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Swastika not a Hate Symbol

**New York State legislature's
Flawed Hate Symbol Bill stalled
after enraging Indian-Americans**



Story on
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Indian Consulate Launches India@75



fought valiantly and gave up their lives at the altar of freedom for our motherland, India. Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's daughter Dr. Anita Bose Pfaff (Germany), Lord Rami Ranger (UK), Dr. Maya Chadda (USA) and Historian/Author Dr. Bhuvan Lall (India).

India's Consul General Ambassador Randhir Kumar Jaiswal launched India@75, a yearlong

Celebration commemorating the 75th Anniversary of India's Independence and called upon the Indian Diaspora to join him in celebrating India's freedom till August 15th, 2022. Shatrughna Sinha, Deputy Consul General in New York felicitated the community.

Ambassador Jaiswal and DCG Shatrughna Sinha released the Shaheed Diwas Calendar presented by Siddharth Jain (Sid Jain) of GOPIO-Manhattan, for the year 2021-2022. Ambassador Jaiswal while reviewing the calendar cited that it recognized contributions of Patriots of India. Ambassador Jaiswal further added on the

Calendar as "A collector's delight and dream", where one can read about the freedom fighters and their heroic activities.

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's Daughter, retired Prof. Dr. Anita Bose Pfaff shared with the audience experiences from her own personal life, as she was growing up seeing her father, travelling across India to Europe to South East Asia, garnering support from Western and Asian nations, creating an army to fight the British power. Stating that her dad was one of the most hated by the British, she narrated about the many coup attempts by the British to assassinate him. Calling him a Leftist radical, Dr. Anita Bose Pfaff said, "He had joined the freedom movement at a very young age. Joined the non-violent movement led by Gandhi initially. He was imprisoned and lost his health in prison. He risked his life disguising himself and escaping the prison and joined and led the Independence Movement abroad by aligning with Germany, Soviet Union and

Japan, creating an Indian National Army (INA) to fight the British". While Mr. Bose died in a plane crash, while trying to defeat the British, she said, "There is good reason to call him a martyr, because he died in the process of fighting for freedom. India was his sole love, and he was willing to put his life for the freedom of India. It's justifiable to call him a martyr."

Lord Rami Ranger, Member of the House of Lords, London, a self-made businessman and chairman of Sunmark Group, an international marketing and distribution company. He is also chairman and managing director of Sea Air and Land Forwarding Ltd. He is the Joint Chairman of Conservatives Friends of India in the British Parliament. Lord Ranger's father Shaheed Sardar Nanak Singh stood for the unity of India and was assassinated by a mob in Gujranwala (in Pakistan) in 1947. "My father was assassinated at age 42 when I was not even born," he said, sharing about the circumstances that led to his father's martyrdom.

(New York, NY:) If India and the people of Indian origin living around the world enjoy freedom, liberty, equality and success, it's due to the sacrifices, vision and foresight of men and women who dedicated their lives at the cause of freedom, fighting for independence from the 200-years of British Rule. There are millions who dedicated their lives, while there are some whose leadership and bravery inspired millions of others to fight for freedom. Shaheed Diwas or Martyrs' Day is observed on six days across India which includes January 30th and March 23rd each year to remember the sacrifices of brave freedom fighters who devoted their entire lives to help us enjoy freedom. Global Organization of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO) along with the Consulate General of India in New York jointly organized and honored the martyrs during a virtual celebration of Shaheed Diwas 2021, which is the 90th death anniversary of three courageous youngsters on March 23rd, 2021. The celebrations touched many hearts as the hundreds of participants heard personal stories shared by family members of some of these brave men and women, who

"One Reason Is...": Indian-American On Running For Virginia Lt Governor



(Insider Bureau)- Indian-American businessman and community leader Puneet Ahluwalia, who is running for the powerful office of the Virginia Lieutenant Governor, is seeking to bring diversity in the country's political landscape at a time when there is a sudden national surge in violence against the Asian-American community. The Republican Party is slated to pick its nominee for the Lieutenant Governor at a hybrid convention on May 8.

"I came to this country with almost nothing, built a business, married a wonderful woman who also immigrated, and raised a beautiful family," Ahluwalia told PTI

ahead of the convention.

"Nadia (his wife who is an Afghan-American) and I have had our struggles along the way - as every family does. And, like most people of colour, we've occasionally faced bias and prejudice, but we've never lost sight of the blessings we've enjoyed by being citizens of this wonderful country," Ahluwalia said.

Over the past several months, he and his team of volunteers have been crisscrossing the entire state of Virginia campaigning on his platform to create jobs and economic book of Virginia.



1 in 7 children faces hunger.

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



Women's day celebrated virtually by Sruhadam Entertainment in New Jersey



Srudham Entertainment, the event organizing company, based in New Jersey celebrated women's day virtually with their inaugural event, Sruhadam International Women Achievers Award "SIWAA" on 20th March 2021. The Sruhadam International Women Achievers Award recognizes a woman who has led the way in the advancement in art and culture, music, health care, education, entrepreneurship, welfare,

literature, influencer, social work and sports exhibited outstanding achievement and made significant contributions to the community. Sruhadam entertainment was initiated by Mr. Vishnu Patel in May 2020 to support artists and entertain people with free virtual events, so far they have organized 10 events on zoom, Facebook and YouTube and entertained more than five thousand people around the world during the pandemic.

From 2021 they started siwa awards for all talented women achievers. This year they chose music from out of seven categories and after the selection process Judges Mr. Ali AZ and Ms. Viya Dave finalized six women singers. All six winners -Aranpreet Kaur, Pankaj Puri, Sejal Shah, Neelam Mishra, Tanya Gupta from USA and Anuhya Patnaik from India performed on 20th march on zoom platform. Event hosted by

RJ Shiva Mathur. Mr. Sanjay Raval renowned motivational speaker was the chief guest of the event along with Mrs. Shubhangi Mitra-first runner up Mrs. India UK 2020 Mr. Hitesh Bhatt & Mrs. Kim Bhatt from Bhatt Foundation and the famous playback singer Ms. Priyanka Basu, Bhavika Parihar, Payal Dutta, Manjusha Deshpande and Vilas Shah were the special guests of the event. All the six women singers re-

ceived SIWA Award. More than hundred people from all around the world witnessed the event live on zoom and thousands of others watched live on YouTube. Mr. Vishnu Patel, President and Founder of Sruhadam Entertainment spoke about their mission and future plans and showed his gratitude to all.

(By Vijay Shah for The South Asian Insider, from New Jersey)

Josh India WebTV



Geeta Saxena
Show Host (Prime Time News)

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

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

Stay home except to get medical care

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



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

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



Call ahead before visiting your doctor

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



Wear a facemask if you are sick

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



Cover your coughs and sneezes

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



Clean your hands often

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



- Soap and water:** Soap and water are the best option, especially if hands are visibly dirty.

- Avoid touching:** Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

Avoid sharing personal household items

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



CS 156129-A 03/26/2020

[cdc.gov/COVID19](https://www.cdc.gov/COVID19)

Baps Charities Host 2nd Pop Covid-19 Vaccination Clinic



(Insider Bureau)-BAPS Charities had a very successful 2nd Covid Vaccination pop-up clinic on Friday, March 26th, 2021, at BAPS Hindu Temple in Melville, Long Island. A total of 550 people received the Pfizer vaccine, out of which 240 people

received their 2nd dose. The vaccination and logistics were provided by NYS Covid Task force, in collaboration with Stony Brook University Hospital and its medical staff. Lisa Santeramo, assistant secretary for intergovernmental affairs, representing

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's office participated in welcoming the clinic. The organizers were very happy and appreciative of the BAPS Charities volunteers for providing very valuable support to make this a successful event.

NY State Senator James Gaughran visited the site and was very appreciative of the excellent services BAPS Charities is providing to our communities. BAPS Charities cherishes cooperation and support from all the stakeholders.

"Relief": OCI Card Holders Won't Need Old Passports Now For India Travel

The Overseas Citizens of India or OCI card is issued to people of Indian origin globally which gives them almost all the privileges of an Indian national except for the right to vote, government service and buying agricultural land.

(Insider Bureau)-People of Indian-origin having the Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) cards are now not required to carry their old, expired passports for travel to India, as required earlier, according to a government notification that has been welcomed by members of the community.

The Overseas Citizens of India or OCI card is issued to people of Indian origin globally which

gives them almost all the privileges of an Indian national except for the right to vote, government service and buying agricultural land. The OCI card gives them a visa free travel to India. In a March 26 press statement, the Indian missions in the US said that in order to ease the travel of OCI card holders, it has been decided that the "time line for re-issuance of OCI cards in r/o OCI card holders, who may

be required to get their OCI card reissued has been extended until 31 December, 2021." Further "requirement of carrying old and new passports along with the OCI card has been done away. Henceforth, the OCI card holders travelling on the strength of their existing OCI card bearing old passport number are not required to carry their old passport. However, carrying a new passport is mandatory."



Biden Nominates Indian-American Rupa Ranga Puttagunta As Judge Of DC District Court

If confirmed by the US Senate, Judge Puttagunta would be the first Asian American and Pacific Islander woman to serve on the US District Court for the District of DC, the White House said.

(Insider Bureau)- US President Joe Biden on Tuesday announced his intent to nominate Indian-American Rupa Ranga Puttagunta as a federal judge, among 10 other diverse picks for top judicial positions which include African-American and Muslim American candidates. Among the presidential nominations, 10 are for Federal Circuit and District Court judge posts, and one is for Superior Court Judge for the District of Columbia.

These highly-qualified candidates reflect the president's deeply-held conviction that the federal bench should reflect the full diversity of the American people - both in background and

in professional experience, the White House said.

If confirmed by the US Senate, Judge Puttagunta would be the first Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) woman to serve on the US District Court for the District of DC, the White House said.

Judge Puttagunta currently serves as an Administrative Judge for the D.C. Rental Housing Commission. Prior to joining the Commission in 2019, Judge Puttagunta was a solo practitioner from 2013 to 2019, representing indigent criminal defendants in trial and on appeal.

Before opening her own practice, Judge Puttagunta

practised family and appellate law at Delaney McKinney, LLP from 2012 to 2013.

While working on domestic relations matters in private practice, Judge Puttagunta also provided hundreds of hours of pro bono legal services by volunteering at D.C. Superior Court's Family Court Self-Help Center and Attorney Negotiator Program and representing victims of domestic violence in D.C. Superior Court.

Judge Puttagunta began her legal career as a law clerk for Judge William M. Jackson of the D.C. Superior Court from 2008 to 2010, as well as the Senior Judges of the D.C. Court of Appeals from 2010 to 2011.



Judge Puttagunta received her Juris Doctor degree from Ohio State Moritz College of Law in 2007.

The nominations announced on Tuesday also include three African American women and a Muslim American. If confirmed by the Senate, Judge Zahid N Quraishi would be the first Muslim American federal judge in US history. Of Pakistani

descent, Judge Quraishi is a United States Magistrate Judge for the U.S. District Court for the District of New Jersey, a position he was appointed to in 2019. Prior to his appointment, Judge Quraishi was a partner at Riker Danzig where he chaired the firm's White Collar Criminal Defense and Investigations Group and served as his firm's first Chief Diversity Officer.

Indian-Origin Singaporean Sent To Jail For Deliberately Coughing At Cop



Devraj Tamil Selvan was also given a three-year driving ban after pleading guilty to four charges, that included using abusive behaviour towards a public servant and riding a motorcycle while already under a driving ban.

(Insider Bureau)-An Indian-origin Singaporean was sentenced to 14 weeks in jail on Monday for deliberately coughing at a police officer and using abusive language at a hospital in Singapore last year. Devraj Tamil Selvan was also given a three-year driving ban after pleading guilty to four charges, that included using abusive

behaviour towards a public servant and riding a motorcycle while already under a driving ban. District Judge Ng Cheng Thiam considered another 10 charges, such as being drunk in public, before announcing the 14-week prison sentence.

The court heard that on September 13 last year the police re-

ceived a call from a woman who said her sister-in-law's boyfriend was at their home "using violence".

Three police officers went to the scene. While they were there, Devraj slapped his girlfriend once on the face, leading to his arrest. When he was taken inside the police vehicle, Devraj claimed he could not breathe and was taken to Ng Teng Fong General Hospital. Indian-Origin Singaporean Sent To Jail For Deliberately Coughing At Cop The accused was previously fined SGD2,000 in 2009 for theft (Representational)

Singapore: An Indian-origin Singaporean was sentenced to

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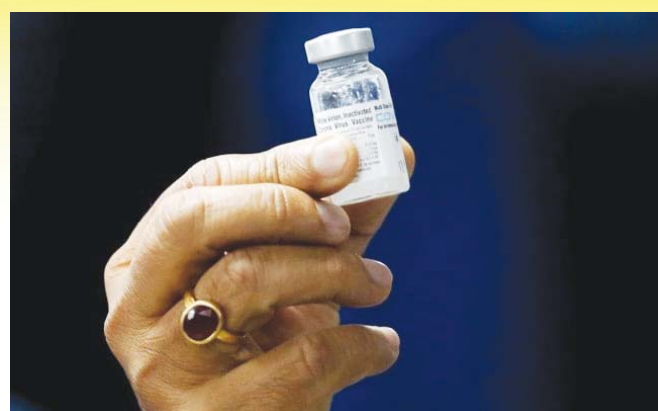
said her sister-in-law's boyfriend was at their home "using violence".

Three police officers went to the scene. While they were there, Devraj slapped his girlfriend once on the face, leading to his arrest. When he was taken inside the police vehicle, Devraj claimed he could not breathe and was taken to Ng Teng Fong General Hospital. At the hospital's accident and emergency department, Devraj removed his mask -- which must be worn mandatorily in public places here to stem the spread of COVID-19 -- and coughed at a policeman, despite several warnings from the officers and hospital staffs.

Brazil Says "No" To Covaxin, Bharat Biotech Explains

(Insider Bureau)- Brazil's health regulator has denied permission to import Covaxin, the Covid vaccine produced by indigenous firm Bharat Biotech. Twenty million doses of the vaccine has been ordered by Brazil, the nation hit worst by Covid after the United States. According to reports, a Brazilian government gazette had said that Covaxin had been rejected "considering the non-compliance with the requirements of Good Manufacturing Practices for Medicines". In its response, Bharat Biotech has told NDTV: "The requirements pointed out during inspection will be fulfilled, the

timelines for fulfilment is under discus-



sion with the Brazil NRA and will be resolved soon."

Covaxin, produced by Bharat Biotech in collaboration with the Indian Council for Medical Research, was approved for emergency use by the national drug regulator in January. The vaccine was expected to be used only in the "clinical trial mode".

Earlier this month, it was taken off clinical trial mode after the authorities said vaccine has showed an interim efficacy of 81 per cent in the Phase

3 clinical trials in India.

Bharat Biotech said the vaccine is effective against the UK variant of the virus. The government has said the need to change the composition of Covaxin has not been felt yet in view of its efficacy against the mutant variants.

Several other nations, including Iran, Nepal, Mauritius, Paraguay and Zimbabwe have approved and received Covaxin for emergency use. Bharat Biotech had also applied for clearance in Brazil, Thailand and the Philippines. Bharat Biotech says around 40 countries have expressed interest in Covaxin.

Sword-wielding mob attacks cops at gurdwara in Maharashtra's Nanded; 17 held, 400 booked

A mob of sword-carrying protesters broke through barricades at a gurdwara in Maharashtra's Nanded and attacked cops after they were denied permission to hold a religious procession. At least 17 have been held and hundreds booked for violence and violation of Covid safety rules.

(News Agencies)-At least 17 persons were held and 400 booked after a mob of sword-wielding Sikhs attacked policemen, injuring at least four of them, in Maharashtra's Nanded on Monday.

Policemen were allegedly attacked after permission was denied to hold a public procession in Nanded due to the coronavirus pandemic, an official said.

"Seventeen persons have been detained by Nanded police in connection with the assault on policemen & vandalism outside Nanded Gurdwara yesterday [Monday]. Police registered FIR under charges of rioting & attempt to murder against several unknown persons," police officials

told ANI. What happened in Nanded?

A viral video showed a sword-wielding mob barging out of the Nanded gurdwara, breaking the barricades put up by police and attacking the policemen.

Several vehicles were also damaged in the violence.

"Permission for the Hola Mohalla public procession was not granted due to the pandemic. The gurdwara committee was informed and they had assured us that they would abide by our directives and hold the event inside the gurdwara premises," Nanded Range DIG Nisar Tamboli told PTI. "However, when the Nishan Sahib was brought at the gate around 4 pm, several participants started

arguing and over 300 youth stormed out of the gate, broke the barricades and began attacking the policeman," he said. Tamboli said the condition of one of the four constables was serious.

He said six vehicles of police were damaged by the mob.

Nishan Sahib is a triangular saffron-coloured flag furling outside a gurdwara on a steel pole covered with a saffron-coloured cloth. The flag also has an insignia called Khanda in the middle, which includes two swords and a chakra.

Hundreds Booked

The officer said on Monday an FIR will be registered under sections 307 (attempt to murder), 324 (voluntary causing hurt with danger-



ous weapons), 188 (Disobeying the order of public servant), 269 (Negligent act likely to spread infection) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and for rioting.

"Those involved in violence will be arrested," he added.

What is Hola Mohalla?

Hola Mohalla (Hola) is a Sikh festival that comes a day after Holi. Unlike Holi, when people sprinkle the coloured powder on each other, Hola Mohalla is an occa-

sion for Sikhs to demonstrate their martial skills.

Nanded is an important Sikh pilgrimage centre as it is home to a sacred shrine, the Takht Sachkhand Sri Hazur Abchal Nagar Sahib. It was here that the 10th and last Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708), anointed the holy book Guru Granth Sahib as the eternal Guru of Sikhism and spent the last 14 months of his life.

Six children burnt alive as straw house catches fire in Bihar's Araria



Six children were burnt alive while cooking corn inside a thatched house in Bihar's Araria district on Wednesday.

(News Agencies)- Six children were burnt to death after the thatched house they were inside caught fire in Bihar's Araria district on Tuesday.

The incident took place in the Kavaia village of the Palasi block of Araria.

The six children were roasting corn when the hut caught on fire.

The flames spread quickly, preventing the children from being able to escape.

Some locals tried to douse the flames but could not rescue the children.

Soon, police and the fire department reached the spot. The bodies were recovered from the burnt down hut and sent for a postmor-

tem.

All the victims were between the ages of 3 and 6.

Meanwhile, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has expressed his deepest condolences over the incident and announced an ex gratia compensation of Rs 4 lakh for the kin of each of the deceased.

Madras HC asks parents of same-sex couple to undergo counselling by specialist in LGBTQ issues

The Madras High Court has asked the parents of a same-sex couple to undergo counselling by a specialist in LGBTQ issues.

(News Agencies)- The Madras High Court has asked the parents of a same-sex couple to undergo counselling by a specialist in LGBTQ issues. Justice N Anand Venkatesh passed the interim order hoping that the parties would work towards a peaceful

resolution. "What is required for the present is an understanding of the issue in hand," the judge said. In their petition, the women sought protection for their living together without any disturbance from their respective parents.

While one of them is 22 years old

and pursuing MBA, the other woman, 20, is pursuing BA Tamil. Natives of Madurai district, both of them have been in a relationship since the past two years.

