, Oklahoma, Indiana, New Hampshire, Mississippi, Arkansas, Tennessee, Ohio,

Utah, Alaska, Georgia, West Virginia, Texas and Arizona.

The cancellations will affect more than 3.6 million workers currently relying on unemployment benefits by either wiping out or severely cutting their pay.

The American Rescue Plan signed by Joe Biden authorized federal pandemic unemployment benefits until 6 September, but these states are opting to end benefits early, beginning in June. Nequia Nichole Fugate worked in childcare in Jefferson county, Tennessee, before the coronavirus shutdowns hit last March. She has relied on pandemic unemployment assistance as the parents she

provided childcare for cannot afford childcare services at the moment.

"I'm really anxious and in a panic since the announcement from the governor. I can't believe this would happen during a pandemic, these benefits were the only thing helping me get by," said Fugate.

She added: "I'm going to be without a phone, a car, gas, groceries and money to pay for my medication. I'm currently in between housing as well. Everyone has just been surviving the best they can. A majority of us don't have medical insurance, let alone a safety net of savings to fall back on. Stimulus checks have been spent on necessities, funds are lower than when the pandemic started. The struggle is real out here."

Republicans have blamed the perceived labor shortages on unemployment benefits, despite economists dismissing the benefits as a driving factor, with data showing labor shortages are confined to the leisure and hospitality sector and show no signs of spilling over to other

industries or reducing growth within the leisure and hospitality sector, according to a recent analysis by the Economic Policy Institute.

Based on the most recent job opening data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there remains a significant job deficit in several industries such as construction, arts, entertainment and recreation, with two unemployed workers for every one job opening.

Many Americans still relying on unemployment benefits are facing issues with coronavirus safety protections, lack of paid sick leave, long delays and backlogs from broken unemployment systems, a lack of jobs in their industries, and scarce childcare options.

"I have a child who needs help with schooling, a mother I am taking care of with heart conditions, and also pure anxiety about getting sick," said Mary Lanier, a former restaurant manager in Charleston, South Carolina, who moved to Pennsylvania to take care of her mother during the pandemic after

losing her job, but now faces losing federal extended unemployment benefits.

Jessica Calvedt worked for a grocery retail store in Waterloo, Iowa, but was terminated along with her boyfriend for taking two weeks of leave due to contracting Covid-19 in March. It took over a month for their unemployment benefits to begin, and her boyfriend still hasn't received back pay for the missed weeks.

"We've been applying and going to interviews almost daily, and still haven't found a job," said Calvedt. "The impact of not having those federal unemployment benefits is causing so much stress due to bills stacking up and medical issues I've been having since I got Covid. I was depending on those funds to live and now I'm worried about becoming homeless and losing everything." Several unemployed workers in states where federal extended unemployment benefits are scheduled to be cancelled in a few weeks have circulated online petitions calling for their governors to rescind their decisions.

## States are ending federal unemployment benefits early. Here's what to know and what's at stake

More than a dozen states are withdrawing from pandemic-era unemployment programs - forgoing billions of dollars in federal funds that would otherwise flow to out-of-work residents. Here's what to know about the state decisions and what's at stake.

So, what's going on?

At least 16 states have elected to opt out of federal programs paying unemployment benefits.

As of Thursday, they include Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, Ohio, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah and Wyoming. All are led by Republican governors. Montana was the first state to announce its withdrawal, on May 4.

How soon is this happening?

The American Rescue Plan made these federal programs available until Labor Day, on Sept. 6.

States are ending their participation around two or more months early - anywhere from June 12 to July 10. (It varies by state.) How many people are affected?

The governors' decisions would reduce or cut off benefits for nearly 2 million people. Around \$11 billion of total funding is at stake, according to Andrew Stettner, a senior fellow at the Century Foundation.

What programs are involved?

States are withdrawing from programs enacted by the CARES Act in March 2020.

Together, the programs raised the amount of weekly aid, extended its duration and offered funds to workers who don't typically qualify for state benefits.

How will my benefits change?

States will no longer issue an extra \$300 a week to workers.

Those receiving state benefits will continue getting that aid, which generally amounts to half their pre-layoff wages. The average person got \$350 a week in state benefits in March, according to the Labor Department.

(Benefits vary widely by state. Among opt-out states, for example, they ranged from \$195 a week in Mississippi to \$480 in North Dakota.) Certain workers won't just get a benefit cut - they'll lose aid entirely. Those groups include the long-term unemployed (who've exhausted their maximum allotment of state benefits) as well as gig workers, the self-employed, freelancers and others collecting what's known as Pandemic Unemployment Assistance.

This is the case in most - but not all - the states in question. In Arizona, for example, residents are only losing access to the \$300.

Why is this occurring? Governors have pointed to labor shortages as the driver of their decisions to opt out of federal funding. They claim enhanced unemployment benefits offer an incentive for people to stay home and not look for jobs - leaving businesses struggling to fill open positions.

"While these benefits provided supplementary financial assistance during the height of COVID-19, they were intended to be temporary, and their continuation has instead worsened the workforce issues we are facing," said Missouri Gov. Mike Parson.

Is there a labor shortage?

It's hard to pinpoint the answer with available data, according to economists. But evidence suggests labor shortages are occurring, at least in some areas and sectors.

The most compelling evidence is twofold, according to Daniel Zhao, a senior economist at Glassdoor, a job and recruiting site.

Job openings hit a record high in March, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported Tuesday. Meanwhile, the U.S. economy added 266,000 job payrolls in April - much weaker than the 1 million expected, the Bureau said last week.

In other words, there's strong demand for labor as the economy reopens, but not a commensurate flood of workers onto payrolls.

Where are they most acute?

It seems shortages are most pronounced in industries like leisure and hospitality, which includes food services and restaurants.

This is where most anecdotes of shortages among business owners seem to be sourced and where companies like

McDonald's and Chipotle are raising wages and offering bonuses to attract workers, Zhao said.

Some states are likely experiencing a labor crunch more than others.

In Montana, for example, the labor market appears to be close to pre-Covid status, unlike the rest of the U.S., according to Peter Ganong, an assistant professor of public policy at the University of Chicago. Many (but not all) states opting out of federal benefits have unemployment rates below the national average of 6.1%. (For context, the national rate is still almost double its 3.5% pre-pandemic level.)

Are unemployment benefits the problem? Unemployment benefits likely play at least a small role, economists said.

Research suggests higher benefits reduce job-search intensity. This wasn't a problem earlier in the pandemic when jobs were scarce. But it's hard to say how much they may or may not be a factor now.

Are there other factors?

The coronavirus - not unemployment benefits - is likely the primary issue, according to labor experts. New daily infections, while falling, are still in the tens of thousands. And less than half (46%) of American adults are fully vaccinated, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (That share, which includes seniors, is lower among the working population.)



# Jobless Texans say Gov. Greg Abbott's decision to end federal unemployment benefits will worsen their already dire situations

Sign up for The Brief, our daily newsletter that keeps readers up to speed on the most essential Texas news.

Since she lost her job as a customer service coordinator at a department store, Mary Baker has cut down on everything she can to make ends meet while she searches for a new job. The San Antonio resident has unsubscribed from cable, stopped paying for some of her medications and cut down significantly on her air conditioning. But her roughly \$3,000 monthly unemployment payments still don't stretch far enough.

And they're about to get smaller. Baker is one of the many jobless Texans who will lose a significant portion of their unemployment benefits in June as they continue trying to get back on their feet in a state still recovering from the pandemic. In an effort to connect



many expected when Congress authorized or extended programs to run as late as early September.

For Baker, that means she'll

jobless Texans say they are still facing difficulties reentering the workforce and are relying on federal unemployment to get by.

Abbott's office did not

didn't answer how many people are currently receiving the federal benefits. But according to data compiled by University of Texas at Austin economics professor Julia Coronado, approximately 344,000 Texans were receiving assistance through the PUA program as of April 30.

Abbott's decision comes amid a wave of Republican governors announcing plans to cut benefits in order to encourage people to return to work and after pressure from business groups. In his announcement, Abbott said there are more than a million job openings in Texas, and many employers across the state are hiring for jobs that pay well above the minimum wage of \$7.25.

Abbott said there are nearly 60% more listed jobs open in Texas today compared to February 2020. According to the

Texas Workforce Commission, approximately 76% of posted jobs pay more than \$11.50 an hour, and 2% of posted jobs pay around the minimum wage. But multiple Texans on federal unemployment said that those numbers don't tell the full story. Jobless Texans told The Texas Tribune they're desperate to return to work, but they haven't had any luck when applying to multiple jobs every month. For some, one month isn't enough time to apply for and find a job, and others say that the income from the available jobs at places like retail stores and restaurants just isn't enough to pay for their rent, food and other expenses. Labor economists said it's unclear how Abbott's decision will immediately affect unemployment or the return of people back to work. More people may seek out food assistance, free health care and temporary housing, or they may be motivated - or forced - to find a job.

"We would expect some people who have been on the fence about going back to work to take the leap," said Belinda Román, an assistant professor of economics at St. Mary's University. "However, there are those who simply will not (be) able to return to the labor market for any number of reasons, and this type of change can only make it more difficult for them during the hot Texas summer."