They told the judge their friendship blossomed into love and they were



Two dead, one critical after consuming sanitiser in Madhya Pradesh's Bhind on Holi

(News Agencies)- Two youths died while one is in critical condition after they consumed sanitiser on Holi in Madhya Pradesh's Bhind district. The three friends consumed sanitiser after they failed to get alcohol since all liquor shops were closed in Madhya Pradesh on Holi. The incident took place in Bhind's Chaturvedi Nagar. The deceased have been identified as Rinku

Lodhi and Amit Rajput. The third friend, Sanju, has been shifted to



a hospital in Gwalior. Their conditions deteriorated on Monday evening after Holi celebrations and

were rushed to the hospital by their relatives. Bhind's Superintendent of Police (SP) Manoj Singh said two 500 ml sanitiser bottles were recovered from the homes of the Deceased. Singh said the sanitiser bottles were likely bought from Itawa district. The ethanol content in that particular brand of sanitiser was high, which resulted in such grave consequences, he said.

very clear that both of them want to be together for life. However, their parents were opposed to the relationship and exerted pressure on them to separate. Following this, the women left Madurai and are presently under the care of a city-based NGO. The judge also spoke to the parents and found that they were more concerned about the security of the duo in the society. Before passing the interim order, the judge said he personally

spent time in doing some research and collected materials to arrive at a proper understanding of the issue.

"To be open, I am also trying to break my own preconceived notions about this issue and I am in the process of evolving and sincerely attempting to understand the feelings of the petitioners and their parents, thereafter proceed to write a detailed order on this issue," the judge said.

Are you above law: Bombay HC pulls up Param Bir Singh, asks why no FIR against Anil Deshmukh

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday pulled up former Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh and asked him why did he not lodge a police complaint against Maharashtra minister Anil Deshmukh, against whom he has levelled severe charges of corruption and extortion.

(News Agencies)- The Bombay High Court on Wednesday pulled up former Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh and asked him why did he not lodge a police complaint against Maharashtra minister Anil Deshmukh, against whom he has levelled severe charges of corruption and extortion.

A division bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice GS Kulkarni asked Param Bir Singh why he did not lodge a complaint with the police first saying he is not "a layman" and added that without an FIR there is no scope of the court to intervene or ask a probe agency to investigate.

"You (Singh) are a senior police officer. You are not a layman. You were duty-bound to register a complaint against any wrongdoing. Despite knowing that an offence is being committed by your boss, you (Singh) remained silent," Chief Justice Datta said.

In an explosive letter to CM Uddhav Thackeray, Param Bir Singh had recently said that Anil Deshmukh asked arrested police officer Sachin Vaze to collect Rs 100 crore from bars and restaurants. Deshmukh has vehemently denied the allegations while the government has ordered a probe against him.

The Bombay HC was hearing a criminal public interest litigation (PIL) filed by Param Bir Singh, seeking a CBI probe against Anil Deshmukh. The bench also said that Param Bir Singh cannot convert the HC into a magistrate court.

"The proper and appropriate course of action would be for you (Singh) to first lodge a complaint with police. If the police do not lodge an FIR, then you have the option of filing an application before the magistrate," the court said. Param Bir Singh's counsel Vikram Nankani argued that his client wanted to avoid this



"chakravayuh" (labyrinth). To this, the court said that this was the procedure laid down in law. "Are you saying that you are above the law," asked Chief Justice Datta. Nankani argued that he did not have any other option than to approach Bombay HC as the complaint and allegations were against the "very head of the state administration". The court fur-

ther asked Nankani if any statement, as alleged by Param Bir Singh in the petition against Deshmukh that he had asked police officers to extort money, was made by the Home minister in Singh's presence. "Was any of these statements made by the Home Minister in Singh's presence? Otherwise this is nothing but hearsay," the court said.

UP MLA Mukhtar Ansari produced before Punjab court in extortion case, to reappear on April 12



(News Agencies)-Gangster-turned-politician, Uttar Pradesh MLA Mukhtar Ansari was on Wednesday produced before a Mohali court in Chandigarh in connection with an alleged extortion case which took place in 2019.

Ansari has been asked to reappear in the court on April 12, a police official said.

The UP MLA from Mau constituency has been allegedly involved in multiple cases of murder, attempt to murder, conspiracy, cheating, apart from offences under the Gangsters Act, lodged in Uttar Pradesh. And out of these, 10 cases are at the stages of trial.

Amid tight security arrangements, the politician was taken

UP MLA Mukhtar Ansari was on Wednesday produced before a Mohali court in Chandigarh in connection with an alleged extortion case which took place in 2019.

to court in a wheelchair. Ansari was sent back to Punjab's Rupnagar jail in an ambulance after the appearance.

Hand over Ansari's custody to UP police: SC to Punjab govt
Recently, the Supreme Court had directed the Punjab government to hand over the custody of

Ansari, who is also wanted in various cases in Uttar Pradesh, to the UP Police, saying it was being denied on trivial grounds under guise of medical issues. The top court had also said that a convict or an undertrial prisoner, who disobeys the law, cannot object his transfer from one

jail to another and the courts are not to be a 'helpless bystander' when the rule of law is being challenged with impunity.

The court had said the custody of Ansari should be handed over to Uttar Pradesh within two weeks in order to lodge him in Banda district prison in Uttar Pradesh.

BRO worker dies trapped in snow as avalanche hits Zoji La in Ladakh

(News Agencies)-A Border Roads Organisation (BRO) worker died after getting trapped under an avalanche at the Zoji La



pass in Ladakh.

According to reports, the snowslide hit a beacon vehicle in Zoji La's Aabmath on Srinagar-Kargil Highway today.

As a result, the BRO employee was trapped in his vehicle and died after being buried in the snow.

The deceased worker has been identified as Ghulam Rasool Bhat and was working as a driver with Project Beacon. Officials said Bhat was buried under the avalanche and his body was retrieved by police and BRO personnel.

Many areas in the higher reaches of Kashmir have received fresh snowfall this week.

(News Agencies)-A woman police officer in Odisha's Mayurbhanj district has been suspended for making a pregnant woman walk three kilometres in scorching heat for not wearing a helmet. Sarat police station in-charge Reena Baksal was suspended on Monday after the incident came to light.

Bikram Biruli was taking his wife, who is eight months' pregnant, for a health check-up to a hospital in Udala on his bike when he was stopped by the police. While Biruli was wearing a helmet, his wife did not have one. When Biruli was asked to pay the fine, he told the police that he did not have cash and would pay the amount online. But Reena Baksal did not agree. "Since I didn't have cash with me, I urged OIC Reena Baksal to hand over the challan to me so that I can deposit the fine amount directly with RTO. Instead, the police took me to the police



station, leaving my wife stranded midway. I also requested her to take my wife with me to the police station. She abused me and locked me inside the cell for around three hours. My wife

was waiting for me on the road for hours," Bikram said. When her husband did not turn up, the woman started walking to the police station. The couple then lodged a complaint with the sub-divisional police officer.

Following an inquiry, Mayurbhanj SP Parmar Smit Parshottamdas suspended Reena Baksal

for gross misconduct and dereliction of duty. The letter stated that during the suspension period, the officer would remain under the disciplinary control of RI Mayurbhanj. Meanwhile, sub-inspector Sanjay Pradhan, officer in-charge of Kaptipada, has been assigned the additional charge of Sarat police station.

A woman police officer in Odisha's Mayurbhanj district has been suspended for making a pregnant woman walk three kilometres in scorching heat for not wearing a helmet.

Agra: Woman gang-raped in front of husband, looted by three men

A married couple travelling on a bike on Monday evening in Agra was stopped by three men who beat the two and gang-raped the woman in front of her husband.

The perpetrators made a video of the incident and also robbed the couple.

A married couple was travelling on a bike in Agra on Monday evening when three young men allegedly blocked their way, beat them and gang-raped the woman in front of her husband. The perpetrators made a video of the incident and looted the couple before escaping, according to the couple's account.

The woman has filed a police complaint and recorded her statement at Agra's Etmaddulah police station. The police have filed a case based on her statement and a team has been formed to search for the accused, according to Superintendent of Police Satyajit Gupta. The woman has

been sent for a medical check-up.

The incident took place around 6 pm on Monday. The couple was on their way to the woman's parents' home in Etmaddulah when they were allegedly attacked by the men and forcefully dragged into the bushes. The perpetrators stole



Rs 10,000, a pair of earrings and some accessories.

The couple first registered their

complaint at 2 pm on Tuesday. The police have been investigating the case ever since.

UP cop replaces sanitiser with Gangajal, smears chandan paste on people visiting police station



Nauchandi police station SHO Prem Chand Sharma has devised a novel approach to fight the pandemic and crime in his area. As per the cop, the Gangajal is India's ancient sanitiser and kills the germs while smearing of chandan paste on visitor's foreheads helps calm them down and solve their issues quickly.

In a video posted by Twitter user Piyush Rai, the SHO can be seen

entering the Nauchandi police station in UP's Meerut district with a bottle of Gangajal. Soon after that, several bottles of Gangajal were lined up on his table. He is also seen sprinkling the Gangajal in his room while chanting 'sanitising mantras'.

In another video, posted by the same Twitter user, SHO Prem Chand Sharma tells a lo-

cal reporter that the gangajal and chandan paste were meant to have a calming effect on anyone who visited the police station. "Those who come to the station are calmer, they can tell their problems peacefully and slowly their problems get diluted," Sharma can be heard saying. The cop even claimed the Gangajal and chandan have helped improve law and order in his station.

(News Agencies)-If you visit the Nauchandi police station in Uttar Pradesh's Meerut, chances are you won't find any sanitiser bottles that have become a common fixture at public

places during the Covid-19 pandemic. Instead, you will be most likely welcomed with a sprinkle of Gangajal (water from the Ganges river) and a chandan tilak.

Delhi BJP leader hangs himself inside park, locals find body during walk

(News Agencies)-A Delhi BJP leader died by suicide after he hanged himself at a park near his residence in the city.

both police and the party have refrained from stating the reason behind his death as of now.



58-year-old GS Bawa was a resident of Fateh Nagar in West Delhi.

The incident took place on Monday evening when GS Bawa was found hanging from a grill at a lake inside a park in Subhash Nagar of Delhi. Around 6 pm on Monday, locals reported that a body was hanging inside

The deceased has been identified as West Delhi BJP's former vice-president GS Bawa.

Sources have said the BJP leader may have killed himself over some domestic issues but

the park, police later reached the spot and identified him as BJP leader GS Bawa.

No suicide note has been recovered so far and the body has been sent for post-mortem.

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It's Time To Rethink Our Flawed Strategy To Beat Covid-19

Globally, Covid-19 has reared its head again. India has also started reporting the highest number of Covid-19 cases in the world for the past few days, and this is a worrying sign. So, what is going wrong and how to correct it? We must contain the spread.

Else, the madness of lockdowns will tear apart the economy and society. Some sectors had started crawling back towards revival when the second wave has stuck. On 7th April 2020, I wrote about the plan to tackle Covid-19 and moving out of lockdown from mid-April 2020, and post the detailed analysis of the global scenario, in July 2020, I wrote that the extended lockdown might not be the best strategy. Aurangabad is already going into a complete lockdown after a year again, and the plan may be to extend lockdowns if the Covid-19 explodes. Which could spell disaster! So where did we go wrong? Communication strategy: We kept denying that the community spread had happened, despite the fact that it had started post the first few weeks of Covid-19. Till 4th April 2020, the ministry of health dissuaded the general populace from wearing masks, till the Disease Management Association of India sent an SOS to the Prime Minister. So, our communication strategy went wrong.

Lack of Scientific approach:

I was a chair of a leading newspaper's panel discussion on Covid-19 with a few state health secretaries, and I asked the senior member of the Covid-19 task force and the government's key advisor on Covid that 'Despite the high number of cases, why is India's fatality rate low?' To which he responded, 'We don't know, it is a million-dollar question.' His response summed up our understanding and also our approach.

Poor compliance at the top:

When leaders don't wear a mask during their public appearance and conduct election rallies with thousands in attendance, the campaign and enforcement of Covid-19 guidelines suffer a fatal blow.

Illogical decision making:

Let us look at the vaccination guidelines Who can take the vaccine?

Frontline health workers

Individuals above the age of 45 years (third phase of vaccine rollout). Individuals with hypertension, diabetes, asthma, pulmonary, liver, or kidney disease, and chronic infections that are stable and controlled. The interim recommendation is that immune-compromised persons who are part of a group recommended for vaccination may be vaccinated, though when possible, not before receiving information and counselling. Known people living with HIV with a controlled health condition can get vaccinated after a healthcare provider's recommendation.

If vaccination is about curbing the spread of Covid-19 in the country, then the strategy mentioned above is neither scientific nor enough. Let us consider the following: Senior citizens who are not working should have been asked to stay at home and avoid physical contact with people moving out, and the vaccination for them must have been an optional priority. These senior citizens are, in fact, at the least risk in terms of spreading or getting should they be following physical distancing and other measures besides staying at home. We should have instead prioritised the young who are working and have multiple touch-points like house helps, drivers, shop-keepers, security guards, fuel station and other attendants and factory workers of all ages to be vaccinated on top priority.

But they are not even on the list! It is not just the age or comorbidities but people with multiple touchpoints who should also have been vaccinated on top priority else they will become the super spreaders, and we will not be able to contain Covid-19. So, it is important to consider 'exposure' besides other factors, and just addressing vaccination based on 'age' and 'comorbidities' will not be enough to contain the spread. The recent spate of Covid-19 amongst children indicates that we must go back to the drawing board, else we have a bigger headache ahead.

Maharashtra, instead of considering stopping local trains, should increase the 'halt time.' People forget social distancing as the trains stop for 30 seconds or so, and this should be raised to two minutes so that people do not brush past each other to alight and board the local trains. Also, strict enforcement of distance-based seating is needed. Similarly, a state has put guidelines that shops will close from 8 pm to 5 am. And that trucks will not ply in the morning. Did the planners even stop to think how these shops will get supplies when they open at 8.00 am, when the trucks stop moving at that time? I fail to understand the science or logic behind these guidelines, and the public will surely suffer and break the rules of night curfew if they don't get essential supplies.

Also, there is neither logic nor science in the night and weekend curfew imposed by many states. We must never do it, and instead, 24 x 7, we should enforce physical distancing and masks. Covid-19 is here to stay, but we need to keep its incidence under control. The resurgence of the economy will suffer collateral damage due to the resurgence of Covid-19, and if we don't go to the drawing board and redo our strategy and the team in charge of Covid-19, we are in for a big shock.

The 'Green Energy' That Might Be Ruining the Planet

Here's a multibillion-dollar question that could help determine the fate of the global climate: If a tree falls in a forest-and then it's driven to a mill, where it's chopped and chipped and compressed into wood pellets, which are then driven to a port and shipped across the ocean to be burned for electricity in European power plants-does it warm the planet?

Most scientists and environmentalists say yes: By definition, clear-cutting trees and combusting their carbon emits greenhouse gases that heat up the earth. But policymakers in the U.S. Congress and governments around the world have declared that no, burning wood for power isn't a climate threat-it's actually a green climate solution. In Europe, "biomass power," as it's technically called, is now counted and subsidized as zero-emissions renewable energy. As a result, European utilities now import tons of wood from U.S. forests every year-and Europe's supposedly eco-friendly economy now generates more energy from burning wood than from wind and solar combined. Biomass power is a fast-growing \$50 billion global industry, and it's not clear whether the climate-conscious administration of President Joe Biden will try to accelerate it, discourage it or ignore it. It's usually obvious which energy sources will reduce carbon emissions, even when the politics and economics are tricky; everyone agrees that solar and wind are cleaner than coal. But when it comes to power from ground-up trees, there's still a raging substantive debate about whether it's a forest-friendly, carbon-neutral alternative to fossil fuels, or an environmental disaster. Even within the Biden administration, senior

officials have taken different sides of that debate. Biden's answer will be extremely important, because as odd as it sounds during a clean-tech revolution driven by modern innovations like advanced batteries and smart grids, there's been a resurgence in the old-fashioned technique of burning wood to produce energy.

The idea that setting trees on fire could be carbon-neutral sounds even odder to experts who know that biomass emits more carbon than coal at the smokestack, plus the carbon released by logging, processing logs into vitamin-sized pellets and transporting them overseas. And solar panels can produce 100 times as much power per acre as biomass. Nevertheless, the global transition away from fossil fuels has sparked a boom in the U.S. wood-pellet industry, which has built 23 mills throughout the South over the past decade, and is relentlessly trying to brand itself as a 21st-century green energy business.

Its basic argument is that the carbon released while trees are burning shouldn't count because it's eventually offset by the carbon absorbed while other trees are growing. That is also currently the official position of the U.S. government, along with many other governments around the world. In documentaries, lawsuits and the teenage activist Greta Thunberg's spirited Twitter feed, critics of the industry have suggested an alternative climate strategy: Let trees grow and absorb carbon, then don't burn them.

Deforestation is a major driver of climate change, and the United Nations climate panel has warned that the world needs to end it worldwide to meet the ambitious Paris emissions targets for 2050.



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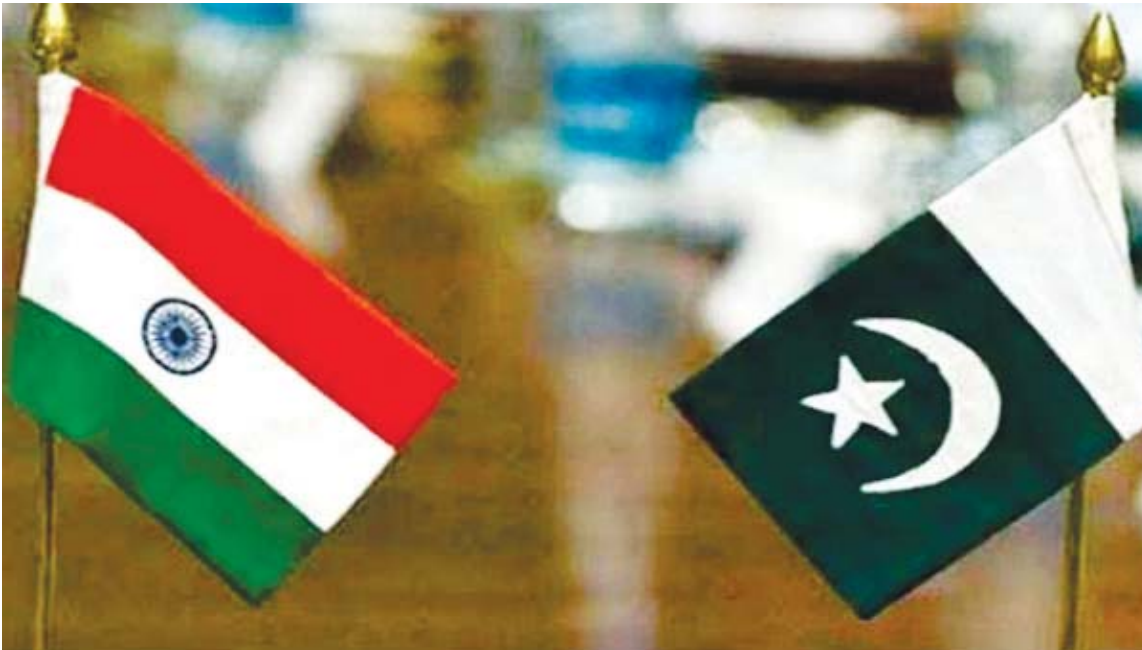
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The thaw on the India-Pakistan front



While sticking to its redlines, Delhi should be open to building on the ceasefire pact and resuming a more comprehensive dialogue

Responding to Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi's letter greeting Pakistan on its national day, Pakistan's PM, Imran Khan, has claimed that his country seeks "peaceful, cooperative relations with all neighbours, including India". Mr Khan also said that durable peace and stability in the region was contingent on resolving all issues between India and Pakistan, "in particular, the Jammu and Kashmir [J&K] dispute". He then added that the creation of "an enabling environment" was "imperative for a constructive and result-oriented dialogue". There are two ways to interpret this letter. The first, sceptical, view

can see it as an attempt by Pakistan to hold the ties hostage to the J&K issue yet again, without confronting the issue of terrorism. The logical conclusion of such a reading would be that there is little merit in engaging with Pakistan. A second way to read the letter is to focus on why Mr Khan has said what he has, and what he has not said. A reference to J&K is imperative for any Pakistani leader to survive domestically. The fact that despite relentless propaganda over the past year-and-a-half against India's moves in J&K, Pakistan has not made any tangible demands other than mentioning an "enabling environment" leaves space for diplomacy. This reading would lead to a different conclusion - of the merits of engagement. While India must have minimal expectations from Pakistan's establishment and be prepared on the security front, there is a definite churn in Pakistan. Mr Khan's letter, which would have been approved by the army, is an attempt to signal Pakistan's willingness to engage, as is Islamabad's decision, on Wednesday, to resume limited trade with India. While sticking to its redlines, Delhi should be open to building on the ceasefire pact and resuming a comprehensive dialogue.