In Marble Falls, Glen Bird, a former driver for Uber and Lyft, said he has spent the pandemic getting a college education to improve his future job prospects and trying to start his own small



unemployed people with work instead of unemployment assistance, Gov. Greg Abbott said on Monday that Texas will opt out of all federal unemployment assistance programs after June 26, including an extra \$300-per-week federal benefit Congress approved earlier this year. Abbott also is planning to withdraw from Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, which provides aid to gig workers, self-employed people and others who aren't traditionally covered by unemployment insurance. That June 26 cut-off for Texans comes months earlier than

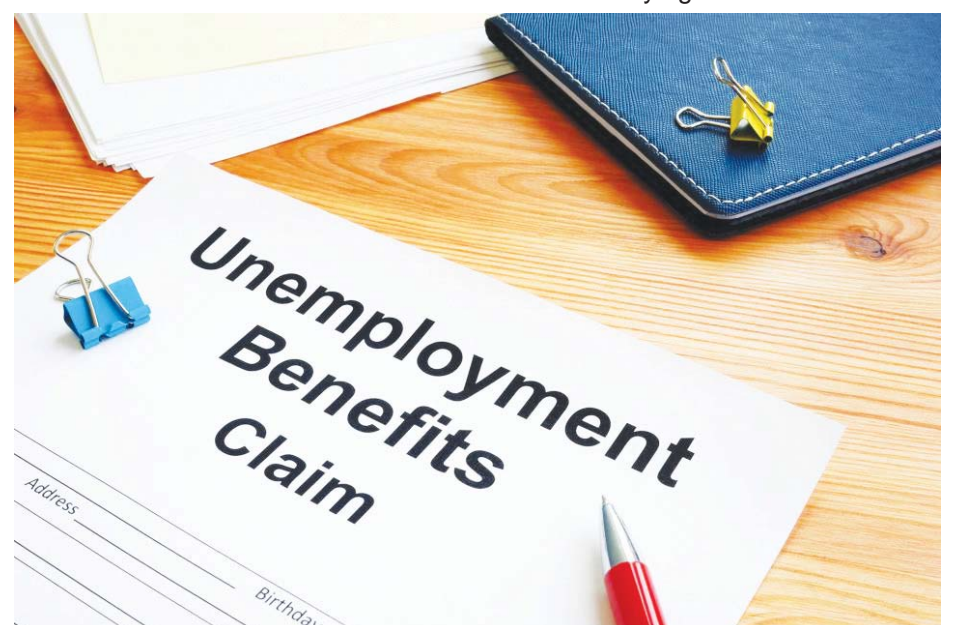
likely have to stop buying her insulin, and cut back on groceries next month.

"When I heard Abbott's announcement on the TV the other night, I got a knot in the pit of my stomach because I just don't know how I'm going to make it work," Baker said. "I can't just go take a \$12 an hour job. That's going to stop the unemployment, but it's still not going to pay my bills."

Critics of Abbott's move say tens of thousands of desperate Texans shouldn't have to choose between scrambling to find a job in the next few weeks or living with \$1,200 less getting deposited into their bank accounts every month. Many

immediately respond to a request for comment Thursday. The unemployment rate in

Texas was 6.7% in April. That is far below the record-high rate of 12.9% for April 2020, when much of the state's businesses were shut down. But it is nearly double the record low of 3.4% in May and June 2019. The Texas Workforce Commission





business making theatrical costumes and props. But without the federal unemployment assistance, he said the future of his business is in jeopardy, and he has no idea how he is going to keep the bills paid starting next month. "I've got a month to just try to figure out what I'm going to do because since I'm an independent contractor on unemployment, it's not a case of 'I'm just losing the \$300 federal benefit,'" Bird said. "After June 26, I'm going to be without any source of income, unless I can drum something up really fast."

Bird, a 40-year-old, said he recently started studying theater at Texas State University to help him get a job teaching theater or working as an artistic director. He said he also recently rented a small one-

room office, which he was planning to use as a space to make and sell costumes and props before he learned Abbott was withdrawing from federal unemployment assistance.

"I hear all the time about how Texas supports small businesses," Bird said. "By cutting off the pandemic unemployment insurance early, that's putting me in a spot now where I'm going to have to start chasing my tail again, not only to pay bills, but to keep the rent paid for my new office space. And that's going to be less time I'll have available to invest in trying to grow this into a business."

Some Texans are also struggling to find a job that accommodates their child care responsibilities, especially if their children are learning virtually or need to be home-

schooled. Other Texans still have fears of going back to work in-person and catching COVID-19 themselves or spreading it to their high-risk friends and family members.

Gabrielle McGinnis, a server and bartender in San Antonio, said she has had to home school her son, who has autism and is non-verbal, when he faced difficulties learning remotely. She said she'd like to get a job working from home, but she's been unable to find one that pays enough to cover her bills and works with her son's schedule.

"I'm definitely getting less on unemployment compared to when I was working. I've had to cut back a lot and just make do with what we got. We're not starving, but our quality of life has gone down for sure," McGinnis said. "Next month, it's gonna be really bad because my

partner just got laid off from his job, too. I'm not really sure what we're gonna do."

McGinnis said she's gone back to being a bartender for one night a week, but she said customers can be rude and she is now looking for other opportunities. While she is vaccinated, she said she is still nervous about getting sick and infecting her vulnerable family members with the coronavirus, not all of whom are vaccinated yet.

"My mother is elderly, and she's high-risk. My son is high risk. I want to go back to work, but how can I replace them if something happens to them? I can't," McGinnis said. "So I would rather struggle a little bit than lose people that I care about deeply. Like to me, it's

not even a question."After working to start his own business while taking classes during a pandemic, Bird said he wants to push back against the narrative that people on unemployment are lazy.

He said the federal aid has been a lifesaver that allowed him to remain financially stable while he survives the pandemic and works to recover. "We're on unemployment because we were unable to work due to this pandemic. It's not like we were fired from jobs, where we weren't doing a good job. It was a case of 'This was meant to keep people financially secure and stable during a time where businesses are closing, because of the pandemic where people have lost their jobs,'" Bird said.

# U.S. unemployment claims continue to set new pandemic lows

The numbers: Applications for U.S. unemployment benefits continued to decline to pandemic lows in mid-May as companies ramp up hiring efforts.

Initial jobless claims fell 34,000 to 444,000 in the week ended May 15. That's the lowest level of claims since March 2020.

Economists surveyed by Dow Jones and The Wall Street Journal had forecast new claims to fall to a seasonally adjusted 452,000.

While new state jobless claims have been cut in half since the start of the year, they are still more than twice as high now compared to the last month before the pandemic.

The number of applications had been running in the low 200,000s before the viral outbreak early last year.

What happened: Regular applications for unemployment benefits have been falling in every state. So too are applications filed through an emergency federal program set up during the pandemic.

Read: A jobs report whodunit: The prime suspects for weak hiring gains in April

Just 95,086 applications for



jobless benefits were filed last week through the federal relief program. They peaked last year at well over 1 million a week.

The number of people already collecting state jobless benefits, so-called continued claims, rose by 111,000 to a seasonally adjusted 3.75 million in the week ended May 8.

Read: A record number of small businesses can't find enough workers

Some 5.1 million who have exhausted state compensation

were also getting benefits through an emergency program funded by the federal government.

Altogether, the number of people reportedly receiving benefits from eight separate state and federal programs totaled 16 million as of May 1. These claims had topped 30 million early in the crisis.

Fewer than 2 million people were getting benefits before the pandemic erupted.

Note to readers: A government review found the number of

distinct individuals collecting benefits has been inflated by fraud and double counting. Widespread fraud has also resulted in tens of billions of dollars in improper payments, a Labor Department review estimated. Big picture: Layoffs and new jobless claims are waning, but a big debate has broken out over whether extra jobless benefits are keeping some unemployed people from taking jobs.

The debate intensified after a disappointing April jobs report. Since then nearly 20 states have said they plan to stop offering a \$300 weekly federal benefit in June to push people back into the labor force, a move that could affect several million people.

Whatever the case, a fast-growing economy buoyed by federal stimulus, low interest rates and high savings is expected to remain strong over the summer. The result is likely to be a lot more hiring and new jobs that adds to the economic momentum. What are economists saying? "Continuing claims have flattened out a bit in recent weeks, but we expect they will eventually continue to drift lower, reflecting a lower level of initial claims, workers being rehired, and some individuals exhausting regular benefits," said Nancy Vanden Houten, economist at Oxford Economics. Market reaction: The Dow Jones Industrial Average DJIA, +0.36% and S&P 500 SPX, -0.08% rose Thursday in a bid to end a three-day losing streak. Analysts said the stronger data was driving the market.



# What Unemployment Insurance Tells Us About Work During A Pandemic



One of the most expensive provisions in President Biden's COVID-19 relief plan involves giving unemployed workers an added \$300 per week, through September 6th, on top of their existing state unemployment insurance benefits. While the House version of the bill called for \$400 per week, this was revised down to \$300 in the Senate proposal, due to a last minute push supported by moderate Democratic Senator Joe Manchin. Senator Manchin argued that an extra \$400 per week was too much, and could stifle people's motivation to find jobs. "We want people to get back to work," he said. "We're going to have a hard time getting people ready to go back in and keep the economy going." Seems like basic economics: if you make nearly as much money as you do working, then why would you work?

Every state in the nation requires individuals to seek and accept available work in order to claim unemployment benefits. Still, assuming unemployed people can choose whether to work or not, economic logic tells us that

each dollar increase in unemployment benefits reduces the incentive to work, by making the alternative, not working, slightly more appealing. Finding the right unemployment benefit levels can be a tricky balancing act for politicians: they want to provide as much of a social safety net as possible, but they also want to encourage people to get back to work as soon as they can. A new working paper from Professor Arindrajit Dube of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, however, suggests that policymakers need not worry: higher unemployment benefits don't seem to affect employment levels the way many economists assumed.

Last March, President Trump's CARES Act stimulus package began providing a \$600 per week federal bonus in unemployment benefits. The bonus affected people differently depending on which state they lived in, based on income levels in the state, and the generosity of state unemployment benefits. For example, the median unemployed person in Louisiana received benefits worth 143

percent of their previous income because of the federal bonus, compared to 39 percent without the bonus. The median unemployed person in Hawaii also had their unemployment benefits boosted to a similar level - 149 percent of their previous income - but even without the bonus, they were already



receiving benefits worth 62 percent of their previous income. The federal bonus from the CARES Act eventually expired, and by mid-September of last year, states returned to their pre-pandemic levels of benefits. For the next few months, Dube compared how employment levels varied across states using data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau. He concluded

that states with low unemployment insurance benefits (and thus the strongest incentives for returning to work) did not increase employment levels more than states with high levels of unemployment insurance benefits. In fact, just the opposite: high unemployment benefits led to slightly higher employment levels.