Send a message to Myanmar



India runs the risk of neither safeguarding its own interests nor standing up for values. It does have the standing to send a stern public and private message to the dictators in Nayapitaw - restore democracy now

Myanmar's military dictators have crossed a line. Not only did they reject electoral results, oust a representative government, arrest political leaders and grab complete power in February, they have also been engaged in a brutal repression of the pro-democracy movement. Security forces are reported to have killed over 400 citizens, including possibly over a 100 on Friday itself; detained thousands; deployed high-tech surveillance equipment to keep a check on citizens; and stifled all outlets for the expression of democratic views. India is in a fix. It had, in the 1990s, supported pro-democracy elements in Myanmar. But the need to have a working relationship with the military - for

security reasons in the Northeast, for strategic reasons with an eye on China, for geopolitical reasons

to enhance connectivity with Southeast Asia, and for economic reasons to be able to leverage Myanmar's resource-rich landscape - saw it tone down support for democracy. When the army and Aung San Suu Kyi shared power in the system, Delhi had equities in the system, primarily through the military,

and shared an uneasy relationship with Ms Suu Kyi. When the military took power this year, India decided to take a cautious approach of relatively muted public criticism, as compared to the West, and private engagement with the military. The Indian Army chief, for instance, has not yet

condemned the atrocities by a neighbouring military - even as many at the helm of defence forces in democracies have done so. This approach is unsustainable. One, India, as a democracy, which distinguishes itself from China on the count, cannot turn a blind eye to bloodshed in the neighbourhood.

The scars of 2020-2021

Fiscal year 2020-21, which ended on March 31, has been a time of unprecedented economic disruption due to the pandemic. The Indian economy is expected to contract by 8% in 2020-21, its largest-ever contraction on record. To be sure, growth rates have recovered - from a 24.4% contraction in the June 2020 quarter to a 0.4% growth in the December 2020 quarter. But the economic pain caused by the pandemic is lingering. Poverty levels and

inequality are likely to have gone up. Labour force participation rates have gone down. The gender gap among workers has worsened. The employment intensive sectors have shown less growth compared to others. And there remains lack of clarity about the pandemic's adverse impact on the tax base. But even though the domestic economy suffered a big shock, the external environment remained benign in the past year. Oil prices crashed, which allowed the government to

reap a tax windfall without stoking inflation. Since major economies increased their public borrowing and fiscal deficits, global finance did not penalise any country for what would have been seen as an unacceptable deviation in normal times. This favourable environment might start receding in 2021-22, as growth picks up in advanced countries and commodity prices start rising. External factors will be more of a constraint this year.

India is also, now, staring at a delayed, but strong, second wave of Covid-19 infections. The last fiscal year began with a complete lockdown, but a second national lockdown is not feasible. At the same time, rising infections will not just take a toll on human lives but also impact productivity and economy. Bringing down infections, through enhanced and aggressive vaccination, has to be top priority from both a public health and economic perspective.

Why Kerala Is So Crucial For Rahul Gandhi And A Diminished Congress

Bright red Che Guevara and hammer-and-sickle flags flutter on the long Calicut beach. In Ermeli on the foothills of Sabarimala, the Vavar masjid sits in age-old co-existence with the Ayyappa temple opposite. Vavar, the Muslim, was known as one of the greatest friends of Ayyappa, the Hindu deity. In Calicut town, lines of devotees file peacefully into twin shrines; some walk to the 14th-century Tali Maha Shiva temple, others towards the 13th-century Muchundi Palli mosque. They don't disturb each other. In Trivandrum city cafes, young Muslim girls in headscarves sip coffee and laugh into mobile phones. Under the aegis of a Communist regime, Kerala is open for business. Spanking new buildings, footbridges and malls reveal a big and visible push for infrastructure.

In Kerala, the Left is business-friendly and supremely electable; religious divisions are blocked by centuries-old community interconnectedness; the Nehru-Gandhis, unlike in other parts, command enormous goodwill. At a time of dominant Hindutva and opposition weakness in most of the country, Kerala is marching to its own tune.

Hindu, Christian, Muslim communities have long co-existed in relatively peaceful equipoise. Kerala has never seen any large-scale communal riots, except in 1971-72 in Thalassery. With 18% Christian, 27% Muslim and 54% Hindus, religious minorities in Kerala are stable, dominant in their regions, and not vulnerable or easily ostracized as the "other." The IUML or Muslim League of Kerala is not a radical marginal outfit; instead, it's a centrist moderate force and its leading lights like CH Mohammad Koya have even served as Kerala Chief Minister. The IUML remains a key alliance partner in the Congress-led UDF coalition contesting 27 seats, and for the first time in 25 years, putting up a woman candidate, Noorbina Rasheed from the Kozhikode South constituency. "There should be women's reservation in both parliament and legislative assemblies. Women's representation is unstoppable, it's only going to increase," Noorbina tells me. Unlike in north India, Kerala's Muslim women are increasingly visible and articulate

in public. The Muslim League's welfarist, moderate centrism, however, is increasingly being challenged by more radical outfits, like the SDPI and the Welfare Party. MK Muneer, veteran IUML politician contesting this time from Koduvally, says the League's constitutional stance and belief that India social fabric must never be disturbed is under threat from radicalized youth increasingly galvanized by issues like CAA-NRC and attacks on Muslims elsewhere in India and in the world. This even as highly influential Kerala Muslim intellectuals like CT Abdurahim, MN Karassery and others remain staunch secular progressives and give the community a modern identity. "I identify as a Muslim," says Shemim K, a 28-year-old Ph.D scholar, "but I don't believe in mixing religion with politics and will always opt for secular leaders." Kerala's educated, modern and progressive Muslim community, an equal in power-sharing and administration with Hindus, is another feature that underlines the state's distinctiveness. Another distinctive feature of Kerala is the nature of the Left. In Kerala, the Left is non-doctrinaire and pragmatic. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan is enormously popular, a towering personality cult, known for his autocratic yet decisive style. Vijayan has made a strong bid for growth, pushing infrastructure projects, cutting red tape for entrepreneurs and unveiling a digitization programme. He combines the business-friendly approach with welfarist beneficiary economics, distributing food-kits during the lockdown, hiking pensions to ? 1,600 per month and offering a ? 1,000 one-time payment to the poor. Kerala is the only state in India where the Left has produced a popular leader, who, although accused of corruption, ideological dilution and subordinating the party to his own persona, is not only electable, but may just with this election end the pattern of incumbent being replaced by the alternative in every election. From Calicut to Trivandrum, posters of Vijayan dot the landscape. Dool News, a lively

website run by young team, points to his popularity among youth. Some call Vijayan "Irattachankan" (double-chested or strongman). He is Kerala's own Mr. 56-inch-chest, known to be famously dismissive of the media, occasionally even ordering journalists out of press conferences. Local media have derisively dubbed him "Modi in a mundu."

Another feature that makes Kerala different from other states is the continuing popularity of the Nehru-Gandhis. In the 1977 elections, after the Emergency, the Congress won Kerala. Today, the party is hobbled with factions and a leadership crisis, yet, among fishing communities, already nursing grievances about the LDF's bid (now cancelled) to tie up with a US marine company, there is significant approval of Rahul Gandhi's recent outreach. In 2019, the Congress dominated Kerala's Lok Sabha seats, winning 19 of 20 seats in what local Congress leaders describe as a 'Rahul Wave' and the party is far more organizationally entrenched here than in other states. In the 77-year-old Oomen Chandy, the Congress too has a universally-liked, popular face, although mindful of party factionalism, no leader has been projected as Chief Minister. "This is a do-or-die existential battle for us, who becomes Chief Minister will be decided by the elected MLAs after the results," says Ramesh Chennithala, the leader of the opposition in the state assembly.

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Yet, while the BJP's vote share in Kerala has been consistently rising since 2011 (from 6% in 2011 to 15% in 2016), Hindus in Kerala are not a monolithic bloc. The dominant Ezhava caste is aligned strongly with the Left (Vijayan is an Ezhava) and still influenced by the egalitarian anti-caste teachings of early 20th-century reformer Narayan Guru. Polarisation is extremely difficult with tightly-knit communities living in proximity, with Christians and Muslims as influential as Hindus. Mixed primary schools have also built powerful and intimate connections between religions. "We simply can't afford communal riots here," says journalist NP Chekutty.

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Gujarat Dinner A Top-Class Teaching Moment From Both Pawar And Shah

Amit Shah's statement that "not everything can be made public" is being interpreted as affirmation of the fact that on Saturday night, he met Sharad Pawar for dinner at the home of a billionaire in Gujarat. Along with Pawar, who is 80, his deputy, Praful Patel, was also reportedly at the dinner diplomacy event.

Sources say that the police in Ahmedabad had been asked not to register the movements or make special arrangements for the Home Minister as he drove to the host's mansion. Your columnist can confirm that the meeting took place. Pawar's party denied it before Shah offered his comment. The menu was vegetarian. Pawar and his deputy reached the venue about 45 minutes before Shah interacted with their host, known for his proximity to PM Modi and Shah.

The dinner comes in the midst of raging political hormones in Maharashtra where Pawar's man, Home Minister Anil Deshmukh, has been accused of corruption by the former police chief of Mumbai. The controversy threatens the

Maharashtra government, which comprises an alliance of the Shiv Sena, the Congress and Pawar's party.

The scandal began with the discovery of an SUV, containing gelatin sticks, ingredients for explosives, parked near the home of Reliance top boss Mukesh Ambani. Within days, the owner of the SUV was found dead in a creek. All this is now being pinned on controversial cop, Sachin Vaze, who had been ordered to collect 100 crores every month from businesses via extortion, the former police chief, Param Bir Singh, has alleged (he has also filed a court case demanding an investigation against the Home Minister). Meanwhile, Deshmukh has denied the allegations and Pawar's party has said there is no need for him to resign. But Vaze has been arrested and the case is being handled by the country's top anti-terror agency. As these developments were blaring through Maharashtra, it was Pawar whose rich reserves of political experience kept the government on an even keel, assuaging allies and fortifying the government against the attack by the opposition BJP.

Which is why the meeting with Amit Shah is such a wobbler for those who felt Pawar had managed to downgrade the emergency for the Maharashtra government from Code Red to Amber. Modi has made no secret of his close equation with Pawar, who regularly meets with him at parliament when it is in session. A few years ago, Modi in a public speech described Pawar as his "political guru".

Pawar is famous for keeping his options open - even after he has committed his support to a party or a particular government. When the Maharashtra crisis began, he said Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray had reason to order an inquiry against the Home Minister because the charges were serious; a day later, however, his party firmly declared that Deshmukh would not quit. As the BJP went into the full attack mode, Pawar reportedly counselled the Chief Minister not to concede an inch. Pawar is learnt to have said, "In the UPA the Congress had a bad habit of forcing resignations when the BJP demanded them. The BJP never makes any one resign. Let us not give an inch, or they will torch our



government".

The allies followed his advice. The spook seemed less scary. So why the dinner with Shah, then? Because Pawar operates at many levels and the Gujarat meal sends a strong message to his allies: Yes, it may be his party that has made them vulnerable, but he has options and can engage the affections of the BJP as an eager suitor. The Shah meeting makes it clear that in the Maharashtra alliance, it is Pawar that is the king: the Congress is a washout; Thackeray cannot reunite with the BJP whom he dumped to form the current alliance; but Pawar has no such impediments. It's vintage power play, Pawar-style. Pawar's signalling comes also as

Sanjay Raut, Sena leader, wrote in a stinging editorial in the Sena mouthpiece that Deshmukh is an "accidental Home Minister". The Sena and Congress want to move towards dropping Deshmukh as Home Minister, though not immediately, since that would be seen as giving in to the BJP's demands. After Pawar's dinner with Shah, Raut was ticked off and warned not to play "spoilsport" - this was done publicly by Pawar's nephew, Ajit Pawar, who said the Maharashtra government is "working well". Clearly the Maharashtra government does not believe in TMI - Too Much Information - with its frequent squabbles erupting in sound bites to the press.

Even Without A Pandemic, Going Maskless In Delhi Can Kill You



As recovery from the coronavirus pandemic continues, Bloomberg Opinion is running a series of columns looking at crisis-inspired innovations that promise better living over the long run - from more resilient economies, cleaner cities and healthier offices to five-star meal kits and less unnecessary business travel.

It has been a year since the pandemic hit India and, for me, the oddest thing is how healthy I've been. Like most but not all of the people I see on the streets, I have been masked up these

past 12 months. I've washed my hands religiously and avoided crowds. As a result, for the first time in my life, I haven't caught a cold all year.

This is remarkable. Living in Delhi, with its crowds and its sudden changes of season, usually means one picks up pretty much every bug that's going around.

I am not fond of masks. And, in the steam-bath summers of north India, wearing something on your face can be stifling. And yet I find myself hoping that once this pandemic ends, the habit of mask-

wearing will remain.

Not all the time, of course. That might be asking too much. But wouldn't it be great if city-dwellers across the world began to behave a little more like those in East Asia? If, during flu season, people wore masks whenever they planned to take a flight or join a crowd? That if they caught themselves sniffing, they grabbed a mask on their way out the door? I recognize that this dream might be a little difficult to achieve in some parts of the world. This century has set a ridiculously high bar for partisanship and polarization but, even by those standards, the transformation of mask-wearing into a political statement in the United States and elsewhere has been appalling.

Surely, of all the things one could do to prevent the spread of disease, mask-wearing is the easiest to understand. Instead, it's as if one whole section of humanity decided it was perfectly polite to cough in people's faces.

Nor have the health authorities always been as sensible about this as one would like: Last March, remember, people like Dr. Anthony Fauci were telling Americans that "there's no reason to be walking around with a mask." While they changed their minds later, inconsistent messaging is still damaging.

There's another reason why masks have been the silver lining of this awful year, at least as far as I'm concerned. Last March, Prime Minister Narendra Modi ordered India into one of the most restrictive lockdowns in the world. Markets were shut, deliveries stopped, nobody could buy anything - but I felt rich. Because, lying by the door of my Delhi flat, I had lots of N95 masks.

This was not because I miraculously foresaw the pandemic. (If I had, I would have shorted the market, not bought masks.) Nor had I hoarded masks the moment news of the virus emerged.

The reason I had masks on hand

was simple: I had bought a large number of them a few winters earlier. Not for fear of the flu but because, in Delhi, even breathing is dangerous. This is the most polluted megacity in the world. In 2020, two-thirds of the world's most polluted cities were in India, most of them in the northern plains around Delhi. Sensible people, faced with air quality more than 10 times worse than it should be, wear a mask to protect their lungs.

Yet, the first few times I went out in Delhi with a mask, I felt foolish. In those halcyon pre-pandemic days, nobody around me was wearing one. They stood chatting to each other in the mild winter weather, manfully breathing in the gray, toxic air.

That's yet another reason why I'm glad that people have gotten used to wearing and seeing masks. Even when there's no pandemic around, going maskless in Delhi can kill you.

(Mihir Sharma is a Bloomberg

India's New Move Could Produce Second-Rate Engineers

The recent announcement by the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) that Mathematics and Physics will no longer be mandatory for eligibility to get a spot in engineering undergraduate programmes came as a bolt from the blue. These two subjects have been added to a list of 12 optional subjects, in three of which the student should have scored more than 45% to become eligible.

The announcement received immediate pushback from many quarters, including senior scientists who expressed concern that this move was in the wrong direction. The first question that comes to mind upon hearing such rules is how such decisions are reached. Who is consulted? I do not recall any public debate or consultation related to this issue. The apparent trigger for such a decision seems to have come from representations made by "industry as well as student community to give an option to pursue technical courses such as agricultural engineering, biotechnology, information technology, electronics to students who did not have prior electives of Physics and Maths at class-level but had studied relevant portions of the same to a certain desired extent." AICTE also stated that whether to implement this or not was up to individual institutions, and that impacted students could make up for this deficit by taking bridge courses (that would connect whatever little Mathematics and Physics they actually studied with what was needed in the engineering curricula).

One might agree that there may be a few pathways in engineering that could avoid significant Mathematics and Physics, but an entire programme of study is not designed for these few possibilities. Both

subjects are a part of the foundational core of engineering that everyone must learn. Understanding of natural phenomena requires a background in Physics which is usually expressed in the language of Mathematics. The "laws" that govern mechanical devices, electrical and magnetic equipment and the quantum



world of atoms are all expressed in terms of mathematical equations.

In this context, bridge courses are likely to produce a cohort of students who will mostly be "second-class citizens" among the rest of the "mainstream" students much better versed in Mathematics and Physics. Such a cohort will always need specially-designed courses, at every stage that focus on the qualitative and minimize the quantitative. It is also very likely that upon graduation, this group will face discrimination, as also fewer opportunities in employment and in admission to higher studies. Many will proclaim, "So this person is from the no Math-Physics group"! It is of course possible to have several choices within the college - after admission - in terms of opting for routine or advanced Mathematics, specialized Physics or Chemistry courses. However, providing

the option to skip Mathematics and Physics at the entrance-level is tantamount to removing essential pillars from the foundation.

It is worth reflecting whether institutions who can barely run half-decent undergraduate programmes in engineering will have the creativity and the ability to simultaneously conduct such parallel streams. I also wonder what institution heads and faculty will have to say about the burdens and consequences of such a policy decision. The second issue that is striking is the discourse emanating from AICTE. This shows an unthinking eagerness to somehow "align" with the New Education Policy (NEP) in terms of paying obeisance to notions of a liberal education, flexibility in choosing courses and diversity in the groups of college-entering students. This is an abuse of the meaning of the words "liberal" and "diversity".

Liberal does not imply that a student can choose any course arbitrarily. Every liberal undergraduate programme has a planned sequence of courses. A student follows a plan and an overall theme - yes, even flexibility has a plan. There are prerequisite courses to be cleared before enrolling for some higher courses. A large majority of courses in engineering would require some kind of Mathematics taught at the school-exiting level. Thirdly, the idea of making Mathematics and Physics optional for

admission to engineering studies stems from a very simplistic, "craft-only" (popular?) view of what engineering is. An engineer is not a technician or a craftsman even though s/he may need to know enough about "hands on" practices. An electrician is not an electrical engineer, nor is a farmer an agricultural engineer, though the former must know about electrical wiring, meters and switches, and the latter must be familiar with agricultural patterns, crops, fertilizers and irrigation techniques. A rigorous engineering curriculum deals with a very significant amount of natural sciences expressed mostly in mathematical forms. This is much more true for degree programmes than diploma-awarding programmes which focus more sharply on the "practice" part than the "theory". It is therefore even more surprising that a body like AICTE which is deeply involved in making engineering curricula should reflect such a simplistic worldview about engineering education.

When engineering, as a profession, evolved from the guilds of the various crafts, it was in no small measure due to the related Science and Mathematics getting internalized through the professional education often organized by the guilds themselves. Socially, the emergence of engineering professions was driven by the rise of industrial capitalism and the "freeing" of individuals from the authority of the guilds; intellectually, it was driven by the capacity of the craftsmen to compute, design and ultimately generalize and abstract their professional work - all of this needed Mathematics, Physics and, in some instances, Chemistry.