So policymakers can breathe easy, then: raise the unemployment benefits, and watch the employment numbers rise! Well, there are a few caveats.

While Dube did find that high unemployment benefits led to slightly higher employment levels, the rise was so slight as to be statistically insignificant. The results, therefore, don't rule out the possibility that high unemployment benefits may in fact have led to lower employment levels. Dube pointed out, however, that his results do suggest that any decrease in

employment would be relatively small; smaller than most estimates from prior research on the topic.

Dube also noted that the period he studied was a deep economic downturn and had unique health restrictions. It's unclear, therefore, whether the results he found would hold up even during the later periods of the pandemic.

Biden's relief plan addresses a time period with economic and public health conditions markedly different than those of the CARES Act. Those conditions could change how people weigh the value of unemployment insurance benefits against the value of working, so economists can't fully predict how labor markets will behave during the rest of the pandemic and recovery process. While no one can be certain which policies will lead to the most streamlined recovery, Dube's work suggests that - at least in some cases - providing more support to unemployed workers may not be the delicate balancing act policymakers once thought it was.



# Ekal Offensive Against Pandemic in Rural India



**Ekal Info Campaign**

**By Prakash Waghmare**

In India, Covid-19 (Corona) pandemic's second wave hit hard suddenly and with the force of a tsunami. The country was caught off guard and ill prepared for the toll it took. All the focus of the grave situation revolved mainly around the urban areas and rural-tribal areas received scant notice. There was a reason too for this apathy towards the rural community. Last year, the villages had fared quite well in arresting the spread of corona, by and large, and the majority of folks there had remained immune to it. As India entered well into Yr.2021, the situation changed. According to Bajrang Bagra, the CEO of 'Ekal Abhiyan' (federation of all 'Ekal' organizations), "the serious aspect of the pandemic, this time around, is that it has struck even in the countryside where, unfortunately, the medical infrastructure and facilities are not as strong as they are in the urban areas". In rural India, 'Ekal' (as 'Abhiyan' is popularly known) has the most wide-spread network of volunteers and collaborators in the deepest corners of villages. It has firm presence and unwavering support in over 100,000 villages. That's why Ekal has undertaken a comprehensive well-coordinated offensive against the pandemic, with support from its allied organizations. Last year, Ekal's successful initiative against covid was

based on self-monitoring, self-reliance, education and cooperative-exchanges. It included a wide-spread awareness campaign about the hygiene, social distancing, food distribution, mask-making and restrictive movements. The new offensive has not only incorporated all these steps in the direct-action roadmap, but also, has started a proactive counter campaign against the misinformation about the vaccine, the danger posed by covid and voodoo-treatments. With extensive reach well beyond its footings, Ekal has mobilized tens of thousands of its school teachers for this information campaign. 'Ekal-Arogya (Health Foundation)' has established 24-hr Telehealth lifeline (# 011 41236457) for professional medical counselling. According to Ramesh Shah, Ekal Global Coordinator and an advisor to Ekal-USA, 'Board of Directors', "currently more than 350 'National Medico Organization (NMO)' Doctors



**Ekal Clinic**

in India and some in U.S. are manning the helpline every day". In addition to various empowering projects for the economic sustenance of the village folks, Ekal has earmarked one million dollars just for covid relief. It is converting its 29 'Gramotthan Research Ctrs' and 'Integrated Village Development Ctrs' into corona isolation camps, fully equipped with Oxygen concentrators, PPE kits, Oximeters and basic medicines. After making provision for hundreds of beds it is dispensing Ayurvedic, Homoeopathic and Allopathic medicines as deemed necessary. According to Arun Gupta, Chairman of Ekal-USA 'Board of Directors', "Ekal has lost many volunteers to Covid and so Ekal has created an endowment fund to the tune of \$500,000 - \$1Million, as an assistance to their families. It is supplying 15,000 Oximeters and infrared thermometers to its 'Arogya Sevikas' (healthcare workers). It has created resident facilities for thousands of its city volunteers, throughout its reach. Ekal intends to extend emergency medical services to 5 million people. It is



**Bajrang Bagra - CEO of 'Ekal Abhiyan'**

running vaccination Centers in collaboration with the local govt. These efforts are being spear-headed by Dr. Mukul Bhatia in India and Dr. Rakesh Gupta in U.S., with support from numerous healthcare specialists.

In this national crisis, Ekal is working alongside various organization like 'Sewa International', 'AAPI', 'Seva Bharati', 'Mission Oxygen' and few others. It is assisting many humanitarian groups who have collected funds for Indian pandemic but have no proper distribution network to dispense them. Ekal is appealing nationally and internationally to its donor-base to contribute to its various relief-work packages. As of now four donor-

packages have been floated – Diagnostic Kits \$50/ village; Telehealth Lifeline \$500/30 villages; Supporting Covid Ctr \$5000/Ctr; and Supporting Covid Victim \$5,000/Family. Ekal's youth groups are also very active in creating awareness and raising funds for this unprecedented fight against the pandemic. One example - Arnav Enaganti from Michigan has taken an initiative to raise funds for Oximeter, PPE Kits and Oxygen concentrators. Come what may, Ekal is confident that with everyone's help, we can defeat this deadly virus, once and for all. Please support this noble cause and donate generously at [www.ekal.org](http://www.ekal.org)



**Ekal 2021 Campaign**



**Handbill for Vaccines**



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**APOLLO**  
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# The Second-Largest Country In The World Is Running Out Of Land

Canada's housing market is running hotter than just about anywhere else in the world. But despite the anxiety about irrational bidding wars and fears of the bubble bursting, what's fundamentally driving it is a worsening imbalance between supply and demand: Buyers want large homes but increasingly can't have them because there isn't enough space in and around the major cities where people work.

The world's second biggest country by landmass is effectively running out of space, and that has Canada on course for a reckoning. The dream of a detached home and a piece of land, which generations of Canadians have taken for granted, and which continues to entice new immigrants, may soon be out of reach in the places where people want to live. That could force an expansion of the idea of home to include condos and rentals, potentially transforming how the middle class does everything from raising families to saving for retirement.

"Running out of land in Canada is a relatively recent phenomenon compared to Europe, or Japan, or other parts of the world," said Robert Hogue, an economist at Royal Bank of Canada. "I think

that for future generations, homeownership is going to look a lot more European, for example, than it does today."

In Canada, buying a home has long been seen as the surest path to middle class security. Canadians on average live in some of the biggest houses in the world, and post higher rates of homeownership than in the U.K., or France, or even the U.S. The pandemic has put an even bigger premium on backyards and extra space.

Nearly 60% of home sales last year in 18 communities in and around Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver and Ottawa were for single-family detached houses, according to data compiled from local real estate boards by Bloomberg News. Only about a quarter of the sales in these places were for apartments.

But when you look at what has been built in these same cities and their nearby bedroom communities over the last decade, the percentages are exactly reversed: 60% of new housing stock is apartments, and just 25% detached houses, according to government data compiled by Bloomberg. That mismatch has forced desperate bidders to vie for

an increasingly constrained supply of single-family homes. In 2020, Canada's benchmark home prices gained almost 15%, with only Luxembourg posting a bigger increase, according to a data from the Dallas Fed.

Still, developers don't seem to be responding. Though construction started on a record number of new homes in Canada's metro areas in March, the percentage that were single family-detached actually fell to 19% from 24% the previous year, according to government data. While this ratio improved in April, new home starts slowed that month overall. "If there is a problem it's in the composition of the new supply," said Robert Kavcic, an economist with the Bank of Montreal. "We don't build single detached homes anymore. And it just so happens from a demographic perspective that's what the market demands. So we're kind of stuck on that front."

It comes down to land. While Canada boasts a total area of about 10 million square kilometers (3.9 million square miles), roughly 40 times the area of the U.K., most Canadians are clustered in a handful of major cities not far from the U.S. border.



That's where the jobs are. And while the work-from-home era has expanded that radius for some, turning quiet farming communities and weekend-getaway spots into the hottest real estate markets in the country, the possibility of returning to the office even a few days a week has kept most workers from striking out too far afield.

City-specific factors have constrained land use even more. Vancouver is squeezed between the Pacific Ocean and the mountains; provincial regulations against urban sprawl have effectively turned Toronto and Ottawa into islands for the purposes of development; and Montreal actually is an island.

"If we think of first-time home buyers, a young couple starting

out, it's much more realistic for them to be considering a condo apartment as a starter home from an affordability standpoint," said Royal Bank of Canada's Hogue. "This is the norm for large global cities. I'm hard pressed to think of any major global city where a single-detached home near the core urban area is affordable."

Canada is going to need more apartments too, especially as Prime Minister Justin Trudeau moves to boost immigration to historic records to make up for the pandemic lull. The country has a shortage of homes generally, posting the lowest number of housing units per 1,000 people among Group of Seven countries, according to a recent report from the Bank of Nova Scotia.

## Why Peru is reviving a pre-Incan technology for water



Pre-pandemic, in the austral winter, I drove north out of Lima, up into Peru's highlands to the village of Huamantanga (wa-mon-TONG-a). I was traveling with scientists who were studying local farmers' use of a 1,400-year-old technique to extend water availability into the long dry season.

Wending our way through the narrow Chillón River Valley, a slim swath of irrigated green crops hemmed in by sheer walls of tawny rock, we crossed the river and began grinding up a single-lane dirt road clinging to the side of a steep mountain. At about 3,500m (11,500ft), we reached a

plateau with fields of avocados, hops, potatoes and beans and, finally, the village, where two-storey buildings of mud bricks and concrete lined narrow dirt streets. Burros, horses, cows, dogs and people pattered around. The Andes Mountains are one of six places in the world where complex civilisations emerged, spurred by precipitation so seasonal it was a catalyst for hydrological innovations again and again. People cultivated deep knowledge of water and the underground, deploying strategies that still astonish - and which some still use.