The missing voice of the developing world

Scholars Arvind Subramanian and Devesh Kapur pointed out how development economics, which is focused on improving lives and incomes of the poor in developing countries, has barely any representation from the global south

In an article for Project Syndicate, economist Arvind Subramanian - who served as the chief economic adviser in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in its last term - and political scientist Devesh Kapur, who has written extensively on global economic institutions, exposed the deep imbalance that exists in the world of knowledge production of development economics. They pointed out how the field, which is focused on improving lives and incomes of the poor in developing countries, has barely

any representation from the global south. None of editors or co-editors of The Journal of Development Economics, a leading academic journal, are based in developing countries, with Asia and Africa entirely unrepresented; the flagship conference of the World Bank on development economics saw no participation from an institution from a developing economy in 2019 and only 7% of the papers presented at the conference in the last three decades are from the global south. Mr Subramanian and Mr Kapur also flag the problems

associated with the growing use of randomised controlled trials, and how it has had exclusionary consequences, both because of the costs associated with it and the fact that gatekeepers are located, once again, in the developed world. This may appear like an abstract academic debate. But by pointing to this imbalance, the scholars have pointed to a real crisis in global knowledge production. Peer-reviewed journals and academic and policy conferences are the first site of throwing up and test-



ing new ideas, which then get picked up by the policy establishments and determine the agenda of global institutions. But in this process, the voices and experiences of billions of the world's poor remains unheard. This must be corrected.

Impending doom? We can avoid it

Thank God for vaccines. The Biden administration's mass vaccination campaign comes just as spring brings warmer weather and longer days, fueling a sense of broad optimism for many across the United States. On weekend nights, cities like New York are again brimming with pleasure-seekers; you can feel the raw and almost feral enthusiasm of millions of people coming out of our Covid cages. Plans for summer travel are being laid. Parents are hugging their adult children and meeting new grandchildren for the first time.

This is all good. Let's embrace the freedom vaccines give us. But let's be sensible about it.

Your vaccination, if you've had one, doesn't mean the pandemic is over -- and unfortunately, a good swath of the American public is refusing to get the vaccine. Others

are immunocompromised, unable to get the vaccine for health reasons, or simply haven't yet come to their place in the vaccine queue. At the same time, new variants threaten to push us col-

lectively back on our heels -- if we're not careful now, this bright light we're seeing at the end of the tunnel could be snuffed out. But the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued some helpful advice. You and your loved ones all got your final vaccine shot at least two weeks ago? Great! Feel free to gather with them in small groups, even inside. Hug your vaccinated mom. Smile, maskless, as you catch up with your vaccinated friends over coffee. Go on a first date with that guy you've been flirting with online. These are profound gifts after such an isolated year.

As with so much else in this pandemic, many Americans are largely following the guidance given to us by our elected officials. Unfortunately, those officials aren't always listening to the best public health advice, and their decisions vary wildly by state. Across the middle and south of the country, elected officials have lifted mask requirements, even as CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky issues a

powerful warning that a fourth stage of the pandemic could bring "impending doom." President Joe Biden is begging state governors and city mayors to impose mask mandates to keep the public safe; so far, many of them are refusing.

Coronavirus cases in the United States seem, troublingly, to be going up. Every day, close to 1,000 people die from the virus in the US alone. Vaccinations in the United States are doing well, but that's not the case around the world -- and as we should have learned over the past year, viruses don't respect borders. Across the world's poorest nations, virtually no one has received the vaccine. That doesn't mean Americans are uniquely protected -- it means all 7 billion of the world's people are collectively vulnerable.

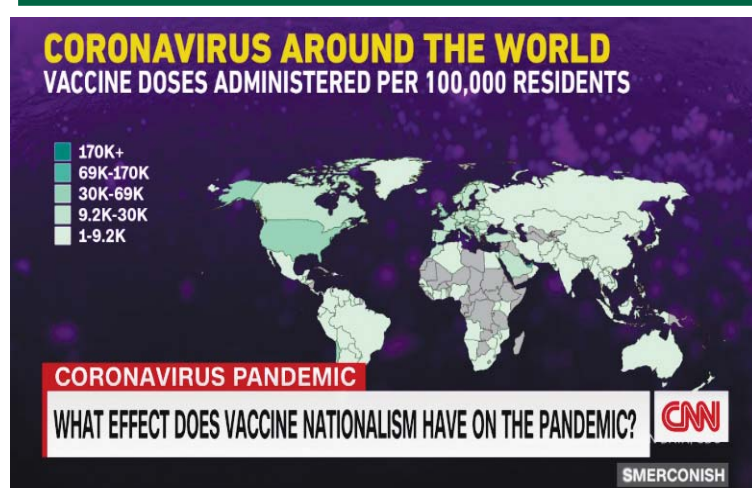
It's enraging that so many elected officials have entirely derogated their responsibility to the public. With that kind of shameful example, it's no wonder so many Americans seem to have written the virus off as no longer a big



deal or a simple inconvenience -- as Baylor Women's Basketball Coach Kim Mulkey did when she mused on Monday that players should no longer be tested for Covid-19 once their teams reached the Final Four, because a positive result might mean they wouldn't play. Her comments were revealing: They were focused entirely on the perception of a lost opportunity -- players who wouldn't get to play in an important game -- rather than a serious health threat not just to the players themselves, but everyone around them. This has been a year of loss for all of us, but those losses are not of equal magnitude. Those of us who have lost

our social lives, our workplaces, opportunities for pleasure, and even, on occasion, our ability to cope realize that we at least have our lives; more than half a million Americans have lost theirs. And many millions of Americans have lost friends and loved ones. We are all ready to see these losses, from the smallest ones to the biggest, end. But we also have to keep them all in perspective, and be willing to tolerate some of the smaller inconveniences and frustrations -- wearing a mask inside, getting tested for Covid before you can play in a sporting event, and certainly getting vaccinated -- so that we can stem the tide of massive loss of life.

The US needs a Marshall Plan for global vaccinations



Donald Trump left President Joe Biden with many messes to clean up: A raging pandemic, a weakened economy and a cascade of foreign and domestic policies that diminished America's standing on the world stage. After two months in office, Biden has already done a superb job of bringing our country back. The \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan will jump-start our economic recovery and pave the way for schools to reopen, while enabling state and local officials to invest in infrastructure. And the vaccine rollout has ramped up,

with experts projecting the United States could reach herd immunity this summer.

The US may be winning the race between vaccinations and variants -- but the world is losing it. As the US recovery effort picks up steam, we have an opportunity to save lives while rebuilding our moral standing in the world post-Trump. To turbocharge the President's Build Back Better agenda at home and christen a new era of US foreign policy, we need to lead a global vaccination initiative to help the world beat back the pandemic, much like the

Marshall Plan aided in Europe's recovery after World War II.

So far, only about six doses have been administered per 100 people worldwide and many countries will not reach herd immunity until 2023, if at all. That timeline doesn't even take into account the possibility that emerging variants could evade the vaccines. The longer it takes to achieve global herd immunity, the more likely it is that Covid-19 will become endemic. To vaccinate the world faster, the US government needs to provide more funding for COVAX, the global vaccination effort led by the World Health Organization along with UNICEF and other organizations. The United States should also increase direct investments in vaccine manufacturing through public-private partnerships, which would create jobs, leverage vaccine diplomacy and support the biomanufacturing industry, possibly leading to cures for other illnesses as well. But the chief bottleneck in vaccine production is not money but manufacturing capacity. The private sector has

already increased its production by multiples, but it's still not enough to meet the global demand. Vaccines are, in the lexicon of economics, a public good. The market, left alone, is undersupplying a product that benefits the public at large. The federal government needs to support production more expansively, which will require contracts with pioneering biomanufacturers like National Resilience and a review of how to streamline the entirety of the supply chain, from vials to special syringes. Investing in biomanufacturing -- the production of biological products made from living cells -- could benefit the US economy and cement our position as a leader in medical innovation. Biomanufacturers are capable of producing an array of pharmaceutical products, from vaccines to cell or gene therapies that could one day treat cancer or Alzheimer's. Given that my state of Massachusetts is already the top biopharma hub in the country, federal funding would help it to expand -- from research and development to manufacturing -- to become a global cen-

ter for industrial biology. Finally, controlling more vaccine production will give the United States greater leverage in vaccine diplomacy. Countries like Russia and China are already offering other countries access to vaccines in an attempt to further their interests. We should not let them set the norms or stakes for these negotiations. In Brazil, for example, China is using vaccine shipments to press for 5G access for the Chinese telecommunications company Huawei. The United States should be countering such strong-arming by providing its own vaccine supplies. Instead of extracting concessions, however, we can be building partnerships in public health, from the logistics of vaccine distribution to the training of medical workers. As a student of history and the great-grandson of Harvey Bundy, one of the architects of the Marshall Plan, I don't propose this undertaking lightly. The world needs America to lead. The fight against Covid-19 is a transnational challenge that calls for vision and boldness.

Why the media, scientific community and WHO won't investigate COVID origins

A remarkable twist in a tragedy, still ongoing, with effects that have transformed this country forever: just days before authorities reported the first cases of the coronavirus in Wuhan, a top inspector at the World Health Organization sat for an interview that was broadcast on YouTube.

The inspector was a man called Peter Daszak. He spoke about his research with the Wuhan Institute of Virology, which had been going on for more than 15 years. In the interview, Daszak also discussed his nonprofit organization, which had received millions from the U.S. government. Daszak channeled a substantial percentage of that money to the lab in Wuhan, which he described as, "world-class lab of the highest standards." Some of that work, paid for by American taxpayers, went to something called "gain-of-function research." It involved manipulating viruses in a laboratory to make them more transmissible and more deadly. In his YouTube interview, Peter Daszak spoke freely about all of this. At the time, he had no reason not to. Outside of a handful of diplomats, no one had raised concerns about the kind of research into bat viruses, very

dangerous research it turns out, alternative explanation for the that was taking place in Wuhan. pandemic. The virus, they told According to Peter Daszak, his the world, had most likely research, and the grant money emerged from an exotic that supported it, was mammal that form some necessary to create a vaccine reason was being sold in a to prevent the next global seafood market in Wuhan. pandemic. Daszak even That's what happened. The explained how easy it is to media bought that explanation. manipulate a coronavirus. Later we discovered that was

DASZAK: Coronavirus is a not true. There was never any pretty good...You can evidence that COVID infections manipulate them in the lab originated in a pangolin eaten pretty easily. It's spike protein. for food.

Spike protein drives a lot of what The locals in Wuhan laughed happens with the coronavirus, at that idea. Peter Daszak zoonotic risk. So you can get didn't apologize. He just kept the sequence, build the protein. deflecting attention from the And we worked with Ralph lab.

Barrack at UNC to do this. In April, he told the show Insert into a backbone of DemocracyNow that, "The idea another virus and then do some that this virus escaped from a lab is just pure baloney. It's

"You can manipulate them simply not true. I've been pretty easily" in a lab. That working with that lab for 15 recorded on December 9, 2019. years. They're some of the best It wasn't long before Peter scientists in the world."

Daszak stopping giving Daszak has pushed that line interviews about his lab ever since. Relentlessly.

experiments. People were Last summer, he wrote an op- starting to ask uncomfortable ed in The Guardian entitled, questions. Wasn't there an "Ignore the conspiracy advanced virology lab with a theories: scientists know history of sloppy containment Covid-19 wasn't created in a protocols, very close to where lab." Then made the point on the first out outbreak occurred? Twitter repeatedly.

Well yes there was. But Peter DASZAK: "[Gain-of-function] Daszak didn't want to talk to research has nothing to do with about that. So he and other the origin of COVID unless you bureaucrats at the World Health believe the conspiracy Organization came up with an theories. Why mix the two



together if the virus came from bats, which is what all the evidence suggests?" Almost every media outlet in this country dutifully repeated Daszak's claims as fact. As early as January, National Public Radio reported, "A wet market Wuhan, China, is catching the blame as the probable source of the current coronavirus outbreak that's sweeping the globe." That was fast. It was a few days into the pandemic, and it wasn't clear that NPR had sent anyone to the ground in Wuhan, but somehow they knew exactly where the virus came from half a world away in central China.

National Geographic, famous for its expeditions, also determined, somehow, that the issue was settled. "Wet markets launched the coronavirus," they wrote. "Here's what you need to know." So, the investigative reporters were satisfied with no investigation. But some

people still had questions. One of them was Alina Chan, who's a molecular biologist at the Broad Institute at Harvard and MIT.

Chan noticed something odd about the coronavirus.

Its genome hadn't changed much over time, even though it, the virus, had undergone trillions of replications. That's strange. Normally, viruses that jump from animals to human have to adapt quickly to their human hosts. That's what the last SARS virus did, in 2003. Early-stage SARS viruses looked very different from SARS viruses later in the pandemic. But this coronavirus wasn't behaving that way. In fact, it seemed like it was custom-built for human transmission. When Chan published a paper on her findings, Peter Daszak attacked her to any reporter who would listen.

Migrant surge will 'change the country forever'

Fox News and Fox Nation host Tucker Carlson said Tuesday the surge in illegal crossings at the U.S. southern border will "change the country forever."



The host of Fox Nation's "Tucker Carlson Today" argued on "Fox & Friends" that President Biden's immigration actions are an attempt to "try to change election outcomes."

Biden has scrapped a number of former President Donald Trump's policies, which included having asylum seekers remain in Mexico instead of staying in the

U.S. while they wait for their cases to be heard. The moves have led to a record surge in migrants, including unaccompanied minors, that has strained capacity at immigration facilities at the southern border in recent weeks. More than 15,000 unaccompanied migrant minors are in custody at federal facilities, according to recent reports. U.S. Cus-

toms and Border Protection reported encounters with more than 100,000 migrants in February alone. Carlson said the U.S. is a democracy "so when you change the population, you change the outcome of the vote, which means you change the way the country is run, and that of course is the whole point of this." "So if you open the borders and then sponsor legislation giving citizenship and voting rights to the people you've just admitted illegally, what are you doing? You're trying to change election outcomes and that's what they [Democrats] are doing," Carlson added. He went on to note that he

thinks the change in immigration policies will help the Democratic Party in the longterm. "The Democratic Party is extremely frustrated by the idea that there are Americans who don't vote for them, who reject their programs so if you change the nature of the people who live here, then you win forever," he said. Carlson also pointed to a double standard in America amid the coronavirus pandemic. "In order to hold a job or fly on an airplane you have to get a vaccine and wear a mask after you get a vaccine and remain in terror of the virus after you get the vaccine," he said. "But people from foreign countries can

be admitted without any testing at all. It's just yet another example of the intense focus on foreign nationals to the exclusion of the interests of American citizens." Carlson's exclusive new video podcast "Tucker Carlson Today" premiered on Fox Nation this week, and features new episodes every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The show features wide-ranging interviews with newsmakers and offers viewers unique insight into the issues of the day. Carlson will continue to host his top-rated program "Tucker Carlson Tonight," weeknights at 8 p.m. ET on Fox News Channel.



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UK Concern Over 'Opaque' Empire Of Billionaire Sanjeev Gupta

Kwasi Kwarteng told the BBC that Liberty Steel, which groups Gupta's steel activities, was a "national asset" employing around 3,000 people in Britain

(News Agencies)- Britain's business minister on Tuesday confirmed that Boris Johnson's government had refused a £170 million rescue package for billionaire Sanjeev Gupta's steel group due to his business empire's "very opaque" structure.

Kwasi Kwarteng told the BBC that Liberty Steel, which groups Gupta's steel activities, was a "national asset" employing around 3,000 people in Britain but that the government could not pump money into "a black box". He called the structure of Liberty's owner -- Gupta Family

Group (GFG) -- "very opaque" and "not helpful".

"We are custodians of taxpayer's money... and we feel that if we gave the (£170 million, \$235 million, 200 million euros) money, there was no guarantee that the money would stay in the UK and would protect British jobs," he said.

However, he added that "all options" were being considered to save Liberty Steel's UK plants and jobs, including nationalisation. "We think that the steel industry has a future in the UK," said Kwarteng, despite the government's

planned decarbonisation of the economy. There is growing concern in Britain about the future of GFG and Liberty Steel, which together employ around 5,000 people domestically and 35,000 worldwide. Its financial situation has been strained by the bankruptcy of key backer Greensill, which provided short-term loans to companies by paying invoices in advance for a fee.

Since the bankruptcy, GFG has had difficulty obtaining new liquidity, even though the group says it has sufficient



funds for its current needs. GFG also employs almost 2,500 people in France, where Liberty Steel directly oversees the Ascoval steel plant in Saint-Saulve and a rail plant in Hayange. GFG

also owns an aluminum site in Dunkirk. In Britain, the group is also suffering from a drop in demand for certain steels from the aviation sector, which is in crisis due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Indian-Origin Property Developer Banned In UK For Investor Funds Misuse



Sanjiv Varma, a director of Grosvenor Property Developments, collected more than 7.7 million pounds from investors between February 2017 and January 2018 along with fellow director, Jonathan England, who has been disqualified for 12 years.

(News Agencies)-An Indian-origin property developer has been banned as a company director for 13 years in the UK after his company was found to have misused investor funds raised towards building student accommodation in the south-west England city of Bristol.

Sanjiv Varma, a director of Grosvenor

Property Developments, collected more than 7.7 million pounds from investors between February 2017 and January 2018 along with fellow director, Jonathan England, who has been disqualified for 12 years.

The student accommodation was never completed by the company and investors applied for the liquidation of the company in

November 2018. Enquiries by the Insolvency Service found that Varma, 57, used at least 1.3 million pounds to fund travel, gifts and designer clothing.

"Sanjiv Varma and Jonathan England fabricated an extensive renovation project to create student accommodation in Bristol, taking large deposits from investors with the promise of a high quality asset," said Karen Maxwell, Deputy Chief Investigator at the Insolvency Service.

"Instead, Sanjiv Varma took millions from the company and Jonathan England did nothing to stop his co-director from spending their funds on

international flights and designer clothing. Both have now been disqualified as company directors for a significant time period," she said.

Grosvenor Property Developers was wound-up in court on November 14, 2018, and the Official Receiver was appointed as liquidator, which triggered investigations into the conduct of the directors of the property firm. Enquiries established that funds were diverted into accounts belonging to or companies connected to Sanjiv Varma and that 3.1 million pounds was paid to another company in Dubai also owned by the director.

Investigators also found that

planning permission for the student housing was never applied for and titles to the property were never acquired by Grosvenor Property Developers. In their undertakings to the government, the two directors did not dispute that they caused and/or allowed Grosvenor Property Developers Ltd to misappropriate investor deposits of more than 6.5 million pounds. Both their bans are effective from 22 February 2021 and the pair are banned from directly or indirectly becoming involved, without the permission of the court, in the promotion, formation or management of a company, the Insolvency Service said.

South Africa Turns To UN To Extradite Controversial Gupta Brothers From UAE

Although South Africa does not have an extradition agreement with the UAE, both the countries are signatories to the UN convention against corruption, which is what Lamola is now pinning hopes on.

(News Agencies)-South Africa will approach the UN in a bid to extradite the controversial Gupta brothers from the UAE, where they are in self-exile, as talks with the Emirates have delivered no results, Justice Minister Ronald Lamola said on Friday. Although South Africa does not have an extradition agreement with the UAE, both the countries are signatories to the UN convention against corruption, which is what

Lamola is now pinning hopes on. "It is clear the UAE is not willing to cooperate with the process. We have not really received very good cooperation... So, the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) is exploring other means through the UN convention against corruption," Lamola said in an interview with national public broadcast station SAfm. "It's a process where all state parties which are signatories to the UN

conventions are obliged to cooperate and if it's an extradition request, to also comply. The UAE is a signatory to that convention," Lamola said. South Africa's NPA wants to question the Gupta brothers, Ajay, Atul and Rajesh, about their alleged involvement in billions of rands siphoned off from state institutions through their alleged closeness to former president Jacob Zuma. The Guptas told the Commission of



Inquiry into State Capture in 2018 that they were not prepared to return to South Africa to testify after a number of witnesses implicated them and Zuma in corrupt activities.



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Jaishankar calls on Tajikistan Speaker; discusses parliamentary support for Indo-Tajik cooperation

(News Agencies)- External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday met Tajikistan Speaker Zokirzoda Mahmadohir Zoir and appreciated the strong parliamentary support for Indo-Tajik cooperation.