Today, modern Peruvians are

redeploying that ancient knowledge and protecting natural ecosystems such as high-altitude wetlands to help the country adapt to climate change. It's one of the world's first efforts to integrate nature into water management on a national scale. Peru is among the world's most water-insecure countries. The capital Lima, home to a third of the country's population, sprawls across a flat desert plain and receives just 13mm (0.5 inches) of annual rainfall. To support that human abundance, it relies on three rivers born in the Andes that rise behind the city, soaring to 5,000m (16,400ft) in just 150 kilometres (93 miles). Lima residents are not alone in this reliance on mountain water. An estimated 1.5 billion people worldwide could depend on water flowing from mountains by 2050, up from 200 million in the 1960s. Water scarcity in Peru is getting worse as a result of climate change. Within living memory, mountain glaciers have melted and the rainy season has shrunk

to just a couple of months. Already Lima's water utility Sedapal can only supply customers 21 hours a day, a rate that Ivan Lucich, executive director of the national water regulator Sunass, says he expects to further decline in the coming years. A 2019 World Bank report evaluating drought risk in Peru concluded that the capital's current strategies to manage drought - dams, reservoirs, storage under the city - will be inadequate by as early as 2030.

Several years ago, desperate for water security, the country's leaders did something radical: they passed a series of national laws requiring water utilities to invest a percentage of their customers' bills in "natural infrastructure". These funds - called *Mechanismos de Retribucion por Servicios Ecosistemicos* (Mechanisms of Reward for Ecosystem Services) or MRSE - go to nature-based water interventions, such as restoring ancient human systems

that work with nature, protecting high-altitude wetlands and forests, or introducing rotational grazing to protect grasslands. Before, it was considered a misuse of public funds if utilities invested in the watershed. Now it's required. As climate change brings water change worldwide, conventional water control structures are increasingly failing. Such human interventions tend to confine water and speed it away, erasing natural phases when water stalls on land. Nature-based solutions, on the other hand, make space and time for these slow phases. In researching my forthcoming book on the subject, I've come to think of them as "slow water". Like the slow food movement, slow water approaches are bespoke: they work with local landscapes, climates and cultures rather than try to control or change them. They provide multiple other benefits too, including carbon storage and homes for threatened plants and animals. For these reasons, conserving



# \$2 Million Highest Bid So Far For Space Flight Seat, Discloses Jeff Bezos' Firm

**The second phase of the auction will last until June 10 and the process will conclude in a final phase on June 12.**

Blue Origin, billionaire Jeff Bezos' rocket company, disclosed \$2 million as the current highest bid for a seat on its New Shepard spacecraft after the startup closed the first phase of its auction.

The second phase of the auction is underway and will last until June 10. The process will conclude in a final phase on June 12 with a live online auction.

(www.blueorigin.com)

The rocket company is targeting July 20 for its first suborbital sightseeing trip on its spacecraft, a landmark moment in a competition to usher in a new era of private commercial space travel.

The New Shepard rocket-and-capsule combo is designed to autonomously fly six passengers more than 62 miles

(100 km) above Earth into suborbital space.

Reuters reported in 2018 that Blue Origin was planning to charge passengers at least \$200,000 for the ride, based on an appraisal of rival plans from billionaire Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic Holdings Inc and other considerations, though its thinking may have changed.



## An Economic Rebound Can Help Government In Elections Next Year



**A recent Credit Suisse study talked about how 100 unicorns - firms with more than \$1 billion valuation - have sprung up in India in just a few years**

At the beginning of 2021, when S&P Global Ratings forecast Indian gross domestic product growth at 11 per cent for the coming financial year, the number looked eminently achievable. Last month, the Goods and Services Tax - a good barometer of economy activity - hit ? 1.41 trillion (\$19.1 billion), its highest ever monthly collection. Indeed, it's been higher than the benchmark ? 1 trillion for seven consecutive months and higher than the

same month for the last year for eight consecutive months.

India's international merchandise trade reached \$34 billion in March, the highest ever, and stayed over \$30 billion in April. Many short term economic indicators - auto sales, electricity consumption, highway toll collection - were also pointing to a strong recovery after a crushing 2020. But that's when the second wave of the pandemic hit with a vengeance. The daily case count went up from 81,000

on April 1 to more than 402,000 thousand on April 30. India's healthcare system came under severe stress the same month. As the outbreak grew worse, state governments applied restrictive lockdown measures that halted the nascent economic recovery in its tracks. According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy - a think tank - the unemployment rate grew from 6 per cent in March to 8 per cent in April. Studies show that more than 200 million Indians are expected to fall into poverty as a result of shutdowns and healthcare costs. The S&P has now downgraded Indian GDP growth to 9.8 per cent. Most experts predict the second wave to recede by June. But the government has to start now to

rebuild the economy. There are three parts to this. The most immediate involves vaccinations: choosing which sectors of the population get inoculated first will mitigate the negative impact on GDP. A government spending boost will then help backstop the downslide. Finally, structural changes must be initiated to ensure that India's prowess in technology and manufacturing is leveraged to its highest potential. Right now, the focus must be placed on vaccinations in the 53 cities with populations of a million-plus each.

They are hubs of economic activity and need to be de-risked from a third wave. Second, workers in customer-facing businesses - hospitality, restaurants, aviation, storefront

retail, local transportation, commercial real estate - should have priority. The sectors have all taken a hard knock, as in every other country; inoculations there will help build confidence for consumers to patronize them and move about again.

Government spending must then follow. At the end of 2019, the government released a National Infrastructure Pipeline, outlining capital expenditures of ? 120 trillion over five years. The announcement ran into the onset of the pandemic, but this program should be expedited. With a gradual glide path to 3 per cent fiscal deficit signaled in the union budget and buoyant direct and indirect tax collections, the government has fiscal headroom for this expansionary spend.

## Elon Musk Loses 2nd-Richest Ranking To Louis Vuitton's Bernard Arnault

**Elon Musk, who held the top spot in the Bloomberg Billionaires Index as recently as March, now has a fortune of \$160.6 billion, down 24% from its January high.**

Elon Musk's Twitter posts keep sending Bitcoin prices tumbling. His own fortune is heading in the same direction. On Monday, Tesla Inc.'s chief executive officer lost his spot as the world's second-richest person to LVMH Chairman Bernard Arnault as the electric vehicle-maker's shares fell 2.2%. That was on top of last week's slump amid a global rout in technology stocks and fresh signs of trouble in its China business.

Musk, who held the top spot in the Bloomberg Billionaires Index as recently as March, now has a

fortune of \$160.6 billion, down 24% from its January high.

The drop follows a turbulent period for Musk, who sent Bitcoin tumbling as much as 15% last week after posting a statement on Twitter that Tesla was no longer accepting the digital currency as payment. He also helped to whipsaw Dogecoin prices after tweeting he's working with developers of the Shiba Inu-themed token to improve transaction efficiencies.

Wreaking Havoc

Over the weekend, Musk wreaked havoc again when he

seemed to imply that Tesla may sell or has sold its Bitcoin holdings before later clarifying in a tweet Monday that the company had done no such thing.

To clarify speculation, Tesla has not sold any Bitcoin — Elon Musk (@elonmusk) May 17, 2021

Musk, 49, became the world's richest person in January after Tesla's shares surged almost 750% last year amid a boom in technology-driven stocks. Despite reporting record first-quarter profit, the Palo Alto,



California-based company's shares have since fallen by about a fifth amid a global semiconductor shortage and increasing competition from traditional automakers. Musk's fortune has dropped about \$9.1 billion this year, the most

among U.S.-based billionaires tracked by Bloomberg's wealth index. Meanwhile, Arnault, 72, has added the most, with his net worth climbing by almost \$47 billion to \$161.2 billion as sales of his firm's luxury goods surge in China and other parts of Asia.



# Going after tax cheats to pay for Dems' spending plans? There's just one problem.



Democrats want to raise billions of dollars by giving the IRS more money to go after tax cheats - and use the money to pay for their infrastructure spending plans.

There's one problem: That isn't allowed under Congress' arcane budget rules.

A two-decade-old rule bars lawmakers from paying for legislation with money generated from things like beefing up IRS audits of the rich. It's a crucial problem Democrats are now confronting behind closed doors.

They are relying on greater IRS enforcement to contribute billions toward the cost of their plans. If they can't tap that, it could blow a big hole in their budget numbers.

Lawmakers are now discussing ways around the rules, with some pushing to overturn them. "This is an issue we're looking at closely," said Senate Finance Chair Ron Wyden (D-Ore.). "The revenue generated from going after wealthy tax cheats should be counted toward the revenue needed to pay for critical investments in the American people."

"Hundreds of billions of dollars are on the table, and revenue is revenue."

Going after uncollected taxes is among the politically easiest money Democrats are likely to find when it comes to paying for their big-ticket spending packages.

While some lawmakers are skittish about raising taxes, few

object to the idea of expanding IRS enforcement, especially after Commissioner Charles Rettig speculated last month that the annual tax gap - the difference between what's owed and what's actually collected - might run as much as \$1 trillion annually.

If Democrats can't use that money to pay for their plans, they may have to turn to more controversial alternatives, such as even more tax increases or adding to the deficit.

"I'll note that budget scoring rules block Congress from using that high-return investment as a pay-for - that needs to change," said Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.), in a hearing last week on the tax gap.

Improving tax collections is also an area of potential bipartisan compromise as the two sides explore whether they might be able to work together on an infrastructure plan.

Republicans, sometimes blamed for exacerbating the tax gap with years of tight IRS budgets, now say they are open to helping the agency go after unpaid tax bills, though some are skeptical there's as much out there as Rettig says.

The quandary facing Democrats is reminiscent of one Republicans confronted when

they were working on their 2017 tax cuts.

Back then, they wanted to use dynamic scoring - which takes into account the macroeconomic impact of tax changes - to help cover the cost of their plan. But they ran into what proved to be insurmountable procedural hurdles in the Senate and weren't able to include it.