Jaishankar, who is in Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe, attended the 9th Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan on Tuesday. Earlier in the day, the minister paid his respects at the monument of the founder of the first Tajik state.

"At Dusti Square in Dushanbe. Paying respects at the monument of Ismoil Somoni, founder of the first Tajik state," Jaishankar said in a tweet. After visiting the Dusti Square, he called on the Speaker.

"Glad to meet Speaker Zokirzoda Mahmadohir Zoir of Tajikistan. Appreciated the strong parliamentary support for Indo-Tajik cooperation," Jaishankar said on Twitter. On Tuesday, the minister called on Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon and discussed expanding bilateral economic and development cooperation.

Jaishankar also conveyed the greetings of President Ram Nath Kovind and Prime Minister Narendra Modi to President Rahmon.

"Thank President @EmomaliRahmon of Tajikistan for receiving me. Conveyed the greetings of President Kovind & PM Modi. Discussed expanding our bilateral economic and development cooperation. Appreciated his assessment of the Afghan situation," he tweeted.

Talking to reporters, Jaishankar said he discussed with President Rahmon bilateral cooperation and also the situation in Afghanistan.

"We discussed how to expand our economic, trade and investment cooperation. How to expand more in terms of capacity building, how to strengthen our political cooperation and how to work more closely on Afghanistan," he said.

He also expressed India's strong solidarity with Tajikistan in the fight against COVID-19.

Later, Jaishankar met Tajikistan's Defence Minister Colonel General Sherali Mirzo and discussed ways to further strengthen defence and security cooperation.

"Productive discussions with Defence Minister Colonel General Sherali Mirzo of Tajikistan. Focused on further strengthening our defence & security cooperation," Jaishankar tweeted.



Pak PM Imran Khan replies to PM Modi's letter, talks of resolving Kashmir dispute



(News Agencies)-The Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his wishes on Pakistan day. "The people of Pakistan commemorate this day by paying tribute to the wisdom and foresight of our founding fathers in envisioning an independent, sovereign state where they could live in freedom and realize their full potential," mentioned the letter, which was written to the India government as acknowledgement of PM Modi's letter. The letter added: "The people Of Pakistan also desire

peaceful, cooperative relations with all neighbours, including India. We are convinced that durable peace and stability in South Asia is contingent upon resolving all outstanding issues between India and Pakistan, in particular the Jammu & Kashmir dispute. "The acknowledgement went on to add that the creation of an enabling environment is imperative for a constructive and result-oriented dialogue." I also take this opportunity to convey our best wishes for the people of India in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

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India narrowing differences in UNSC, helped shape discussions on Afghanistan, Myanmar, says Ambassador



India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador TS Tirumurti said India has been able to bring a "unique perspective" to discussions in the UNSC. Ambassador Tirumurti added that India has helped shape the Council's statements on Afghanistan and Myanmar.

(News Agencies)-India has "been a bridge" in a polarized UN Security Council, narrowing differences and helping shape the Council's statements, discussions on Afghanistan and Myanmar, pushing for greater meeting of minds to address humanitarian crisis in Syria and focusing on terrorism, India's envoy to the UN said.

With India completing three months as an elected non-permanent member of the 15-nation Security Council, the country's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador T S Tirumurti said India has been able to bring a "unique perspective" to discussions in the Council.

"You can call this an Indian perspective if you like. It has been an intensive period," Tirumurti told PTI.

He noted that India got into a Security Council which had been polarised sharply in the recent past.

"While such a polarisation is still quite visible, India has certainly been a bridge narrowing down the differences in the Council. We have worked constructively with other members in the Council on all issues. Our voice is deeply respected and our contribution has been acknowledged," he said. "There is a greater effort in the Council now with countries like India coming in to have a more collaborative approach to issues."

Tirumurti stressed that "it is more important for the Council to speak in one voice rather than not speak at all."

Outlining instances where India helped an outcome in the Council, Tirumurti said the country has brought in its own perspective on specific issues. Citing the UNSC Press Statements on Myanmar, a "country with which we have strong links and strong interests," Tirumurti said India has been able to "bring together differing viewpoints and make these statements more constructive and helpful in furthering the process to resolve the issues."

Just days after the February 1 military coup in Myanmar in which top political leaders, including State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, were detained, the Council issued a Press Statement emphasising the need for continued support of the democratic transition in Myanmar and stressed the need to uphold democratic institutions and

processes, refrain from violence, fully respect human rights, fundamental freedoms and rule of law. India, Chair of the Taliban Sanctions Committee, also helped shape the Council's statement on Afghanistan to "voice our concern on the rising violence and targeted killings and keep the focus on, inter alia, women, minorities and on terrorism and its impact on Afghanistan and the region."

"We have an important stake in Afghanistan and its stability and peace. As Chair of the Taliban Sanctions Committee, our role in contributing to the process will be important," Tirumurti said.

In a March 12 press statement, the Council strongly condemned the alarming number of attacks deliberately targeting civilians in Afghanistan and "recognised that a sustainable peace can be achieved only through a comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace process that aims at a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire, as

well as an inclusive political settlement to end the conflict in Afghanistan."

Tirumurti said India "has also been pushing for greater meeting of the minds in the Council on addressing the humanitarian crisis in Syria and Yemen."

From Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan to the Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of Congo, India's diplomatic presence in these countries and historical ties with them has also enabled New Delhi to bring unique ground-level understanding to Council debates, he said adding that as Chair of the Libyan Sanctions Committee, India's contribution to resolving some granular issues has been appreciated. India also spoke out in the Council in a strong voice against the scourge of terrorism, with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar outlining an eight-point action plan at a UNSC Ministerial Meeting in February.

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



UAE Project To Broker India-Pak Peace Is Its Most Ambitious Ever

(News Agencies)-Nicknamed "Little Sparta" by American generals like former U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, the United Arab Emirates is widely acknowledged as a small country that punches far above its weight in military terms. But the tiny Gulf state also has outsize ambitions as a peace broker.

Its de facto ruler, Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, was the prime mover in last year's Abraham Accords between Israel and several Arab states. Going further back, Emirati diplomats played a key role alongside their Saudi counterparts in mediating the 2018 peace deal between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

The UAE's latest peacemaking project is arguably its most audacious ever. As Bloomberg reported last week, the Emiratis brokered the negotiations between India and Pakistan that led to an unexpected February 25 announcement that the South Asian rivals would respect their 2003 ceasefire agreement, despite heightened tensions between them.

The announcement was followed by a quick visit to India by the UAE Foreign Minister, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed.

The UAE is hoping to facilitate an exchange of ambassadors between New Delhi and Islamabad

and restoration of trade links between the two countries. More ambitious still, it is aiming to secure a viable understanding on Kashmir, which has been the flashpoint for several wars since their 1947 partition upon independence from British rule.

The two nuclear-armed neighbors are locked in what may be the world's most dangerous faceoff. The latest round of tensions began two years ago when 40 Indian soldiers were killed in a suicide bomb attack, claimed by a Pakistan-based terrorist group, in Kashmir. India retaliated by launching air strikes inside Pakistan. Since then, the leaders of the two countries, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Imran Khan, have blown hot and cold, with little progress toward peace - until last month's announcement.

In many ways, the Emiratis are uniquely qualified to mediate between the two countries. It has strong trade and commercial ties to both, and is home to millions of Indian and Pakistani expatriate workers. And since the conflict is rooted in mistrust between Hindus and Muslims, the UAE's credentials are strengthened by its aggressive promotion, at home and abroad, of a separation of politics and religion.



Pakistan approves import of cotton, sugar from India after 19 months



(News Agencies)-Pakistan is all set to resume bilateral trade with India after an economic committee gave the green signal on Wednesday. The nation is all set to import cotton and sugar from India from June 30, 2021. The announcement was made by newly appointed finance minister Hammad Azhar on Wednesday, lifting a nearly two-year-old ban on imports from India. IMPORT OF SUGAR, COTTON ALLOWED

Azhar said that Pakistan's Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) allowed the private sector to import five lakh

tonnes of white sugar from India. "In India, the price of sugar is quite cheap," he was quoted as saying by Geo TV.

"Hence, we have decided to resume sugar trade with India," he added. Azhar also announced that Pakistan will start importing cotton from India starting June this year. Azhar said that the bank of cotton imports from India had a direct impact on the country's small and medium industries.

"However, at the recommendation of the Ministry of Commerce, we have also decided to resume the trade of cotton with India," he added.

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ਮੋਦੀ ਕਾ ਏਲਾਨ-ਏ-ਜੰਗ

ਬੁੰਦ-ਬੁੰਦ ਕੀ ਟਰਸੇਗਾ ਪਾਕ

ਨਵੀਂ ਦਿੱਲੀ: ਮੋਦੀ ਦੇ ਏਲਾਨ-ਏ-ਜੰਗ ਨੇ ਪਾਕਿਸਤਾਨ ਨੂੰ ਟਰਸੇਗਾ ਪਾਕ। ਮੋਦੀ ਨੇ ਪਾਕਿਸਤਾਨ ਨੂੰ ਟਰਸੇਗਾ ਪਾਕ। ਮੋਦੀ ਨੇ ਪਾਕਿਸਤਾਨ ਨੂੰ ਟਰਸੇਗਾ ਪਾਕ।

ਮਾਰਟੀ-ਅਮਰਿਕਨ ਕਮਿਊਨਿਟੀ ਦੁਆਰਾ ਘੋਰ ਸਿੱਧਾ

ਮਾਰਟੀ-ਅਮਰਿਕਨ ਕਮਿਊਨਿਟੀ ਦੁਆਰਾ ਘੋਰ ਸਿੱਧਾ। ਮਾਰਟੀ-ਅਮਰਿਕਨ ਕਮਿਊਨਿਟੀ ਦੁਆਰਾ ਘੋਰ ਸਿੱਧਾ।

ਆਈਏਸ ਨੇ ਧਾਰਮਿਕ ਹੁੱਤ ਮਹਿਲਾ ਕੋ ਅਮੇਰਿਕਾ ਨੇ ਏਂਟਰੀ ਦੇਣੇ ਦੇ ਕਿਧਾ ਝੰਕਾਰ

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ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਦੁਨੀਆ

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ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਉਡਾਰੀ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਖਰਚੇ 27000 ਕਰੋੜ

ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਉਡਾਰੀ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਖਰਚੇ 27000 ਕਰੋੜ। ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਉਡਾਰੀ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਖਰਚੇ 27000 ਕਰੋੜ।

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

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

ਨਵੇਂ ਵਾਲ ਮੌਕੇ ਅਮਰੀਕੀ ਫੌਜ ਨੇ ਬੰਬ ਟਾਟਵੀਰ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਮੰਗੀ ਮੁਆਫ਼ੀ

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ਭਾਰਤ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨੇ ਖਾਲਿਸਤਾਨ ਲਿਬਰਲ ਫੋਰਸ ਦੇ ਪਾਬੰਦੀ ਲਾਗੂ

ਭਾਰਤ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨੇ ਖਾਲਿਸਤਾਨ ਲਿਬਰਲ ਫੋਰਸ ਦੇ ਪਾਬੰਦੀ ਲਾਗੂ। ਭਾਰਤ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨੇ ਖਾਲਿਸਤਾਨ ਲਿਬਰਲ ਫੋਰਸ ਦੇ ਪਾਬੰਦੀ ਲਾਗੂ।

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Stable Afghanistan essential for peace in the region, says India at Heart of Asia conference

At the Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference, Union minister S Jaishankar said peaceful Afghanistan is the basis for peace and progress in the region. Jaishankar added that ensuring Afghanistan is free of terrorism, violent extremism and drug and criminal syndicates is a "collective imperative".

(News Agencies)- External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday emphasised the need for a "stable" Afghanistan for progress in the region.

Speaking at the 9th Ministerial Conference of Heart of Asia Istanbul Process (HoA-IP) on Afghanistan in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, the External Affairs Minister of India said, "A stable, sovereign and peaceful Afghanistan is truly the basis for peace and progress in our region. Ensuring that it is free of terrorism, violent extremism and drug and criminal syndicates is, therefore, a collective imperative."

Expressing concern over the increase in "violence" and "bloodshed", the minister said

that 2020 witnessed a marked increase in violence in Afghanistan by 45 per cent as compared to 2019.

On cross-border terrorism, S Jaishankar said, "The continued involvement of foreign fighters in Afghanistan is particularly disturbing. Heart of Asia members and supporting countries should, therefore, make it a priority to press for an immediate reduction in violence leading to a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire."

The External Affairs Minister added, "For a durable peace in Afghanistan, what we need is a genuine 'double peace', that is, peace within Afghanistan and peace around Afghanistan. It requires harmonizing the interests of all, both within and

around that country."

India has been supportive of all the efforts being made to accelerate the dialogue between the Afghan government and the Taliban, including intra-Afghan negotiations.

India attended the inaugural virtual session of the Doha talks.

"If the peace process is to be successful, then it is necessary to ensure that the negotiating parties continue to engage in good faith, with a serious commitment towards reaching a political solution," Jaishankar said.

While appreciating the role of the United Nations and supporting the regional process to be convened under the aegis of the UN, India continues to



maintain that any process seeking peace should be 'Afghan-led and Afghan-owned' without compromising the nation's security.

It should also ensure that with the mainstreaming of the Taliban, the advances made in women, children and minorities' rights should not be reversed.

"A notable gain of the last two decades is the democratic framework under which elections were held through universal suffrage.

So too are Afghanistan's sovereignty in domestic and foreign policy and protection of the rights of women, children and minorities and for all Afghan citizens to live freely and without fear. These achievements must be protected and built upon, even as Afghanistan moves forward," said S Jaishankar.

India spelt out her commitment to the development and rebuilding of Afghanistan.

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14 countries and WHO chief accuse China of withholding data from pandemic origins investigation

(News Agencies)-It was supposed to offer insight into the origins of the Covid-19 pandemic. But since its release on Tuesday, the long-awaited World Health Organization investigation has drawn criticism from governments around the world over accusations it is incomplete and lacks transparency. In a joint statement, the United States and 13 other governments, including the United Kingdom, Australia and South Korea, expressed concerns over the study's limited access to "complete, original data and samples."

The European Union issued its own statement, expressing the same concerns in slightly softer language. The criticism follows an admission from WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom

Ghebreyesus, that investigators faced problems during their four-week mission to the central Chinese city of Wuhan, where the coronavirus was first detected in December 2019.

In a news briefing Tuesday, Tedros appeared to contradict the study's central findings by suggesting the theory that the virus escaped from a Wuhan laboratory should be followed up -- even though the report noted such a possibility was "extremely unlikely" and did not recommend further research on the hypothesis.

The WHO investigation, conducted more than a year after the initial outbreak, came under intense scrutiny from the outset. Some scientists and the US government have questioned the independence and credibility of

the study, raising concerns over Chinese government influence. Beijing, meanwhile, has accused Washington and others of "politicizing" the origin of the virus.

After repeated delays, the WHO report, compiled by a team of international experts and their Chinese counterparts, was finally released on Tuesday. It provides a detailed examination of the data collected by Chinese scientists and authorities from the early days of the pandemic, but offers little new insight or concrete findings on where and how the virus spread to humans.

China has vehemently rejected any criticism or blame related to its handling of the pandemic. The Chinese Foreign Ministry said in a statement Tuesday



that China has always been "a supporter for global scientific research on the source of the virus and its transmission routes."

"The Chinese side offered necessary facilitation for the team's work, fully demonstrating its openness, transparency and responsible attitude," the statement said,

adding the study of origins should also be conducted in other countries.

Tuesday's joint statement, signed by the US and its allies, recognized the WHO experts' "tireless work" to understand how the pandemic started, but also raised questions over the timing and independence of the report.

Arrests made in Niger attempted coup, days before President-elect's inauguration



(News Agencies)-Arrests have been made in connection with a coup attempt in Niger overnight, according to a statement sent to CNN by a diplomatic source in the country.

"Several people linked to the coup attempt" have been taken into custody, but authorities are searching for others involved, the source said.

The incident comes two days before the swearing in of President-elect Mohamed Bazoum. The former interior minister succeeds President Mahamadou

Issoufou, who stepped down after a decade in power.

Earlier Wednesday, a separate diplomatic source told CNN heavy gunfire was heard outside Niger's presidential palace, resulting in more than one hour of heavy shelling near the presidency.

Asked to confirm it was an attempted putsch, the diplomatic source said: "Yes it's the army. Which is predominately from the west of the country, which is the heartland of the opposition to Bazoum."

Both outgoing and incoming presidents were reported to be safe, the source said.

"The government condemns this coward and backwards act that had the intention to attack the democracy and the rule of law that our state has embarked upon as we have seen during these recent elections which were

democratic, free and fair and lauded as such by the international community," the statement said.

A spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General in New York has said he is "following with great concern the unfolding developments in the country" and "urges all involved to desist from any

form of incitement that threatens democratic consolidation and the stability of the country." CNN has made attempts to reach the Army and Presidency for comment. The US Embassy in Niger's capital Niamey suspended consular activities and said it would close Wednesday "due to gunshots heard near our neighborhood."

Amazon recruited an army of Twitter trolls and code-named it 'Veritas' to target critics like Bernie Sanders and defend Jeff Bezos

(News Agencies)-Amazon recruited a Twitter army that was code-named 'Veritas' whose members were picked for their 'sense of humor' - and their task was to defend Jeff Bezos' reputation online. The army was recruited in 2018 but reared its head again this week as workers at an Amazon fulfillment center in Alabama voted on whether to form a union amid complaints about working conditions. On Twitter, the army has defended worker conditions and Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, and has even gone after the company's biggest critics like Bernie Sanders, the liberal senator from Vermont. They were told specifically to confront people on Twitter in a 'blunt' manner, according to an internal document about

their training that was obtained by The Intercept. The document was marked 'Amazon.com confidential' and titled 'Global social CS Program Management.' It read: 'To address speculation and false assertions in social media and online forums about the quality of the FC [Fulfillment Center] associate experience, we are creating a new social team staffed with active, tenured FC employees, who will be empowered to respond in a polite-but blunt-way to every untruth,' the project description reads. 'FC Ambassadors ('FCA') will respond to all posts and comments from customers, influencers (including policymakers), and media questioning the FC associate experience.'

Suez Canal authorities need to remove up to 706,000 cubic feet of sand to free the Ever Given

(News Agencies)-Rescue teams working to dislodge the giant container ship blocking the Suez Canal have failed in another bid to free the boat, according to the vessel's technical manager.

"Another attempt to re-float the vessel earlier today ... was not successful," Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement (BSM) said in a statement, adding that more equipment is expected to be

brought in to assist further efforts. The US Navy is also planning to send assistance over the weekend.

The Ever Given, a container ship almost as long as the Empire State Building is tall, ran aground in the Egyptian canal on Tuesday after being caught in 40-knot winds and a sandstorm that caused low visibility and poor navigation.

It has blocked one of the world's busiest and most important waterways, prompting frantic salvage efforts, including the use of two dredgers, nine tug boats and four diggers, and a growing traffic jam at either end of the canal.

"The focus is now on dredging to remove sand and mud from around the port side of the vessel's bow," BSM said, adding that a special suction dredger will be used to

move 2,000 cubic meters of sand and mud around the ship every hour. High-capacity pumps may also be used to reduce water levels around parts of the 224,000-ton ship, which measures 400 meters (1,312 feet) long and 59 meters (193 feet) wide.

Up to 20,000 cubic meters (706,000 cubic feet) of sand in the canal need to be removed to free the gigantic container ship, ac-

cording to the canal authorities. Dredgers are hard at work removing sand and mud from the bow of the ship -- and they will need to move between 15,000 to 20,000 cubic meters (530,000 to 706,000 cubic feet) of sand in order to reach a depth of 12 to 16 meters (39 to 52 feet), which could allow the ship to float, the Suez Canal Authority (SCA) said on Thursday.