For Democrats, the problem is budget scorekeeping rule No. 14. It prevents lawmakers from incorporating into calculations of how much legislation costs any savings from increasing IRS audits or other "program integrity" initiatives across the government designed to make programs more cost-effective - such as cracking down on fraudulent Social Security disability payments. "No increase in receipts or decrease in direct spending will be scored as a result of provisions of law that provide direct spending for administrative or program management activities," the rule says.

That's because government forecasters have long considered those savings too iffy to be relied upon.

"There are a couple degrees of uncertainty," said Janet Holtzblatt, a former longtime tax

expert at the Congressional Budget Office.

For one thing, agency budgets are set one year at a time and just because an administration says it will spend a certain amount of money on a department in the future doesn't mean lawmakers will follow through.

Some are now proposing to make at least some IRS funding "mandatory" so that it is more reliable, but even with that there is an unanswerable question of whether Congress in the future might siphon away other department money that's discretionary.

What's more, lawmakers don't necessarily always know how an agency will spend money. If Congress doesn't include specific instructions, it's possible a department will use the cash in unforeseen ways that have nothing to do with what lawmakers wanted.

"One of the concerns from the perspective of the scorekeepers was that you were not going to give credit for very uncertain savings coming from a certain event" of deciding to boost funding," said Holtzblatt, now a senior fellow at the Tax Policy Center.

# How to deal with a nuclear-armed Kim Jong Un

The Biden administration has pledged to pursue "calibrated" diplomacy

to persuade North Korean leader Kim Jong Un to halt his mad dash toward a deliverable nuclear weapon. But that is a vain hope. Instead, the world and especially the United States must find a way to live with a North Korea armed with The Bomb. And keep Kim from using -- or selling -- it.

Discussions with a number of individuals who have dealt with the North Korean government or monitored the actions of its ruling family have convinced me that no Kim -- neither Kim Jong Un, nor his father nor his grandfather -- ever has or will give up a quest for a deliverable nuclear weapon. Nor is Kim likely to relinquish such a device once it can be deployed. Indeed, North Korea clearly does have any number of such devices -- some analysts say it could be more than 60 -- though the delivery vehicles are

still in development. That brings us to the realm of what may be possible and achievable. For Kim, possession of a nuclear weapon is a question of existential survival. His ultimate fear is no doubt the fate of Libyan strongman Colonel Moammar Gadhafi -- dragged from a drain pipe by rebels and executed, a direct consequence of the decision to relinquish his own nuclear program that allowed his enemies in the West to undermine his regime. Still, it's not clear that President Biden or his principal advisers are prepared to accept any nuclearized North Korea. President Joe Biden has said that any diplomacy "has to be conditioned upon the end result of denuclearization." At the same time, he and his team are rightly rejecting former President Donald Trump's "go big or go home" approach -- agreeing to remove all sanctions in exchange for North Korea fully dismantling

its weapons program -- which Kim rejected out of hand at their last, abortive summit in Hanoi.

"Our policy will not focus on achieving a grand bargain, nor will it rely on strategic patience," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki told reporters after announcing last month that the administration had completed its months-long North Korea policy review. "Our policy calls for a calibrated practical approach that is open to and will explore diplomacy with the DPRK, and to make practical progress that increases the security of the United States, our allies and deployed forces," she said.

An utterly commendable goal. But it's the steps that are needed to get there and the shape of the end result that are so critical to preserving peace -- even a nuclear-armed one -- on the Korean peninsula. The essence of any such plan must lie in the United States finding a way to



persuade the North to join the global nuclear non-proliferation club. Implicit would be the acceptance that it already has a weapon. In turn the North will need to make its weapons and their security clearly visible and open to inspection. China has every incentive to go along with such a plan and see that North Korea respects its spirit and letter. Biden must persuade Xi Jinping to embrace this in his dealings with Kim. At the same time Kim, as well as Xi, should understand that if North Korea launches a nuclear weapon at any

foreign power, the United States is capable not only of a targeted nuclear attack on the capital of Pyongyang, but of turning the entirety of North Korea into a radioactive glass bowl. It's true that the US is unlikely to engage in a full-scale nuclear exchange that could destroy South Korea and inflict enormous damage on China, but it's also true that Beijing would not want a nuclear strike on its neighbor given that China's eastern provincial capital of Dalian is barely 200 miles from Pyongyang and Beijing is barely 500 miles to the west.



# India's covid collapse, part 1: How Modi government's complacency in keeping track of new mutants triggered a second wave

**Genome sequencing was not prioritised even after concerns were articulated about mutants causing a second wave**

Forewarned is forearmed. This maxim holds good for all nations trying to combat the waves of Covid-19 that threaten the world today. Yet the Narendra Modi government, which had acted with alacrity during the first wave, was surprisingly complacent, not keeping track of mutations of the virus that could trigger a second wave of infections—as it did in the US and the UK and is now doing in India. When the first wave raged, barring two institutes, the Delhi-based Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (IGIB) and the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) in Hyderabad, there was no coordinated national effort to sequence Covid samples to detect the most dominant variants and to ascertain if any threatening mutations had occurred. It was only on December 21, after the UK variant was recorded in England, that the Union ministry of health and family welfare (MoHFW) formed the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) to do so. A group of 10 labs was granted funding and came under the purview of the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), which reports to the MoHFW. INSACOG's job was to track Covid variants in the country, most specifically if any of the variants causing concern in the UK, Brazil and South Africa had reached India and also track the progress of the Indian variant, B.1.617, which had been detected in October 2020 by the CCMB. INSACOG faced big hurdles from the start. The first major problem was a May 2020 Union finance ministry order banning the import of goods valued under Rs 200 crore. Several reagents and plastics used by Indian labs come from foreign manufacturers and have no Indian substitutes. To import any of these, a lab would have to prove to officials through a market assessment that no Indian alternative exists. The reagent restriction was lifted only in January this year. The second problem was funds. INSACOG was initially allocated Rs 115



crore for a six-month period, which was to come through the department of biotechnology. But the first tranche of funds was released only on March 31, 2021, and the allocation itself was reduced to Rs 80 crore. Till then, the labs had to spend their own resources for sequencing. The third, and the biggest, problem was getting hold of samples from the states to enable the labs to track the variants. Barring Kerala, most states were lackadaisical in their approach. Covid-19 testing labs in states must preserve positive samples from patients and it is the responsibility of state governments to transport a set number of these samples to the 10 INSACOG labs every week. The problem, an official at one of the labs revealed, was that most states had not appointed nodal officers to ensure collection and transport of the samples to the labs. Some states didn't have cold storages to preserve the samples before and during transportation. As a result, INSACOG fell far short of its objective of sequencing around 80,000 samples by February 2021—it managed to do only 3,500.

This was one reason why it was only in March that INSACOG

could determine that the B.1.617 variant, detected months ago, had been found in a high 20 per cent of samples from Maharashtra. On March 10, the group shared its findings with the NCDC, which further conveyed it to MoHFW. In a draft statement that was never released, INSACOG wrote that the mutations in the B.1.617 variant were of "high concern". On March 24, MoHFW announced the variant's spread



but played down concerns to avoid public panic. Many experts believe this cost them dearly. "That the variant was spreading and was more contagious didn't ring alarm bells till it was too late. People continued to gather in groups without masks and social distancing," says Rakesh Mishra, director, CCMB. Missing the alarm bells The Centre claims it had taken note of INSACOG's warnings. Ashutosh Sharma, secretary, department of science and technology, says the B.1.617 strain was discussed in

an early April meeting with 21 members of the National Task Force for Covid. The task force had been set up in April 2020 to provide scientific and technical guidance to the government and is headed by Dr V.K. Paul. Its members include Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) director general Dr Balram Bhargava, AIIMS director Dr Randeep Guleria and NCDC director Sujeet Kumar Singh. In that meeting, around 100,000

daily new cases were predicted, with the peak of the second wave in end-April. Yet, the experts seemed to have severely underestimated the virulence of the mutant strains. Within 20 days of the meeting, India hit 300,000 new cases a day. On April 19, NCDC director Singh met other members of the National Task Force for Covid. The minutes of the meeting, doing the rounds of social media, purportedly had Singh saying that the lockdown should have been announced 15 days ago. A task force member who attended the early April meeting says the severity of the second wave went unnoticed. "The predictions were based on how infectious the first wave had been and the modelling of the second wave mirrored the first. That the Indian variant replaced the early strain in Maharashtra in just 1.5 months

was not used to predict how rapidly the second wave would spread," he says.

Lessons from the UK

As the B.1.617 strain is showing signs of a third mutation in West Bengal and a new variant, N440K, has come up in Andhra Pradesh, the need for quick and widespread genome sequencing has never been greater. India can learn from the UK's research consortium-COG-UK. The group was created as soon as the pandemic began in March 2020. It has been allocated £32 million (Rs 329 crore), about four times what was given in India. In the first wave itself, the group found out that Covid in the UK came from France and Spain, not Italy or China. To find out if certain viral variants are linked with more severe diseases, COG-UK is linking its viral genome sequences with NHS (National Health Service) patient data and a human genome sequencing project being carried out with Genomics England. Their work is so precise that in Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge, the group identified that an outbreak in the area was due to a bus transporting dialysis patients. Scientists say genome sequencing can pick up outbreaks at least two weeks faster than any other surveillance, by ascertaining if cases in an area are linked. Say, if all five cases are related, it is possible that there is active transmission, which means a containment zone should be created immediately. India has already built up its capacity to do this work. At CCMB, sequencing to identify a variant can now be done in 24 hours. But many of the labs assigned to do this work are not receiving samples from states fast enough to draw a conclusive picture of variants and their spread. Some states, like Goa, are setting up their own sequencing facilities. Rapid surveillance of Covid variants followed by immediate policy action on points of concern is the only way to prevent a repeat of April 2021 and stem the damage a third wave may cause.



# How overwork is literally killing us

Lisa Choi ignored the first symptoms. After all, the 53-year-old business analyst was a very active, fit vegetarian, who cycled frequently and avoided high-fat foods. She was far from the typical victim of a heart attack. However, the Seattle-based Choi was working 60-hour workweeks, including evenings and weekends. She was facing tight deadlines and managing complex digital projects. This workload was utterly normal to her. "I have a really high-stress job... I'm usually on overdrive," she says. It wasn't until several months ago, when she suddenly started feeling an anvil-like pressure on her chest, that she began to take her symptoms more seriously. In the hospital, it turned out that she had a tear in her artery. This is a hallmark of a spontaneous coronary artery dissection (SCAD), a relatively rare heart condition that particularly affects women and people younger than 50. Told that she would need an angioplasty to open up her artery, Choi thought, "I don't have time for this. I'm scheduled for migrations at work, and I'm doing all this stuff."

Like Choi, many are also finding themselves in ill health due to

intense work schedules. New, sobering research - said to be the first-ever study to quantify the global burden of disease from working long hours - has shown how bleak the situation is. In a paper published 17 May, authors from institutions including the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) suggest that, each year, three-quarters of a million people are dying from ischaemic heart disease and stroke, due to working long hours. (Ischaemic heart disease, also known as coronary heart disease, involves narrowed arteries. Choi's SCAD is different from conventional ischaemic heart disease, but stress and high blood pressure are major factors in both.) In other words, more people are dying from overwork than from malaria. This is a global health crisis, demanding attention from individuals, companies and governments alike. And, if we don't solve it, the problem may not only continue - it could get worse.

How overwork affects health

In the paper, published in the journal *Environment International*, researchers systematically

reviewed data on long working hours, defined as 55 hours or more per week; health impacts; and mortality rates from most of the world's countries, from 2000 to 2016. The authors controlled for factors like gender and socioeconomic status, in order to tease out the pure effects of overwork on health.

The study establishes that overwork is the single largest risk factor for occupational disease, accounting for roughly one-third of the burden of disease related to work. "For me personally, as an epidemiologist, I was extremely surprised when we crunched these numbers," says Frank Pega, a WHO technical officer and the lead author of the paper. "I was extremely surprised by the size of the burden." He describes the findings as moderate, but clinically significant.

There are two major ways that overwork can reduce health and longevity. One is the biological toll of chronic stress, with an uptick in stress hormones leading to elevated blood pressure and cholesterol. Then there are the changes in behaviour. Those logging long hours may be sleeping little, barely exercising,



eating unhealthy foods and smoking and drinking to cope. And there are particular reasons to worry about overwork both while we're still in the Covid-19 pandemic, and looking at life thereafter. The pandemic has intensified some work stresses while bringing new forms of workplace exhaustion.

India has become the epicentre of the global pandemic, with more than 25 million cases of Covid-19. But the pandemic is affecting health in other ways as well. Sevith Rao, a physician and founder of the Indian Heart Association, explains that South Asians are already at high risk of heart disease. Now, "with the Covid pandemic we have seen an increase in work from home,

which has blurred work-life balance among many individuals, leading to disrupted sleep patterns and exercise; this has in turn increased the risk for cardiovascular disease and stroke."

Moreover, the pandemic has resulted in the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. Previous recessions have actually been followed by increases in working hours. "It seems almost like a perverse effect," Pega acknowledges, in light of the widespread job losses during a recession. But "the reality seems to be that the people who are still working have to work more to compensate for the job losses."

## What critics of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan get wrong



Within hours of President Joe Biden's announcement that US forces will leave Afghanistan by September 11, 2021, objections and remonstrations appeared across US media. These protests are nearly all disingenuous, false and specious, and meant to utilize fear to continue a tragic and purposeless war. Much of the argument against withdrawal ignores how truly counterproductive the war in Afghanistan has been. Consider

just two facts: In the years prior to the US invasion in 2001, Afghanistan and Pakistan were home to four international terror groups. Now, the Pentagon testifies that the number of such terror groups has grown to 20 or more. Second, when the US first invaded Afghanistan, al Qaeda counted around 400 total members worldwide. Al Qaeda has since spawned branches and offshoots -- including the Islamic State -- in dozens of countries, with total memberships in the

tens of thousands, and have, at times, controlled entire cities in multiple countries.

This, of course, applies throughout the context of US military operations and not just in Afghanistan. For example, in 2009, more than a year after the US military established Africa Command (AFRICOM) there were less than 300 terror attacks in Africa. In 2020, with US commandos, drones and troops in nearly two dozen African countries, the Africa Center for Strategic Studies found that there were almost 5,000 attacks.

These numbers show that the world war that has cruelly raged this century from the western coast of Africa through to Pakistan is motivated and sustained by local forces who oppose foreign presence, as well as predation and disenfranchisement by corrupt, illegitimate and, often, sectarian governments.

Yes, jihadist Islamist groups headline these wars, but the

reality is, whether it be in Africa, the Middle East or Central Asia, 70-90% of insurgents fight not for religion or ideology but against what they view as occupation or oppression.

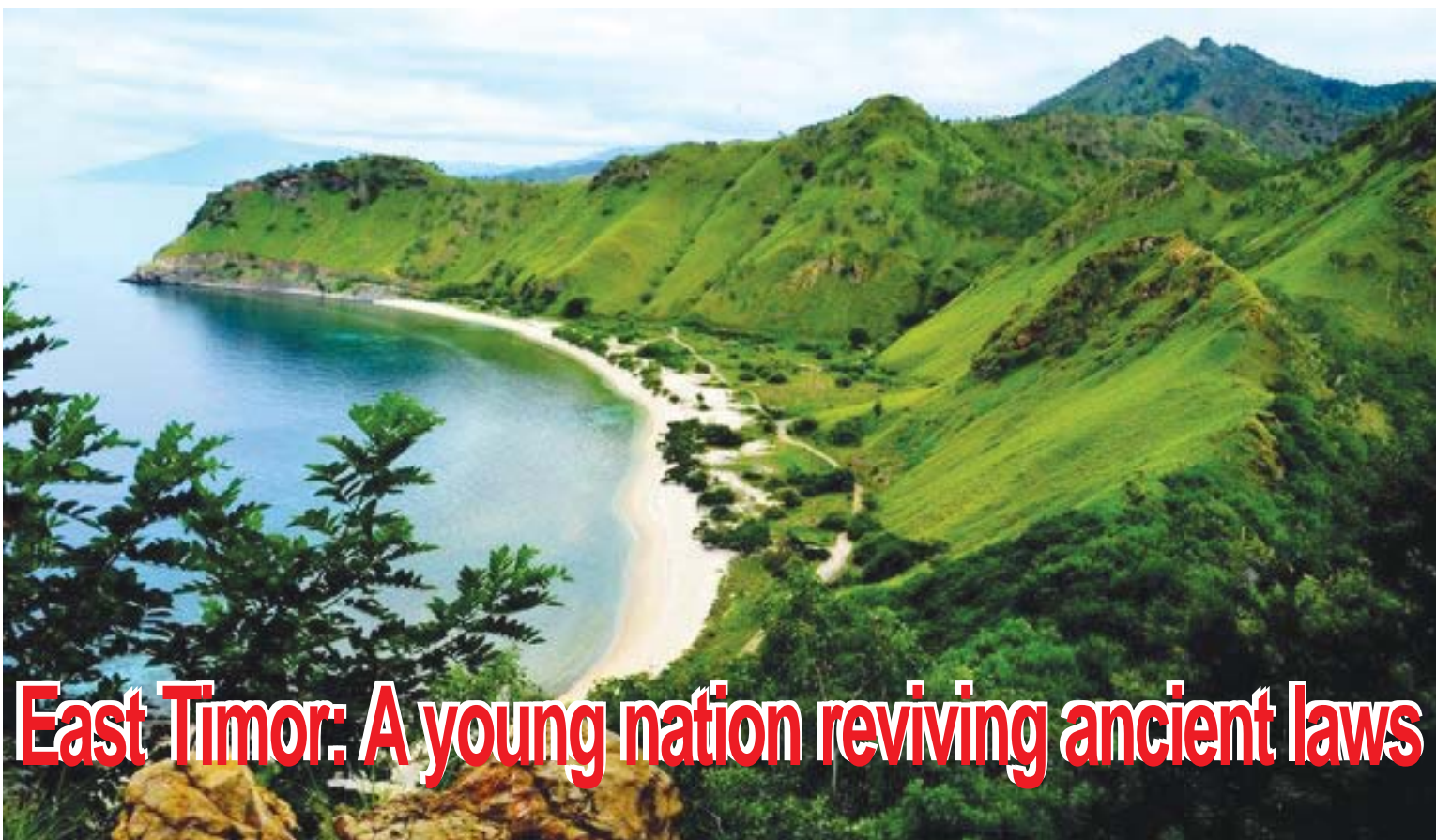
The US government knew this early in the Iraq War. As a US Marine officer in Iraq, and while working on the Iraq desk at the State Department, the intelligence was clear, to me and to anyone who took the time to read the classified transcripts and summaries of interrogations of Iraqi insurgents -- that those insurgents were fighting us simply because we were occupying Iraq. These wars are catastrophes of our own making. The myth that terrorist groups need a safe haven continues even as the reality of the 9/11 attacks demonstrates that Afghanistan only played a minor role in the planning, preparation and training of the hijackers. The logistics for the attack were handled from Germany, where the leading members of the

hijackers lived, while training and preparation occurred in Germany, Pakistan, Spain, Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates, as well as Afghanistan.

Some hijackers were in the US for longer than in Afghanistan, with a number in the US for 18 months. While in the country they received martial arts training alongside the most critical training at American flight schools: the simulator sessions that taught them how to fly passenger jets into buildings.

None of the hijackers were Afghans, most were Saudis, and, in spite of denials by the Saudi government, it's hard to believe that the attackers did not have the support of at least some in the Saudi monarchy -- a recipient of hundreds of billions of dollars of US weapons. The idea that Afghanistan is central to the needs of terror groups is preposterous and denies the nature of how these groups organize and operate.