Children among the dead and injured in Myanmar military airstrikes, say activists



(News Agencies)-Children were among those killed and injured in airstrikes by Myanmar's military on an ethnic rebel-controlled area in the country's southeast, a humanitarian aid group said Tuesday, as junta forces stepped up their offensive in the region. Myanmar's military, which

seized power in a February 1 coup, has been conducting airstrikes in southeastern Karen state since Saturday night, forcing thousands of residents to flee into the jungles. Many of the villages targeted are controlled by the Karen National Union (KNU), an ethnic armed group that holds large swathes

of territory in the borderlands. A 5-year-old boy died in a bombing on Sunday, and a 12-year-old girl was hit in the face by bomb shrapnel, according to relief organization Free Burma Rangers (FBR). The girl had come to Day Bu Noh village to attend school, the group said. A high school in Dwe Lo Township was destroyed in an airstrike on Monday, but no casualties were reported as the students were in hiding, FBR said. Then on Tuesday, six people were killed and 11 injured by airstrikes near Hsaw Hti township. In a statement Tuesday, the KNU condemned the Myanmar military's bombing campaign. "Villagers, including underage children, have been killed by airstrikes," the KNU statement

said. "Many are injured." CNN has not been able to independently verify these reports. Myanmar has been thrown into turmoil since Gen. Min Aung Hlaing ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi and installed a military junta two months ago. Protesters have taken to the streets nearly every day, and workers in various sectors including health care and transport have gone on strike, disrupting the economy. The military has responded by embarking on a systematic and bloody crackdown, shooting unarmed civilians in the street, while carrying out beatings, arbitrary detentions and nighttime raids on the homes of suspected opposition members. This week-end saw the bloodiest crack-

down yet, with at least 114 people killed on Saturday. Residents fleeing the violence have fled to several neighboring countries, including Thailand and India. Myanmar security forces have killed at least 521 people since the coup, with more than 2,600 detained, according to advocacy group Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP). Rebel groups in ethnic states More than two dozen ethnic armed groups have been fighting against the Myanmar military -- known as the Tatmadaw -- and each other, for greater rights and autonomy on and off for 70 years. Fighting in some of these regions has increased since the coup.

Just 100 vaccinated Washington residents test positive for COVID-19 - as New York woman reveals she got the virus a month after her second Moderna shot and attending an indoor wake without a mask



Officials say 'breakthrough cases' - as they refer to them - are expected with any vaccine but are rare. The number of breakthrough cases in Washington represents just .01 percent of the state's 1 million vaccinations. The majority of those in the state with confirmed vaccine breakthrough experienced only mild symptoms, if any, officials said. However, eight breakthrough cases have been hospitalized and officials are investigating potential vaccine breakthrough cases in which two people died since February 1. Both of those patients who died were older than 80 and had underlying

health issues, officials said. 'It is important to remember that every vaccine on the market right now prevents severe disease and death in most cases,' said Secretary of Health Umai A. Shah. 'People should still get vaccinated as soon as they are eligible.' It is not clear what vaccine those 102 people received. Melanie Rosen, who works as a secretary at the Hewlett-Woodmere school district in Long Island, New York, told Pix11 she tested positive after receiving her second dose of the Moderna vaccine. Rosen contracted the virus after attending the wake of her friend's father. She was inside

her friend's home for about 90 minutes without a mask with 10 of her friend's relatives. The friend's family had come from various states and Rosen said she hugged each of them. 'There was probably at least 10 family members there,' Rosen said. 'I hung out for about an hour and a half without wearing a mask. I hugged each one.' Shortly after the wake, Rosen said she developed COVID-19 symptoms, including a stuffy nose and aching muscles. She got tested after being told that three of the family members had since tested positive. 'I was shocked,' Rosen said, of getting the vaccination and still getting COVID.

Now Facebook and Instagram 'non-person' Trump:

Platforms ban ex-President's interview with daughter-in-law Lara where he signals he will run for President in 2024

(News Agencies)- Facebook and Instagram have removed Donald Trump's interview with his daughter-in-law Lara in another sign of the left-leaning Silicon Valley giant canceling the former president. In the interview, Trump tore into social media and the mainstream media for suppressing the Hunter Biden laptop story, he criticized President Biden's green agenda and railed against cancel culture which he said obliterates US culture.

It was for The Right View, Lara's show. During the 18-minute interview, Trump also spoke about running for President again in 2024. Lara had been promoting it on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter beforehand. At 9.26pm on Tuesday night, four minutes before it was due to be uploaded, Facebook emailed Lara's team warning them that it would be removed if it went live. At 9.51pm, they emailed again to say that they'd taken it down.

Lara shared screenshots of the emails on Instagram afterwards. 'And just like that, we are one step closer to Orwell's 1984. Wow,' she wrote alongside them. Trump has been banned from Twitter, Facebook and Instagram since the January 6 riots, cut off from his supporters and unable to get messages to them in the way he did before. In their email, the Facebook employee said that 'content



posted in the voice of President Trump is not currently allowed on our platforms (including new posts with President Trump speaking) and will be removed. 'This guidance applies to all campaign accounts and Pages,

including Team Trump, other campaign messaging vehicles on our platforms and former surrogates'. Trump's interview with Lara is the first time he has been seen on camera since he left office.

'She doesn't know the difference between 'surge' and 'insurgent': AOC is slammed for saying anyone who uses term 'surge' to describe the border crisis is invoking 'militaristic' language of white supremacists

(News Agencies)-Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has been slammed after telling her supporters to stop calling the record number of migrants arriving at the border a 'surge', as it places the crisis in a 'militaristic frame'.

During a lengthy Instagram Live session on Tuesday night, AOC implored people to exercise caution with how they described the border crisis.

'They wanna say, 'But what about the surge?' Well, first of all, just gut check, stop. Anyone who's using the term 'surge' around you consciously is trying to invoke a militaristic frame.'

'And that's a problem because this is not a surge, these are children and they are not insurgents and we are not being invaded, which by the way is a white supremacist idea-philosophy, the idea that if another is coming in the population that this is an invasion of who we are,' the congresswoman said.

Critics have labeled the comments 'peak AOC', and ridiculed her for not knowing the difference between the word 'surge' and 'insurgent'.

Tom Bevan, the co-founder of conservative political news site Real Clear Politics, said: 'Not knowing the difference between the meaning of 'surge' and 'insurgent' - and then using it as a talking point about

white supremacy - is peak AOC.'

Journalist Tim Pool, who describes himself as a 'disaffected liberal' in his Twitter bio, posted: 'It's like no matter what happens she has some half-brained



complaint that has nothing to do with what's going. 'Surge' is racist? What the f*** do you even do?'

And Fox News contributor Tom Homan said the people who know the situation best, Border Patrol, are calling it a surge. He said: 'The men and women of the Border Patrol say it's a surge. The men and women at the Border Patrol say it's a crisis. The men and women of the Border Patrol know that these cartels are using these children and family units to drive them across the border and tie up their assets.'

'This is a national security crisis. If

[Ocasio-Cortez] can't understand that or accept that, then she shouldn't be in Congress at all.'

Approximately 16,000 minors crossed the southern border in March, a record high.



Protection custody on Sunday, up from 5,495 children on Thursday, according to CBP data. In June 2019, when Donald Trump was president, the highest number of unaccompanied minors in custody was around 2,600, according to CBP data.

Additionally, there are 11,886 children in the custody of Health and Human Services. Combining the HHS and CBP figures, the Biden administration has more than 17,500 children in custody.

On Tuesday, President Joe Biden's administration allowed journalists inside its main border detention facility for migrant children for the first time, after weeks of

shutting the media out and releasing their own photos.

The tour on revealed a severely overcrowded tent structure in Donna, Texas, where more than 4,000 migrants, including children and families, are crammed into pods.

The youngest are kept in a large play pen with mats on the floor for sleeping, because the facility is at 1,700% capacity and the dormitories are full.

Border guards say 14 per cent - roughly one in seven - of the migrant children have tested positive for COVID while photos also show detainees being treated for lice, amid fears of an outbreak.

Two thousand children have already overstayed their 72-hour legal limit and at least 39 have been stuck in the cramped quarters for two weeks.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection allowed two journalists from The Associated Press and a crew from CBS to tour the facility in the Rio Grande Valley.

Last week 18 GOP senators traveled to the border to see conditions firsthand and criticized the Biden administration's immigration policies. Republicans argue Biden's decision to roll back many of Donald Trump's stricter border policies has led to the recent migrant surge.

France risks 'losing control' over Covid-19 spread without stricter national measures – Macron



(News Agencies)-French President Emmanuel Macron announced tougher national coronavirus restrictions Wednesday, saying the country must take a "new direction" in its approach to fighting Covid-19 or risk "losing control" over the virus.

The measures will start Saturday and last for at least a month, Macron said in a televised national address.

Under the "limited lockdown," curfews will remain in place, domestic travel will be limited and

people will be asked to work from home. Nurseries and primary and secondary schools will be closed for at least three weeks, Macron said.

The new variant first detected in the United Kingdom has created an "epidemic within an epidemic" and it is more contagious and deadly, he said. Almost 44% of all Covid patients in intensive care units are under the age of 65, the President said. He insisted that France had made the "right choices" so far, but added that in the past few

weeks the vaccine has "accelerated" and "things have changed."

Macron has faced growing criticism over his approach to the current Covid-19 surge. His administration has until now favored regional restrictions instead of the strict national lockdowns imposed in other European nations, against the advice of France's scientific council.

In his televised address, Macron said France would be extending the regional "reinforced slowdown" restrictions, already in place in 19 areas of the country, to all of France. The new rules will last four weeks from Saturday.

"If we make this choice to extend them to the entire metropolitan territory, it is because no metropolitan area is now spared," he said.

"These last weeks we are facing a new situation. We have entered a race of speed," he added. "We

must therefore set ourselves a new framework for the coming months," Macron added.

The French president said schools would gradually reopen at the end on April for kindergartens and primary schools and from May 3 for middle and high schools.

Macron, who is up for reelection next year, had justified his regional strategy by saying the country needed to consider the impacts on mental health and the economy in devising a balanced response to the third wave.

But as of Tuesday, more than 28,000 people were being treated in hospital for Covid-19 in France, including 5,072 in intensive care units (ICU), according to French health ministry data. It's the first time since April last year that ICU patient numbers have surpassed 5,000. More than 40 ICU and emergency doctors in Paris published an op-ed Sunday in the newspaper Journal du

Dimanche, warning that ICUs in the region would reach capacity in the next two weeks if restrictions were not tightened. There are more than 1,500 patients in ICU in the Paris region alone.

The doctors wrote that they had "never experienced such a situation, even during the worst terrorist attacks in recent years," and said there was a "glaring mismatch between needs and available resources," in what they described as a "disaster."

Much of Europe has struggled to contain a third wave of Covid-19, in part fueled by new variants that early studies suggest are more transmissible and possibly deadlier than previous ones. Like many European Union member countries, France has rolled out a sluggish vaccination program, as drug companies have fallen short on their delivery targets by tens of millions of vaccines.

Antilia bomb scare case: Cars, crime and controversy in many tales of Sachin Vaze

The Antilia bomb scare case has exposed Mumbai Police's alleged connections to the world of organised crime with suspended assistant police inspector Sachin Vaze becoming the poster boy for the same. An NIA officer has shared details of the 'multiple lives' of Sachin Vaze with India Today.

The twists and turns in the 'explosive case' of Sachin Vaze, the Mumbai copper are no less dramatic than one sees in a Netflix series. Incidentally, an NIA (National Investigation Agency) officer described the Antilia bomb scare case as the one similar to 2012 "Line of Duty" TV series aired on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).

Created by television writer-producer Jed Mercurio and produced by World Productions, the TV series showed British police's procedural functioning. The key plot of Season-6 was the British cops investing bent cops.

In the Antilia bomb scare case, the anti-terror probe organisation NIA is investigating suspended policeman Sachin Vaze while top sources do not rule out involvement of other officers from the

Mumbai Police.

Multiple Lives Of Sachin Vaze

The sensational case has laid threadbare before the NIA new aspects of the Mumbai Police with several personnel reportedly involved in organised crime. The NIA officer told India Today on condition of anonymity about multiple lives of Sachin Vaze, the suspended assistant inspector of Mumbai Police's Crime Branch - a man, an officer, an author and a tech expert.

Sachin Vaze is a self-proclaimed teetotaler devoted to his wife and daughter. Yet sources said there were five-six women including a bar dancer, who are said to be his close associates. Top NIA sources have confirmed that at least some of them have been questioned in connection with the Sachin Vaze's crime life.

Cars: Owner of One, Master of A Fleet

The NIA has seized possession of at least half-a-dozen different vehicles which were allegedly used by Sachin Vaze for different reasons. This includes the green Scorpio car parked outside industrialist Mukhesh Ambani's Antilla residence in Mumbai. This was the vehicle which had been parked outside Antilia laden with explosives - Gelatin sticks.

After Sachin Vaze's arrest on March 13, the NIA seized a white Innova, which was being used by police personnel. The NIA then seized a black Mercedes Benz with Rs 5.75 lakh cash and a cash counting machine. Sources said none of the cars was owned by Sachin Vaze. This was his modus operandi, they said. Sachin Vaze owned just one car,



a white Mitsubishi Outlander registered in his name.

The Vaze Network

The NIA is investigating the roles of other accused including arrested policeman Vinayak Shinde and bookie Naresh Gaur. Both have been remanded to the NIA custody till April 7 in connection with the Mansukh Hiren death case. Hiren was the owner of the car that was found parked outside Antilia.

In the NIA custody, Gaur has spilled out beans. Being in the business, he gave five SIM cards

(Vodafone and Airtel) to Sachin Vaze, with no questions asked. According to the NIA, the SIM cards were used for committing the crime.

The NIA said Vaze was present when the plot was hatched. Agency's lawyer told the court that Gaur handed over the SIM cards to Vinayak Shinde, who further gave them to Vaze.

Shinde is being questioned over his meeting with Sachin Vaze at the CIU (Crime Intelligence Unit) office on March 3, a day before Mansukh Hiren's death.

Covid-19 cases in Maharashtra doubling 10 times faster than in February



(News Agencies)- Maharashtra and the southern states of Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh have seen a renewed surge in Covid-19 cases. In fact, coronavirus cases in Maharashtra are doubling in 53 days at present as against over 500 days in February.

Sensing that the Covid-19 infection seems to be getting out of control, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has warned about an impending lockdown. The state administration has been directed to prepare a roadmap for a possible complete lockdown.

As of March 30, the doubling rate of coronavirus cases in Maharashtra stood at 53 days. It was 190 days on March 1 and

566 days on February 1. The current doubling rate in the state is equal to the doubling rate it had on October 1, 2020.

The doubling rate is the number of days required for cumulative cases to double. It is calculated on the basis of cases in the seven prior days. Maharashtra has so far recorded 27.46 lakh Covid-19 cases, of which 31,643 cases were recorded in the last 24 hours.

While the rise in Covid cases is alarming in Maharashtra, other states such as Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu are also witnessing more than 2,000 cases every day. The doubling rate in these states has fallen sharply in the last few weeks.

All pregnant people deserve a law like New Zealand's

(News Agencies)-Looking back, I cannot recall the exact time, or even the exact day, that I realized I was miscarrying my very-wanted pregnancy. All I remember is that I was at work, and politely excused myself to the bathroom to discover I was bleeding, which confirmed what the cramps and nausea were already telling me. I made an excuse to go home early and went straight to my OB-GYN, where she gave me an ultrasound, her condolences and sent me on my way. I had just told my employer I was pregnant a few days, maybe a week, prior -- a decision some friends had argued against for the very reason I was now experiencing. It's hard enough telling your employer you're pregnant; telling them that you're not any more feels unimaginable.

I returned to my job the very next day, writing and editing stories about parenthood and newborns and healthy pregnancies as I bled into an oversized pad. I told myself I had been "only" 12 or so weeks pregnant, hardly a reason to make a "big deal" out of losing that pregnancy. I would soldier



on, because I had to. Because what would it say to my employer or my colleagues about me if I couldn't?

It would have been so different for me -- as it would for so many others -- if employers (or better yet, governments) sent workers the message directly: We know this happens. We're here for you. You're entitled to take time to care for yourself and your family. New Zealand recently became the first country to offer bereaved women paid time off after a miscarriage or infant loss. Employees will be entitled to three days' leave following a

pregnancy under the law, which lawmakers unanimously approved and which is set to gain royal assent. This new measure immediately gained traction and started trending around the world. It's crucial to talk more about why.

This revolutionary step forward is a sign of what could be if we, as a society, gained a better understanding of the needs of postpartum people, whether they're post-infant loss, post-miscarriage, post-abortion or post live birth. This policy gives people what my partner and I did not have: the opportunity to heal -- mentally, physically and emotionally -- from a wanted pregnancy that did not end with a living infant and the expansion of our family. Which is why this policy also makes me angry. It's 2021 and still, still, it's revolutionary to include those who suffer miscarriage and infant loss in discussions and policies that aim to support and care for postpartum people. I'm furious that for every other country on the globe, it seems that such a monumental policy is still out of reach.

Why so much mystery over Amit Shah-Sharad Pawar meeting

Especially, if that leader is Sharad Pawar. He has always believed that doors are never closed in politics and that there are no enemies, there can always be opponents.

With this motto, he always kept himself connected with everyone - from Republic Party of India (RPI) chief and Union minister Ramdas Athawale to late Congress leader Ahmed Patel and Shiv Sena founder late Bal Thackeray to former Prime Minister late Atal Bihari Vajpayee to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. So, such a meeting, if it has happened, is not shocking.

Why Shah, Pawar Met Now?

As always, there are some unanswered questions after a 'secret' political meeting.

In 2019, when Sharad Pawar and his party leaders were trying to convince Congress president Sonia Gandhi to ally with the Shiv Sena to cobble up the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA), on the sidelines they were holding discussion with the BJP as well.

This came out only later when Ajit Pawar formed this three-day government after joining hands with former Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis but returned to the NCP fold leaving the BJP hugely embarrassed.

Till then, everyone including the official spokesperson of the NCP, Nawab Malik kept denying the possibility of any such talks between the two parties.

Even Chandrakant Patil never mentioned that such a discussion took place. But this time around, the speculated meeting between Pawar and Shah hit the headlines within a day.

This could be a kind of a hint to other partners in the MVA that

anything can happen, particularly when Pawar is not ready to remove his party leader Anil Deshmukh from Maharashtra home minister's position despite the Shiv Sena and the Congress pushing for it.

Deshmukh came under fire after former Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh, following his removal over Antilia bomb scare case, accused him of asking police officers to extort money from restaurants and bars.

Will Sharad Pawar Join Hands With BJP?

Sharad Pawar has a legacy of never allying with the BJP despite keeping his options open. He lent his support to the BJP once but

from the outside. In 2014, Sharad Pawar's NCP had offered a minority Devendra Fadnavis government outside support for the political 'stability'.



Although he has always chosen to form the government with the Congress despite all his differences with the Gandhi family and the party, Pawar has kept the threat of joining hands with the BJP alive.

At the age of 80, he added an aura to his political image as an ace leader by going against strong Centre, allying with the Shiv Sena and bringing the Congress along to form a

government under Uddhav Thackeray after the Maharashtra Assembly election. What To Expect?

Many in the BJP say Sharad Pawar and the BJP can come together any time as he wants a Union cabinet post for his daughter Supriya

Sule. Besides, an alliance with the BJP will increase the NCP's chances of survival in Maharashtra politics. Additionally, the tie-up will provide Maharashtra a stable BJP-NCP government, the BJP sources say.