## East Timor: A young nation reviving ancient laws

Estevao Marques was barefoot, kitted out in a salt-stained football shirt with a well-worn mask and snorkel pushed high on his forehead. A sharp-looking knife was in one hand and speargun in the other. Marques encouraged me to snap a photo before he dashed off to the beach while there was a break in the monsoon clouds above.

Marques' local fishing ground has one of the highest concentrations of reef fish species ever recorded in a marine ecosystem, but this isn't one of the world's best-known diving destinations (although it should be). This is Atauro Island, a 25km stretch of volcanic rock located off the north coast of Timor-Leste, Southeast Asia's youngest and least visited nation. There's no mass tourism on Atauro, but Marques, a local fisherman and homestay host, still faces the challenge of overexploited marine populations and dwindling island resources. Timor-Leste has a unique solution, though. In Atauro, communities are resurrecting traditional Timorese land management laws known as Tara Bandu while developing community-based tourism initiatives to preserve the most biodiverse coral reef in the world.

Marques and his wife Lourdes had welcomed me into their homestay the previous day with fried bananas and strong Timorese coffee; a welcome relief after the rain-soaked ride on the open deck of the Laju Laju car ferry from Dili, Timor-Leste's coastal capital. The Marqueses were confident the sun would be shining the next day and organised a spot for me on a

snorkelling trip the following morning.

"Timor-Leste has some of the most significant marine resources in the world," Manuel Mendes later told me enthusiastically over the phone from Dili as I conducted post-trip research on Atauro's extreme levels of biodiversity. Mendes is the Timorese director for Conservation International, the organisation that carried out the



first extensive marine survey of Atauro in 2016.

Marine scientists from Conservation International concluded that Atauro has the highest average of reef fish species in the world after recording an average of 253 unique reef species across 10 dive sites during their research. In total, 642 distinct species were recorded. A few months later, another survey recorded 2,287 migratory whales and dolphins from a total of 11 species off the coast; there's also a population of dugongs, three species of sea turtle, and the odd saltwater crocodile that crosses the Ombai-Wetar Strait from mainland Timor.

"They found a lot of important reef systems and a lot of fish species," Mendes said humbly. "But the total

species count has increased since then. We have beautiful, resilient corals, and now a large part of them are in Marine Protected Areas."

Since the 2016 survey, 12 Marine Protected Areas have been established on the reef to protect the astounding levels of biodiversity for future generations, while homestay initiatives and tourism activities successfully provided

additional income (pre Covid-19) to local fishermen.

Although my homestay host was spearfishing that day, Marques had arranged for me to join another group of snorkellers already heading out onto the reef with other fishermen. After pushing the fishing boat off the beach, I was soon on my way to one of Atauro's Marine Protected Areas, where Tara Bandu prohibits fishing.

"Tara Bandu is a treaty between the people, the ancestors and the environment that manages natural resources, social conflicts and spiritual relations at the same time," explained Birgit Hermann, country manager for Blue Ventures, another conservation group working on Atauro. "The people of Timor-Leste have a strong animist identity and have

lived in harmony with nature for thousands of years. And now, the Tara Bandu customary law is currently enjoying a resurgence." Tara Bandu is used to enforce a prohibition on a particular resource. Literally, Tara Bandu means the "Hanging Law" because to signify that a Tara Bandu is in force, a ceremonial symbol that represents the prohibition is hung from a wooden stake. Tara Bandu is flexible, and a prohibition can be placed on a single endangered species or used to create an entire no-take Marine Protected Area on the reef.

Hermann explained how the data supplied by local fishermen and conservation groups like Blue Ventures helps communities to manage their underwater resources and decide which Tara Bandu to implement, and where. "We help to put data in the hands of fishers so that they can enact their own approaches to marine protection and fisheries management, such as temporary and permanent coral reef closures," she said.

Tara Bandu might be historical, but local communities have only had the power to implement Hanging Laws themselves since Timor-Leste gained independence from Indonesia in 2002.

"Tara Bandu is the way our

ancestors protected our nature and natural resources, but the Tara Bandu system was really adopted by Timor-Leste after independence," said Mendes, who saw a resurgence of traditional conservation techniques in the early years of independence. "During the Indonesian time, there were strict laws, lots of civil servants, forest guards, police, military. The Indonesians had sufficient people to control the natural resources."

Timor has suffered centuries of colonisation and exploitation. The Portuguese arrived in search of sandalwood and spices in the 1500s, and when the Dutch began colonising the western half of Timor a century later, the island would be carved in two by the competing colonial powers. West Timor became an Indonesian province when the Dutch were thrown out after World War Two, but the eastern half of Timor remained a Portuguese colony until 1975 when an abrupt revolution in Lisbon led to a declaration of independence in Dili. Timor-Leste enjoyed just nine days of freedom before the encroaching Indonesian military launched a devastating invasion from the west in December 1975. Timor-Leste wouldn't see independence again until 2002, after years of occupation and guerrilla warfare.

"After independence, we had limitations on the number of forest guards and police; it was really difficult for us to control the natural resources, especially the forests and fisheries," said Mendes, who helped establish Timor-Leste's first national park in 2008 in the far west of the country. "So that's why we promoted this traditional ceremony. We wanted to give more power to the community. Tara Bandu became a way to bring the community together again after the occupation, and a way to protect the natural resources." The current was strong as I rolled into the water. Atauro is located on the southern edge of the Coral Triangle, a vast area of ocean that encompasses coastal areas in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste.





# Haunted By HIV, Top WHO Scientist On Covid Management Says, "Learn From History"

Soumya Swaminathan said the inequalities in accessing Covid-19 vaccines today hark back to the late 1990s, when she watched HIV patients in India wither away when drugs were saving lives in the West.

Two decades ago, Soumya Swaminathan watched her HIV-infected patients suffer often horrific and unnecessary deaths. There was a treatment for their disease, but they simply could not afford it.

The World Health Organization's chief scientist told AFP the inequalities in accessing Covid-19 vaccines today hark back to the late 1990s, when she helplessly watched HIV patients in India wither away when drugs were saving lives in the West.

Effective treatments for HIV were first produced in the mid-1990s, but they carried a prohibitively high price tag of over \$10,000 per patient per year.

It would take nearly a decade before they became available to poorer populations.

"I had patients that I was watching die... horrible prolonged deaths, when treatments were already available in the West,"

Ms Swaminathan said in a recent interview.

"I lost so many patients and children were orphaned. Those images still haunt me."

'Morally, ethically wrong'

The Indian paediatrician and clinical scientist, who is one of the top WHO officials leading global efforts to coordinate the pandemic response, said it was disappointing that the world was repeating past mistakes.

"You have to learn from history, but we don't seem to," she said. To date, only 0.3 percent of Covid vaccine doses have been administered in the world's poorest countries, which are home to nearly 10 per cent of the global population.

"That is very difficult to witness, and it is morally and ethically wrong," Swaminathan said.

The glaring unevenness in vaccine access comes despite a concerted effort to address the historical inequities.

The WHO and others have created Covax, a global vaccine-sharing programme, but it remains severely underfunded and has faced significant supply shortages, delaying efforts to roll

out vaccines in poorer countries. Still, Ms Swaminathan said she believed Covax was slowly making a difference and hoped it would eventually be "a success story."

The persisting inequities have meanwhile been an added frustration as Swaminathan and her team have battled to understand Covid-19 and to provide the information needed to rein it in.

'Extremely difficult'

The first months of the pandemic were "extremely difficult," the 62-year-old acknowledged.

As the WHO's chief scientist, she said she felt "an enormous sense of responsibility".

In addition there is the personal strain for Swaminathan, who moved on her own to Geneva for the job, leaving behind her husband, grown children and the rest of her family in India, which is now in the grip of an explosive outbreak.

"At the back of your mind you're worrying about family," she said, adding she was particularly concerned for the wellbeing of her elderly parents.

Her father, the famous geneticist



MS Swaminathan known for his role leading Green Revolution, is 95, while her mother, renowned educationalist Mina Swaminathan, is 88.

Ms Swaminathan, who usually starts her day before 7:00 am and works until late in the evening, said she had strived to "maintain a work-life balance" to avoid burn-out.

'World not doing enough'

Long daily walks near her home on the outskirts of Geneva, through lush and pristine greenery, are part of her routine.

"Nature has been therapeutic for

me," she said. That therapy has been welcome as her team worked tirelessly to keep up with and communicate the constantly-evolving science around Covid-19.

"We were building the ship and sailing it, as they say, and that is always stressful," she said.

"There are days when you feel terribly depressed and sad and upset," she admitted, "especially when you see the images of people impacted around the world, the healthcare workers who have died, my own colleagues and classmates whom I've lost."

## As a survey suggests people need more support to manage the daily impact of diabetes management, 2 women share their stories and the challenges they face

Most of us know someone who has diabetes. In fact, 4.9 million have diabetes, that's 1 in 14 people.\*

What is diabetes?

Diabetes is where either your body's own immune system attacks the insulin cells (type 1), or when your body does not produce enough insulin or develops resistance to insulin (type 2). Both types mean that the glucose (broken down from your food), cannot get into the cells properly to be used up as energy and ends up building up in the blood.

If people with diabetes consistently have too much glucose in their blood, they're at risk of serious long-term complications.

And if they overload with insulin, they're at risk of slipping into a condition called hypoglycaemia, where their blood sugar levels drop too low.

Managing diabetes

People living with diabetes have to learn a whole new way of life and must become experts in their glucose levels.

Someone with type 2 diabetes might have to make changes to their lifestyle, breaking some habits they've had for decades. Some may be faced with a complication immediately after diagnosis as they may have had the condition years before diagnosis.

Most people with type 1 diabetes have to learn how to get their insulin right at every single meal. They have to be constantly on guard, adjusting it for exercise as well as when they're feeling unwell, or even just because of the weather.

Getting this right all the time can be difficult, especially when compounded by the complex management of different therapies.

In 2019 the pharmaceutical company Sanofi commissioned a survey to understand the impact that diabetes has on peoples' lives.\*\*

Despite understanding the potential consequences, 41% of people with type 1 diabetes said they intentionally leave their blood sugar levels to 'run high' when they are planning to do physical exercise, with 38% stating that they do so before going to bed.

They 'run high' out of fear (77%) of experiencing or having to deal with a hypoglycaemic episode, known as a 'hypo' (62%).

Fewer people with type 2 intentionally run their blood sugar levels high, with a quarter (25%) saying they intentionally leave their blood sugar levels to 'run high' when they are planning to do physical exercise or before going to bed.

32% of people with type 2 diabetes 'run high' because they



are afraid of potentially experiencing a hypo, with 35% stating they do so as they do not want to have to worry about dealing with a hypo.

"Anxiety related to hypoglycaemia does exist and it is a real phenomenon," says Dr Thomas M Barber, Associate Professor and Consultant Endocrinologist, University of Warwick and University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire.

"It is clearly way up there when you look at patient fears. And one that is potentially very serious and ultimately could be fatal."

The mental toll of living with diabetes

Living with diabetes is tough. It never stops and can be all consuming.

The responsibility for managing it, for the most part, falls on the person living with it, which can really take a toll on their mental health.





# Panache Entertainment

In Association with IFC  
Presents



**Khushi Oza**

**Sheetal Deo**

**Shilpa Ajith**

**39th Miss India New York (Age 18-30)**

**13th Miss teen India New York (Age 13-18)**

**7th Mrs India New York**

## Registration Open

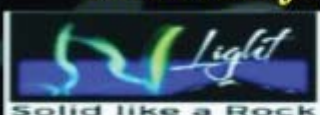
**June 26th @ 5pm**

### Antun's by Minar

**244 W OLDCOUNTRY RD, Hicksville, NY 11801**

Contact :Nishi Bahl 917-992-0076, Shilpa Jhurani 631-356-3655, Taranbir Kaur 917-293 5177

Rhea Manjrekar 516-205-1687, Simran Kohli 516-870-8999 , Nilima Madan 516-603-5022





# Salma Hayek reveals she almost DIED during secret COVID battle and told docs who begged her to go to hospital: 'I'd rather die at home'

Salma Hayek has revealed her secret battle with COVID-19 early on in the pandemic which was near fatal. The 54-year-old actress is featured on the cover story for the latest issue of Variety as she detailed her fight against the coronavirus.

The star said that at one point she was even put on oxygen and spent about seven weeks isolated in a room of her house. She told the publication: 'My doctor begged me to go to the hospital because it was so bad. I said, "No, thank you. I'd rather die at home."'

Hayek lives in London with her husband, Kering CEO François-Henri Pinault, and their 13-year-old daughter Valentina. Though the harshest effects of the infectious disease are behind

her, she has experienced some long-term effects including that she still feels fatigued.

Due to that lack of energy, she said that her first job - which happens to be House Of Gucci with Adam Driver and Lady Gaga - after the secret battle was a proper amount of work for her.

'It was not a lot of time,' Hayek said of the shoot. 'I had started doing Zooms at one point, but I could only do so many because I would get so tired.'

Back in November, Hayek hilariously posted a video montage of her nose being swabbed for COVID-19 tests.

Clearly not a fan of the procedure, the Frida star can be seen wincing as the swab is pushed far up into her nasal cavity, again and again. The Mexican born beauty captioned the clip: 'I've had it. Ya

estoy harta. J'en ai marre. #coronavaccine #corona'.

Hayek also discussed the aftermath of writing an essay for The New York Times in 2017 about the abuse she faced from Harvey Weinstein while making her 2002 film Frida, for which she earned an Oscar nomination.

At the time, Hayek alleged in the piece that he propositioned her to take a shower with him, also offering her oral sex.

As she mentioned earlier in the interview that she did not like to talk about her own suffering she said the essay writing experience was 'Excruciating! That's why it took me so long. It was so hard because I chose not to be a victim even though I was a victim.'

'I had to convince myself that I'm a fighter and above all else, a survivor.'



## Prachi Desai recalls being 'disrespected' by prominent directors: 'They wanted me to be hot'

Actor Prachi Desai, who transitioned to movies after a successful career in television, has spoken about being disrespected by prominent directors and turning down sexist films. She said that for the longest time, all that she'd be asked to do was to focus on being 'hot'. She said that because of her refusal to take on thankless roles, a negative impression of her was formed in the film industry.

"I have never wanted to work in films that are sexist. And in this industry, I have fought with this notion for a long time. All that people wanted me to be was 'hot'," Prachi told a leading daily. "The feedback I got



from several male producers and directors was that I had to work on being hot. So, I picked less work and I chose to stay away. I said no to some big, but very sexist films."

Recalling how she was treated by some 'prominent directors', Prachi said that they were not used to being turned down. She said that often, she would be asked to sign on to a project without a script or a narration. "I could not possibly give the nod to a film like that. I dealt with this for two years before deciding to not put up with it anymore. The notion that others

developed was that I was not interested. Word spread, and some people merely on hearsay didn't approach me," she said.

## A Quiet Place Part II: 'Exhilarating entertainment'



A Quiet Place was one of the most acclaimed films of 2018, which is not bad going for a low-budget alien-invasion splatter-fest. Directed by and co-starring John Krasinski, this high-

powered tension-generating machine owed much of its success to a killer concept by Krasinski's co-writers, Bryan Woods and Scott Beck. The idea was that the planet had been overrun by superhumanly strong and fast creatures from outer space who had no sense of sight but had exceptional hearing. If you made a noise, they would hunt you down and impale you on their pointy arms within seconds. The characters had to keep quiet or die - and cinema audiences everywhere kept quiet with them.

A big part of what made the first film so exciting was the dazzling simplicity of that premise, and the clever ways in which Krasinski, Woods and Beck developed a world in which almost any sound was potentially lethal. During the few minutes when you weren't terrified, you could delight in seeing leaves being used as plates and fluffy pom-poms being used as Monopoly counters. Some of the plot complications were almost as inspired. The central characters were a couple, Lee (Krasinski) and Evelyn (Krasinski's actual wife,

Emily Blunt), who lived on a farm with their two children. One reason they had survived was that their daughter, Regan, was deaf (the actress, Millicent Simmonds, is deaf in real life, too) so they had already learnt to communicate using sign language. But Evelyn was heavily pregnant, which meant that, any day now, she and her new baby were bound to make a lot of noise. It's common enough for a character's waters to break in a film, but it's never been as frightening as it was in A Quiet Place.





## How Biden Can Be a Leader in an Israeli-Palestinian Conflict That Has None

(SAI Bureau)-Despite Benjamin Netanyahu's vow that Israeli airstrikes will continue in "full force" and an unremitting barrage of Hamas missiles, this round of fighting, which has killed 200 Palestinians and 11 Israelis, will end as all others have-without having achieved any discernible or lasting political goals. Historically, war, insurgency and violence have produced breakthroughs in the Arab-Israeli conflict. But those breakthroughs were initiated by the kinds of leaders who are glaringly missing from the current scene. There is no Menachem Begin, Anwar Sadat, Yitzhak Rabin, King Hussein, Shimon Peres or even Yasser Arafat. The leaders, such as they are, are not equal



to the task. The Israeli government is led by a prime minister driven primarily by his own political survival and who doesn't care what others think about its actions in Jerusalem or Gaza. Hamas has exploited Jerusalem to lay claim to leadership of the Palestinian national movement on the wings of thousands of rockets fired indiscriminately to kill civilians in Israel. The Palestinian Authority's president is in the 16th year of a four-year term, recently canceled Palestinian elections and has no actual control over Palestinians in Jerusalem, Israel or Gaza. As a result, the violence will end in little more than a de facto cease-fire. Hamas will rearm, money will pour into Gaza to rebuild, and

(Contd on page 34)

## Covid Conspiracy Theories, Drawing Inspiration From US, Take Root In Europe



(SAI Bureau)- "It's not a virus, it's a tool to use power," says Monique Lustig in the Netherlands, while in Germany, Hellmuth Mendel argues that "Covid is a story invented by an international financial mafia". "And what if this was all just a film?" asks Christophe Charret in France. From The Hague to Stuttgart and Paris, they claim to be battling the control of their minds by a ruling class that invented the Covid-19 pandemic for its own ends, seeing themselves as promoting and disseminating alternative views from the official version.

(Contd on page 32)

## The climate crisis and cyclones



(SAI Bureau)-The warming of oceans means cyclones are now intensifying rapidly. While scientists need more investments in monitoring technology to track cyclones, state governments will now have much less time to take measures for evacuation, and, therefore, must bolster their cyclone preparedness plans now.

(Contd on page 31)

## Wait, does this mean the pandemic is over for vaccinated people?

(SAI Bureau)- The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Thursday abruptly changed its guidance on masks and social distancing, saying people who are fully vaccinated against Covid-19 don't have to wear masks indoors, and they don't have to keep their distance from others. "If you are fully vaccinated, you can start doing the things that you had stopped doing because of the pandemic," CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said in a White House briefing. "We have all longed for this moment when we can get back to some sense of normalcy." Walensky said the science in three areas led to the change. "One is the effectiveness of the vaccines in general and in a real-



world population. One is the effectiveness against variants, which was just published last week, and then the effectiveness in preventing transmissibility," Walensky said. That's in addition to a drop in new Covid-19 cases and the widespread availability of vaccines and access to them. One caveat to note: People with compromised immune systems should consult with their doctor before going without a mask, even if fully vaccinated, the CDC said. As of Thursday, almost 36% of Americans were fully vaccinated, with almost 46% of adults fully vaccinated. The guideline change raised a lot of questions, however. Here's a look at some of them.

(Contd on page 31)

World leaders hail  
Gaza-Israel  
ceasefire and vow  
to help Palestinians  
rebuild



(Contd on page 33)