But Sharad Pawar does not want Devendra Fadnavis as chief minister. The day the BJP accepts this demand, NCP-BJP government will be a reality, the sources say. Still the question remains - will he do what others have suspected him to do for long? Normally, the coalition governments fall when any of the partners feels that its interests are not being served in the ruling alliance. In the era of short-term politics, switching sides is no big deal but own interests are something that can never be compromised. At this point, common and only interest of all three parties in Maharashtra is to keep the BJP out of absolute power in the state. Till the time this interest is being served despite all the pressure and issues, the MVA is likely to survive. Such 'reported' meetings can be for anything.

Now SpongeBob is canceled! 'Kwarantined Krab' episode about 'Clam flu' pandemic is pulled because it might stoke anti-Asian hate

said were racially problematic. And Hasbro said it would stop branding its line of potato toys as 'Mr. Potato Head' to make room for same-sex and single-parent variations.

When it comes to SpongeBob, in Season 12's 'Kwarantined Krab,' many of the main characters are quarantined at the Krusty Krab by the health inspector, leading the characters to try figuring out who has the illness.

In addition to hitting rather close to home during the COVID-19 pandemic, the episode - which features the 'Clam Flu,' as it's called - could contribute to

negative feelings toward those who are different, it's contended, as those suspected to be sick are tossed in a freezer.



'We have decided to not air it due to sensitivities surrounding the global, real-world pandemic,' a Nickelodeon spokesperson told CNN Business. The other episode that has been pulled is Season 3's 'Mid-Life Crustacean,' which

stopped airing on Nickelodeon back in 2018.

Mr. Krabs experiences a mid-life crisis during the episode, leading him to tag along with SpongeBob and Patrick on a night out. Near the end of the episode, the three characters break into a woman's home (who turns out to be Mr. Krabs' mother) and steal her underwear. 'We determined

some story elements were not kid-appropriate,' the spokesperson said of the episode. According to IGN, the episodes were pulled from streaming on Paramount+ and are no longer available to be

purchased on Amazon's digital marketplace. The companion episode for 'Mid-Life Crustacean' remains available to stream on Paramount. Reaction on social media to the pulling of the two episodes has been mixed. 'I never thought I'd see the day where cancel culture starts getting spongebob [sic] episodes taken off air,' said Edgar Martin.

'Spongebob is an old show now, society constantly changes and spongebob [sic] is still relevant. If there is something within the show that the writers think is not appropriate today I guess it is fair for them to remove it,' countered another user on Twitter.

Covid-19 was third leading cause of death last year, CDC confirms in early data

1. Heart disease
2. Cancer
3. Covid-19
4. Unintentional injury
5. Stroke
6. Chronic lower respiratory disease
7. Alzheimer's disease
8. Diabetes
9. Influenza and pneumonia
10. Kidney disease

Researchers at the National Center for Health Statistics

analyzed death certificate data from the National Vital Statistics System, taking a close look at deaths among US residents between January and December of 2020.

"COVID-19 was the third leading underlying cause of death in 2020, replacing suicide as one of the top 10 leading causes of death," the researchers wrote in the report. Suicide previously was the 10th leading cause of death but was bumped off the list for

2020 as deaths due to Covid-19 climbed. The researchers found in their report that about 3.36 million deaths occurred last year. Covid-19 was reported as the underlying cause or a contributing cause of death for nearly 378,000 -- or about 11.3% -- of those deaths. The data showed that heart disease caused 690,882 deaths and cancer caused 598,932 deaths. The data also showed that, overall, death rates were highest among

the Black and Native American or Alaska Native communities, adults ages 85 and older and men. The Covid-19 death rate specifically was highest among Hispanics, according to the CDC report.

The data are provisional -- and so numbers and death rates might change as additional information is received. Since investigating causes of death takes time, final data for a given year are typically published about 11 months after

the end of the calendar year. In January, CDC statisticians shared with CNN that Covid-19 was likely the third leading cause of death in the United States for last year. Life expectancy in the United States also dropped a full year in the first half of 2020, according to a provisional report published by the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics in February. The report shows that US life expectancy fell to 77.8 years, back to what it was in 2006.

Infrastructure was a Trump punchline but is a window into Biden's soul

the President's effort to engineer a generational reorganization of the US economy itself. The Covid rescue plan for instance that cleared Congress this month was hailed by progressives like Vermont independent Sen. Bernie Sanders and independent analysts as the most significant effort to lift millions of Americans out of poverty in decades. Biden's vision now is not just for new highways, broadband and ports. He sees revived labor unions, equally shared GDP growth, easier access to health care, equal pay for women, clean energy and better child care for workers.

"My economic plan is all about jobs, dignity, respect, and community. Together, we can, and we will, rebuild our economy," Biden said in his Democratic National Convention speech in August, which explained his core philosophy. The ambition of the infrastructure and jobs plans leave no doubt about his desire for transformation in an economy that has further enriched the most wealthy in the last 40 years but left the working class as roadkill.

The first includes investments in manufacturing, research and development, climate and transport infrastructure. The second targets child care, paid family leave, health care and education -- crucial considerations for US workers, a senior White House official told CNN.

Even the venue of Biden's speech on Thursday -- Pittsburgh -- sends a message. The Steel City, the place where Biden launched his 2020 bid for the White House, is exactly the kind of gritty, blue collar labor

union fiefdom where the President feels at home. But it is also an example of a city already on the road to accomplishing what the infrastructure plan seeks to do for the rest of America. It has evolved from a post-industrial apocalypse to a hub of modern industries, medical tech firms, world leading education institutions and innovation that is now a showcase for economic regeneration.

The President also has a sentimental attachment to the city.

"It's home," the native born Pennsylvanian told a reporter after jogging through the city's Labor Day parade in 2015 in one of his first public appearances after the death of his beloved son Beau from cancer.

"I am hot. I am mad, I am angry," Biden told a crowd and vowed to fight for workers denied a share of profits garnered from rising productivity. "Something is wrong, folks ... the level playing

field doesn't exist," he roared in what looked like the launch of a presidential campaign that never materialized, only for Biden to end up in the White House five years later.

Shifting political trends give Biden hope. In a conventional political environment, Biden's infrastructure plan would probably be dead on arrival in Congress already. While he will seek Republican buy-in to the push, his desire to finance part of it by a rise in corporate taxes and its scale will almost certainly scare off any GOPers not already bought into their leadership's strategy of denying the new President big wins.

But in the wake of the pandemic and thanks to shifting political sands before it struck, Biden's plan may just about have a chance -- though it will face the limitations of a 50-50 Senate and could test Democratic unity to breaking point as the President agitates for the bill's passage this summer.

Biden clearly established his authority in Washington and bolstered approval with his Covid rescue package that included hundreds of millions of dollars in benefits to workers and the least well off Americans.

No Republicans voted for it, but the rescue bill was broadly popular -- even with some GOP voters --

showing that in the worst domestic crisis since World War II there is a growing desire for government to address the country's problems.

How Trump helped Biden

Many Democrats might have preferred Biden to pick other issues for his next big political gambit, like gun control, climate change, abolishing the Senate filibuster or joining the battle for a sweeping voter reform plan to confront Republican ballot suppression.

But the infrastructure bill was exactly the kind of measure with the potential to be broadly popular to which the President seemed to be referring when he spoke about the importance of political timing last week.

"Successful presidents better than me have been successful in large part because they know how to time what they're doing," Biden

said at a White House news conference.

Had Biden waited until after an effort to pass the "For the People Act" until after other liberal priority issues, which will likely ignite an irreversible political schism on Capitol Hill, infrastructure reform would have stood no chance.

The President's push for his \$2.25 trillion plan may also benefit from indirect help from an unlikely source: former President Donald Trump. He doesn't just benefit by comparison to the ex-President's incompetence that left the federal government disastrously unable to deal with the waves of coronavirus the swept across the country and smashed the economy. The former President changed the Republican Party itself in ways that Biden could exploit.

Trump's inroads with White working class Americans and success in fracturing the conservative creed of low deficits helped may mute the classic Republican attack line about big spending Democrats and win him some support from conservative voters more open to seeing government fix their problems.

It's just possible that the United States has reached a rare moment, experienced under President Franklin Roosevelt in the 1930s and Lyndon Johnson in the 1960s, when there is a brief political window for overwhelming government intervention to help the poorest Americans. At no time since the 1980s has the unchained capitalism represented by President Ronald Reagan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher seemed so threatened. The centrist "era of big government is over" politics of ex-

President Bill Clinton that was designed to sand the soft edges of Reaganism seems outdated too. And Biden's aides now talk openly of how the Obama administration in which he served as vice president didn't go sufficiently big after the Great Recession and initially erred by indulging Republicans who really wanted to hobble the presidency in a months-long search for bipartisan buy-in.

And like Trump, Biden can speak the language of Americans who believe that the riches of the US economy have been unfairly hijacked by the wealthy Wall Street barons who sent their jobs to low wage economies abroad. The President's paeans to the working class, reverence for his birth place of Scranton, Pennsylvania, and tales about his hardworking struggles might sound hokey. But they are authentic because he's been at it his entire political life.

Biden, like Trump has tapped into anti-globalization and "fair trade" sentiment popular with the ex-President's core supporters. Even his foreign policy is geared towards advancing the interests of blue collar Americans first. While Biden rejects Trump's disdain for allies and appeasing of tyrants, his central principle of American retrenchment and building strength at home has conceptual similarities with Trump. "Biden isn't doing 'America First' but his policy is 'Americans First.' That makes total sense. It's why he was elected," said Nicholas Dungan, a nonresident senior fellow at The Atlantic Council.

In Trump's White House, officials were repeatedly to reschedule "Infrastructure Week," a scripted series of events meant to show a disruptive and obstreperous President could behave normally and get things done. Their plans always fell foul of Trump's volcanic temperament and torrent of scandals.

Biden however showed in his news conference that he has a strong theory of why he was elected: to fix problems holding back working and middle class Americans. While daunting political obstacles stand in his way, the centrality of the plan he unveils Wednesday to his personal and political philosophy will ensure his commitment to the issue long outlast Trump's.



Farm protests need a resolution, now

of western Uttar Pradesh. This has remained largely peaceful, but at times, taken coercive forms, as seen during an attack on a Bharatiya Janata Party legislator. The protests have continued while India is going through the second wave of Covid-19, with Punjab being one of the most affected states. The blunt truth is that while the government made a mistake in not going through a deeper consultative process while

bringing the laws and political managers on the ruling side



alienated protesters by questioning their nationalism, the farm leaders have done great

disservice to the cause by not displaying responsible leadership.

The government has offered to suspend the laws for 18 months; this offer is on the table; farm groups can negotiate and perhaps try to extend this timeline even more. But instead of doing that, they have chosen to stick to their maximalist demand of repealing the laws.

This will not just prolong the standoff, but also expose the protesters to continued risk in the face of the pandemic. Farm unions would do well to negotiate and withdraw the protests before the pandemic extracts a higher toll from the brave men and women who have fought valiantly for their cause. The government would do well in making a renewed offer of talks and, yet again, allaying the apprehensions of farm leaders.

New York State legislature's Flawed Hate Symbol

Bill stalled after enraging Indian-Americans

A controversial bill titled 'Senate Bill S2727' was introduced by New York State Senator Todd Kaminsky in the New York Senate in January 2021. This bill would have made it mandatory for the schools in the State of New York to teach 'Swastika', as a hate symbol. Long before being hijacked by the Nazis, Swastika was an auspicious and sacred symbol for religions like Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. This led to an uproarious outcry from the Hindu, Jain and Buddhist communities. Finally, the stream of criticism from the enraged Indian-American communities forced the senator to withdraw the bill. Combining two Sanskrit words, 'Su' (good) and 'Asti' (to exist), the word 'Swastika' came into being. The Swastika is an auspicious and sacred symbol in East Asia, which is connected to divinity and spirituality for ages. Though the symbol was found in many ancient artefacts, it originated in India with its roots in the Vedas, the oldest scriptures of Hinduism. In Asia, it is believed to bring good luck and symbolizes the infinity of creation and the unconquered, revolving sun.

In Hinduism, the four limbs of Swastika can be interpreted as the four Vedas, the core Hindu scriptures. They can also be thought of as the four goals of life: Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha (right action, worldly prosperity, worldly enjoyment, and spiritual liberation). Further, the limbs are also interpreted as representing the four seasons, the four directions and the four yugas, or epochs (Satya, Treta, Dvapara, Kali). For Buddhists, the Swastika is auspicious and signifies the Buddha's footprint and heart. The Jains take the Swastika as the symbol of their seventh Tirthankara, who is a liberated soul showing the way to others. The arms symbolize one of the four places a soul can be reborn in the cycle of birth and death. German antiquarian Heinrich Schliemann started an archaeological investigation at Hisarlik in Turkey. He was strongly motivated to find Troy, the lost city of Greek mythology. Among a cache of jewellery, bronze, silver and gold, he found the symbol of Swastika on

Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh played a key role in mobilizing and uniting Hindu community all over the USA. Besides, Dr Uma Mysorekar, President of Hindu Temple Society of North America, The Oldest Ganesh Temple in New York, Mrs Uma Sengupta Democratic leader from Queens, and various other community leaders have also played key role in this Maha Yagya.

many archaeological objects. Heinrich noticed a similarity with the designs found on pottery in sixth-century Germany. He concluded that it represented a significant and universal prehistoric religious symbol.

News of the excavations spread far and wide, throughout Europe and North America. The symbol of swastika followed the sensational news and became popular and a visible symbol. The swastika symbols are seen to be used in adorning buildings as architectural motifs or used worn on badges and medallions.

of our community's history become offended when they see the name."

The topic is also discussed in details in the book 'The Swastika: Symbol Beyond Redemption' by the US graphic design writer, Steven Heller. In this book, he portrays how the symbol was enthusiastically adopted in the West as an architectural motif, in advertising and product design. The Swastika was used by Coca-Cola and even by Carlsberg on their beer bottles. The Boy Scouts of America adopted the symbol and the Girl Scouts named their magazine Swastika. It was even used by American military units as late as 1939 and it could be seen

upcoming Nazi Party. He adopted a swastika-like symbol as the face of the movement in 1920. It soon became the face of fascism across Europe. The Nazis called their emblem Hakenkreuz. It was a black straight-armed Hakenkreuz (hooked cross) on the distinctive white circle and red background. The Nazis went into a brutal war demonstrating this symbol and came to be related to evil, hatred, fear, racial intolerance and genocide. Around six million Jews were murdered in the Holocaust. The Nazi flag became the most hated symbol of the 20th Century. 93-year-old Holocaust survivor Freddie Knoller said to

without even trying to understand the origin and meaning behind the Swastika started to view it as a symbol of hate and fascism.

Most of the people doesn't realise the irony that the swastika is more European in origin than Asian. Archaeological evidence has pointed out that the swastika is a

The Indian Consulate in "New York, under the guidance "of Consul general Randhir "Jaiswal, and DCG Shatrughna "Sinha also played very "important roles in this "development.

very old symbol. But ancient examples are by no means limited to India. The oldest-known example of the swastika was discovered in Ukraine in 1908. Dating back some 15,000 years, archaeologists found an ivory mammoth tusk carved into the shape of a bird in the Palaeolithic settlement of Mezin near the Russian border. It included an intricate pattern of connected swastikas on its body, which may have been used as a fertility symbol. We don't know how the first swastika was created. It may have simply been an easily created geometric shape. Maybe the inspiration for the elegant design came from a comet in the night sky. In Eastern Europe during the Neolithic period, some 7,000 years ago, single swastikas were carved by the Vinca culture before they became widespread from the Bronze Age. Symbolising the Sun to the Illyrians, the Swastika became a common sight on Mesopotamian coins. It not only appeared on vases and clothing in Greece and formed mosaic motifs



Jagdish Sewhani, President of The American India Public Affairs Committee



Dr Uma Mysorekar, President of Hindu Temple Society of North America



Randhir Jaiswal, Consul General of India New York

To this day, there is a town of Swastika, Ontario, Canada, founded in 1908.

The US Army's 45th infantry division used it as a sleeve insignia during the 1920s, which predates the rise of the Nazis.

There is a small town in New York by the name of Swastika. When the town was requested to change its name they refused to do that as the town Board said that Swastika was named by the town's original settlers in the 1800s and is based on the Sanskrit word meaning 'well-being.' The town supervisor Jon Douglass said, "We regret that individuals, due to lack of knowledge

during World War One on RAF planes.

The swastika became a famous symbol and began to be favoured by German nationalists. While translating old Indian texts, 19th Century German scholars noticed similarities between their own language and Sanskrit. They inferred an idea of shared ancestry with the Indians. They had a skewed mentality that they had descended from an ancient superior God-like race known as the Aryans. This belief continued well into the 20th century, growing more destructive with time. This sentiment appealed to Adolf Hitler, the leader of the then-

BBC, "For the Jewish people it is a symbol of fear, suppression and extermination. It's a symbol that we will never ever be able to change."

Unfortunately in English translations of Mein Kampf, it was incorrectly translated to the Sanskrit word "swastika" rather than "hooked cross". In the west, the symbol has often been met with hatred and controversy. This is because of its radical misuse in the west and as a result of misinterpretations and misunderstandings of its meaning from the Asian languages. This mix-up has often led to stigma and accusations against the people practising the culture. People,

in Rome but also stood as a stylised cross in Celtic design. There are 27 swastikas on the Iron Age Battersea Shield, found in London in 1857. But the symbol had been in Britain long before that shown by the Swastika Stone on Ilkley Moor, Yorkshire, from 2,000 BC. This carving resembles the swastika's shape, although with more curved arms and added spots.

The Swastika gradually became subsumed by religious iconography and spread throughout Europe. A left-facing version of the swastika showed up in reference to the Norse god Thor's hammer. Early Christian art depicted the hooked cross to represent Christ's victory over death. A popular symbol in medieval times, the swastika can be seen today on surviving church decorations, coats of arms and on textile fragments from the 12th century. The monastery in Austria, where a young Adolf Hitler attended school had swastikas carved on the stone and woodwork.

In the aftermath of World War II, public display of the swastika was banned in Germany, where it remains illegal. Yet while reviled in the Western world, it continues to be a dominant symbol with far-right and white-supremacist groups. In the US, places where its use is permitted, incidents involving swastika flags and graffiti have increased in recent years. The most infamous event happened when neo-Nazis marched in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017. In 2021, during the Capitol Insurrection by Trump supporters, the Nazi flag with the swastika was carried by some protesters.

In 2007, when German politicians attempted to introduce a swastika ban across the European Union, Hindus vehemently opposed the measure on religious grounds. All over the world, the swastika remains a feature of worship for Hindus, Buddhists and Jains. It can be seen seemingly everywhere in parts of the Indian subcontinent, Bhutan, China, Indonesia, Malaysia and Nepal. In ceremonies and religious festivals, it is an inseparable part. During Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, the swastika is drawn with rangoli (coloured sand) and decorated with lanterns (diyas) to celebrate the victory of light over darkness and good over evil. It is also found drawn in temples and on vehicles. This auspicious symbol is thought to bring good luck.



The European Union recently attempted to ban all use of the swastika, regardless of the renditions. Fortunately, Hindus have risen in defence of their sacred symbol. Speaking out against the proposed EU ban a representative of the Hindu Forum of Britain said, "The swastika has been around for 5,000 years as a symbol of peace". He further said that banning all use of the swastika would be akin in banning the Christian cross. The Ku Klux Klan used burning crosses to terrorize African Americans. In the US, the Hindu American Foundation assisted a college student in avoiding expulsion for displaying a Hindu swastika in his fraternity house. In recent years, numerous efforts through interfaith dialogue have been undertaken to dispel the misunderstandings surrounding the ancient symbol.

In 2008, at the second Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit a resolution formally recognized the long positive history of the swastika. It said, "Swastika is an ancient and greatly auspicious symbol of the Hindu tradition. It is inscribed on Hindu temples, ritual altars, entrances and even account books. A distorted version of this sacred symbol was misappropriated by the Third Reich in Germany and abused as an emblem under which heinous crimes were perpetrated against humanity, particularly the Jewish people. The participants recognize that this symbol is and has been sacred to Hindus for millennia, long before its misappropriation."

According to some people, knowledge of this long history can help revive the symbol in Europe as something positive. Peter Madsen is the owner of an upmarket tattoo parlour in Copenhagen. He says that the swastika is an element of Norse mythology that holds a strong appeal to many Scandinavians. He is one of the founders of last year's Learn to Love the Swastika Day on November 13, when tattoo artists around the world offered free swastikas, to raise awareness of the symbol's long multicultural past." The swastika is a symbol of love and Hitler abused it. We're not trying to reclaim the Hakenkreuz. That would be impossible. Nor is it something we want people to forget," he says.

Discussing with Mr Jagdish Sewhani, President The American India public affairs committee, is also a hard core Karyakarta of HSS - Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, he stated that the swastika has a history of thousands of years, as a symbol of divinity and spirituality. Tagging it as a hate symbol is a violation of the first amendment right which protects speech, religion, press, assembly and the right to petition. "The important thing is education. Once you start teaching students it will make a lot of difference," added he. They will understand the difference

between Swastika and Hakenkreuz. It's important that Hinduism is part of the curriculum, so students know about Hinduism which is practised by almost 2 billion people across the globe. Knowledge is the Key. With Swastika and Hinduism included in the curriculum - will greatly reduce the misunderstanding and ignorance."

In a bid to raise awareness and foil the bill that blemishes the spiritual symbolism of the swastika, several prominent organisations and personalities in important diplomatic positions lead the movement to raise awareness. Mr Sewhani organized zoom meetings with Senator Kevin Thomas, Senator Shelly Mayer and Senator Tod Kimenski. A large number of calls and emails were sent to them. They understood the sentiments of the Hindu Community. It was made clear that branding the swastika as a hate symbol is absolutely unacceptable.

The Indian Consulate in New York, under the guidance of Consul general Randhir Jaiswal, and DCG Shatrughna Sinha also played very important roles in this development.

Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh played a key role in mobilizing and uniting Hindu community all over the USA. Besides, Dr Uma Mysorekar, President of Hindu Temple Society of North America, The Oldest Ganesh Temple in New York, Mrs Uma Sengupta

and various other community leaders have also played key role in this Maha Yagya. The attitude towards the swastika from Western cultures is widely polarized. It raises the question of whether the symbol – which for so long has been a force for good – can be reclaimed from its association with Hitler and the neo-Nazis who still display it. Would reclaiming the symbol finally defeat the cruelty of the Third Reich and the trepidation it advocated or is that impossible? The 20th-century corruption of the swastika came to represent so much of the horrors of Nazism that it should never be forgotten.

The swastika is a prime example of how one aspect can have entirely different meanings in different cultures. Learning about a country's culture and talking to the locals is a great way to broaden your understanding of the world and helps to clear up any misunderstandings in terms of local customs and beliefs.

There will always be two utterly conflicting interpretations of the swastika and Hakenkreuz, though the answer is simple. We have to acknowledge that the Swastika is the original symbol, which should not be blemished with the bloodied past of the Hakenkreuz. The latter representing the worst of humanity and the former symbolises the best. As good triumphs over evil, we can't condemn a symbol that is considered pious and revered by the large population of this world.

By Susmita Ghosh

How the world loved the swastika - until Hitler stole it

In the Western world the swastika is synonymous with fascism, but it goes back thousands of years and has been used as a symbol of good fortune in almost every culture in the world. As more evidence emerges of its long pre-Nazi history in Europe, can this ancient sign ever shake off its evil associations?

In the ancient Indian language of Sanskrit, swastika means "well-being". The symbol has been used by Hindus, Buddhists and Jains for millennia and is commonly assumed to be an Indian sign.

Early Western travellers to Asia were inspired by its positive and ancient associations and started using it back home. By the beginning of the 20th Century there was a huge fad for the swastika as a benign good luck symbol. In his book *The Swastika: Symbol Beyond Redemption?* US graphic design writer Steven Heller shows how it was enthusiastically adopted in the West as an architectural motif, on advertising and product design.

"Coca-Cola used it. Carlsberg used it on their beer bottles. The Boy Scouts adopted it and the Girls' Club of America called their magazine *Swastika*. They would even send out swastika badges to their young readers as a prize for selling copies of the magazine," he says.

It was used by American military units during World War One and it could be seen on RAF planes as late as 1939. Most of these benign uses came to a halt in the 1930s as the Nazis rose to power

in Germany.

The Nazi use of the swastika stems from the work of 19th Century German scholars translating old Indian texts, who noticed similarities between their own language and Sanskrit. They concluded that Indians and Germans must have had a shared ancestry and imagined a race of white god-like warriors they called Aryans.

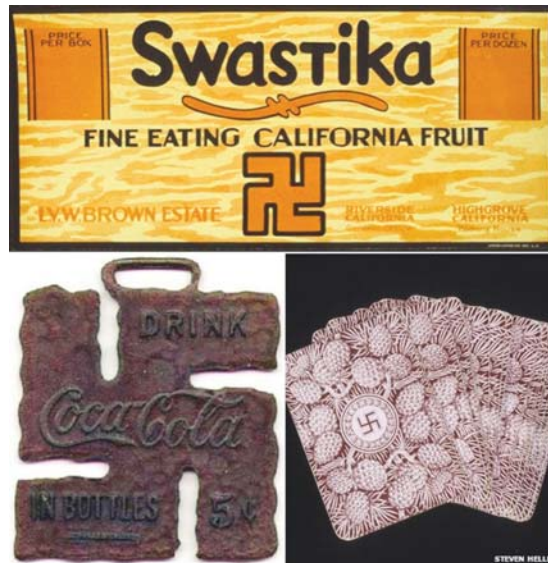
This idea was seized upon by anti-Semitic nationalist groups who appropriated the swastika as an Aryan symbol to boost a sense of ancient lineage for the Germanic people.

The black straight-armed hakenkreuz (hooked cross) on the distinctive white circle and red background of the Nazi flag would become the most hated symbol of the 20th Century, inextricably linked to the atrocities committed under the Third Reich.

"For the Jewish people the swastika is a symbol of fear, of suppression, and of extermination. It's a symbol that we will never ever be able to change," says 93-year-old Holocaust survivor Freddie Knoller. "If they put the swastika on gravestones or synagogues, it puts a fear into us. Surely it shouldn't happen again." The swastika was banned in Germany at the end of the war and Germany tried unsuccessfully to introduce an EU-wide ban in 2007.

The irony is that the swastika is more European in origin than most

people realise. Archaeological finds have long demonstrated that the swastika is a very old symbol, but ancient examples are by no means limited to India. It was used by the Ancient Greeks, Celts, and Anglo-Saxons and some of the oldest examples have been found in Eastern Europe, from the Baltic to the



Balkans.

If you want to see just how deeply rooted the swastika pattern is in Europe, a good place to start is Kiev where the National Museum of the History of Ukraine has an impressive range of exhibits.

Among the museum's most highly prized treasures is a small ivory figurine of a female bird. Made from the tusk of a mammoth, it was found in 1908 at the Palaeolithic settlement of Mezin near the Russian border.

On the torso of the bird is engraved an intricate meander pattern of joined up swastikas. It's the oldest identified swastika pattern in the world and has been

radio carbon-dated to an astonishing 15,000 years ago. The bird was found with a number of phallic objects which supports the idea that the swastika pattern was used as a fertility symbol. In 1965 a palaeontologist called Valentina Bibikova discovered that the swastika meander pattern on the bird is very similar to the naturally occurring pattern visible on a cross-section of ivory. Could it be that the Palaeolithic makers of the figurine were simply reflecting what they saw in nature - the huge mammoth they associated with well-being and fertility?

Single swastikas began to appear in the Neolithic Vinca culture across south-eastern Europe around 7,000 years ago. But it's in the

Bronze Age that they became more widespread across the whole of Europe. In the Museum's collection there are clay pots with single swastikas encircling their upper half which date back to around 4,000 years ago. When the Nazis occupied Kiev in World War Two they were so convinced that these pots were evidence of their own Aryan ancestors that they took them back to Germany. (They were returned after the war.) In the Museum's Grecian collection, the swastika is visible as the architectural ornament which has come to be known as the Greek key pattern, widely used on tiles and textiles to this day.

The Ancient Greeks also used single swastika motifs to decorate their pots and vases. One fragment in the collection from around 7th Century BCE shows a swastika with limbs like unfurling tendrils painted under the belly of a goat. Perhaps the most surprising exhibit in the museum is of fragile textile fragments that have survived from the 12th Century AD. They are believed to belong to the dress collar of a Slav princess, embroidered with gold crosses and swastikas to ward off evil.

The swastika remained a popular embroidery motif in Eastern Europe and Russia right up to World War Two. A Russian author called Pavel Kutenkov has identified nearly 200 variations across the region. But the hakenkreuz remains a highly charged symbol. In 1941 Kiev was the site of one of the worst Nazi mass murders of the Holocaust when nearly 34,000 Jews were rounded up and killed at the ravine of Babi Yar. In Western Europe the use of indigenous ancient swastikas petered out long before the modern era but examples can be found in many places such as the famous Bronze Age Swastika Stone on Ilkley Moor in Yorkshire. Some people think this long history can help revive the symbol in Europe as something positive. Peter Madsen, owner of an upmarket tattoo parlour in Copenhagen says the swastika is an element of Norse mythology that holds a strong appeal to many Scandinavians. He is one of the founders of last year's Learn to Love the Swastika Day on 13 November, when tattoo artists around the world offered free swastikas, to raise awareness of the symbol's long multicultural past. "The swastika is a symbol of love and Hitler abused it. We're not trying to reclaim the hakenkreuz. That would be impossible. Nor is it something we want people to forget," he says. "We just want people to know that the swastika comes in many other forms, none of which have ever been used for anything bad. We are also trying to show the right-wing fascists that it's wrong to use this symbol. If we can educate the public about the true meanings of the swastika, maybe we can take it away from the fascists."

By Mukti Jain Campion,
Courtesy BBC.com

Finland's air force removes the swastika from logo after almost a century

Finland has changed the general staff ID and logo of its Air Force Command without making an announcement of the new logo.

While the new logo is a golden eagle and a circle of wings, the old logo had a swastika - a symbol deeply linked to Nazi Germany. Teivo Teivainen, an academic at the University of Helsinki, first observed the change. Finland's air force had been using the swastika since 1918. While the air force had stopped using the swastika on its planes after World War II, the symbol featured on unit emblems, unit flags and uniforms, an air

force spokesperson told the BBC. The spokesperson added that the logo of the Air Force Command and the Air Force service were



made to match in January 2017 to a golden eagle and circle of wings, removing the swastika. How did a symbol of anti-Semitism make its way to Fin-

land? The swastika entered Finland's air force through a Swedish nobleman, Count Eric von Rosen. He had gifted a plane to the air force of Finland in 1918, with a blue swastika painted on it. Rosen used to consider the swastika a good luck charm. Subsequent planes in the Finnish air force continued to use the symbol, which eventually became associated with anti-Semitism after Hitler adopted the swastika for the Nazi party. Rosen

didn't have any Nazi associations in 1918, but eventually formed a connection to Nazi Germany through his brother-in-law, who was a personal friend of Hitler. Why was the change made after almost a century? Teivainen postulated that the change was made in 2017 because the swastika could potentially be used against the Finnish army and affect the attitude of young people towards the military. He added that Finland's neighbor Russia could also interpret the symbol as a sign that Finland is an enemy. The logo of Finland's air force academy continues to feature the swastika symbol.

How Nazis twisted the swastika into a symbol of hate



The images from Charlottesville, Va., of white supremacists marching with Nazi banners reminded us, as if we needed it, that the swastika remains a potent symbol of racist hate.

In Germany, where neo-Nazis also march, it's illegal to display the swastika, and citizens there initiate private or neighbourhood efforts to remove it from graffiti and other street art.

But attempts to eradicate the swastika can sometimes misfire, as happened recently in Quebec. Corey Fleischer, known by the Instagram handle *erasinghate*, was stopped by police when he tried to blot out swastikas embossed on salvaged anchors on public display in the small St. Lawrence River community of Pointes-des-Cascades.

Plaques suggested that the anchors were from the Third Reich, but a Radio Canada correspondent reported that they were made by the English company W.L. Byers before the Nazis came to power. The company used the swastika as a symbol of good luck, a common practice in the early 20th century. Fleischer remained unmoved by this historical explanation. As he told CityNews: "The swastika is no longer a sign of peace. It's a sign attached to a party that literally almost wiped out an entire culture."

I come across this obsession with swastikas time and time again. In my university courses on German cultural history, students are repelled yet fascinated by the horror it symbolizes. When I ask whether the swastika should be banned in North America the way it is in Germany, some say yes, whereas others point to its innocent use in other cultures.

The debate is similar to the dispute between Pointes-des-Cascades and Corey Fleischer. Should the 25 years it was a symbol of Nazi racism outweigh its millennia-long use as a talisman of good fortune?

A diverse and ancient history The swastika wasn't always an odious symbol of hate. Far from it. The word *svastika* is Sanskrit in origin and means "conducive to well-being."

As a symbol, the swastika's power resides in its simplicity and balance. Graphic designer Steven Heller notes that "the swastika's geometric purity allows for legibility at any size or distance, and when on its axis, the whirling square gives the illusion of movement."

Its form, according to Heller, is "sublime," so it's no wonder that it has found a place in so many cultures.

In Buddhism, the swastika is thought to represent the footprints of the Buddha. It takes on a liturgical function in Jainism, and in Hinduism the clockwise symbol (the swastika as we know it, with the arms pointing right) and the counterclockwise symbol, the *saustika*, pair up to portray opposites such as light and darkness.

In Mesopotamia it was used on coins, and the Navajo nation wove it into blankets. It has been found on ancient pottery in Africa and Asia. It was sometimes used as a single element, but often it was repeated as a series of interlocking swastikas to form a border on a garment or in architecture, as was common in Roman times.

It made an appearance in Germanic and Viking cultures, and you can find it in medieval churches and religious vestments across Europe.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the swastika became well-established in western culture as a good luck symbol, similar to a four-leaf clover or a horse shoe.

Companies used it as logo; it adorned birth announcements and greeting cards. American Boy Scouts could get a swastika badge, and the Girls' Club published a magazine called *The Swastika*. Finland, Latvia and the United States have all used it as

a military insignia. In Canada, a mining community in northern Ontario was named *Swastika*, just as you might name a town New Hope or Bounty. Windsor, N.S., and Fernie, B.C., both had hockey teams called the *Swastikas*. In 1931, Newfoundland issued a \$1 stamp commemorating important moments in transatlantic aviation; each corner had a swastika.

The late 19th century saw the newly formed German empire caught up in an era of unrestrained nationalism. Some nationalists sought to prove German racial superiority, subscribing to a now discredited idea that an ancient Aryan race - the original Indo-Europeans - were their ancestors. Evidence was needed to connect the Germans with the Aryans.

Nazis appropriated the symbol The swastika provided the necessary link.

In the early 1870s, when German businessman and archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann thought he had discovered the ancient Greek city of Troy, more than 1,800 instances of the swastika were unearthed. Since the swastika was also present among the archaeological remains of the Germanic tribes, it didn't take long for nationalists to jump to the

conclusion that the Germans and the Greeks were both descendants of the Aryans.

And if you believe that Germans form a separate "race" superior to other ethnic groups around it, it becomes easier to claim that you need to keep that "race" pure. In that context, anti-Semitism followed.

The Thule Society, an anti-Semitic organization promoting the superiority of German Volk (folk in English), was founded at the end of the First World War. It used a stylized swastika as its logo. The society sponsored the fledgling Nazi party, and in a bid for greater public profile, the party created a banner that incorporated the swastika as we know it today. Hitler was convinced that a potent symbol would rally the masses to his xenophobic cause. With a black swastika (called the *Hakenkreuz* in German, or hooked cross) rotated 45 degrees on a white circle set against a red background, the Nazi banner modernized the ancient symbol while evoking the colours of the recently defeated German empire.

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler took sole credit for the design and attempted to give it meaning: "In red we see the social idea of the movement, in white the national-

istic idea, in the swastika the mission of the struggle for the victory of the Aryan man." Tortured symbolism aside, the swastika banner did what it was supposed to do - it gave visual identity to the Nazi movement. When the Nazis assumed power in 1933, they sought to unite the country behind their racist Aryan ideology, and the use of their symbol infiltrated all aspects of German life. You can still see it sometimes, including in mosaic ceiling tiles at Hitler's *Haus der Kunst* in Munich. The banner became the official flag of the country in 1935, and although it wasn't everywhere as Hollywood might have you believe, it was very much present. The way forward Steven Heller subtitles his book, *The Swastika*, with a simple but pertinent question: *Symbol Beyond Redemption?* In those cultures where it's been used for centuries in religious practices or in the decorative arts, this question is unnecessary. The symbol doesn't carry any negative connotations there. But objects like the swastika do not have any inherent meaning; the symbolism is constructed by the people who use them. In our western society, the swastika is tainted.

By James M. Skidmore,
Courtesy The Conversation

The New York town of Swastika votes to keep its name

A small town in upstate New York voted to keep the name *Swastika*, saying that the town founders named it after the Sanskrit word and not the hate symbol associated with Nazis.

The Town of Black Brook town board, which has domain over the hamlet, voted unanimously to not change the name, Jon Douglass, supervisor for the Town of Black Brook, told CNN.

Swastika was named by the town's original settlers in the 1800s and is based off the Sanskrit word meaning "well-being," according to Douglass.

"We regret that individuals, for out of the area, that lack the knowledge of the history of our community become offended when they see the name," Douglass said. "To the members of our community, that the board repre-

sents, it is the name that their ancestors chose."

The vote follows a national reckoning with what the symbol means in modern America.

In April 2019, a neighborhood in

the Sanskrit word "*svastika*," which means "good fortune," according to the United States Memorial Holocaust Museum. The symbol first appeared about 7,000 years ago, and is considered a sacred symbol in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and other belief systems. It sometimes adorns the walls of houses or temples.

The symbol became popular in Europe in the late 19th century and early 20th century, in part as Europeans learned about ancient

civilizations through the work of archaeological excavations.

The Nazi Party adopted the hooked cross as its symbol in 1920 during a time when other far-right nationalist movements in Europe were beginning to use it, the museum says.



a Colorado town outside Denver voted to change its name from *Swastika Acres* to *Old Cherry Hills*. The area had once been home to the *Denver Land Swastika Company*, a company that chose its name before Nazis adopted the swastika symbol.

The term *swastika* is derived from

The Past, Present, and Future of the Swastika in Japan

Imagine your surprise as a recent arrival to Tokyo, among the world's most futuristic and globalized cities. Safely ensconced in the Starbucks at Shibuya crossing, you open Apple Maps to plot a day of sightseeing in nearby Kamakura, a locale famed for its rich history and deep connection to Buddhism. Zooming in on the map (Figure 1), the first images to greet your eyes are . . . swastikas? Scattered all over the screen? Does the city hide a secret past related to the National Socialist German Workers' Party? Obviously not, but the presence of these "Nazi symbols" begs better questions:

What is perhaps the most reviled graphical symbol in the world doing on a map-and in Japan of all places? Furthermore, what possible connection could there be to an ancient Asian religion of peace and harmony? As the title of this essay suggests, the swastika is a symbol with many meanings; holy in many Eastern traditions, it inspires visceral loathing in the West. Where is it from, and how and why does it hold such radically opposed meanings in this post-globalization age? This essay will examine the swastika's history and usage, particularly as it applies to contemporary Japan. A Diffuse Past

There is no scholarly consensus on the genesis of the swastika, which may be simply described as an equilateral cross, bent ninety degrees at each arm. Various, it may appear as left-facing, right-facing, and/or with the addition of dots or other decorative flourishes. Given its manifold contexts, the symbol has been referred to by many names; the one most familiar to modern English speakers comes from a Sanskrit term meaning "to be fortunate" (su or sv, meaning "good," and asti or astikah, corresponding to "is" or "being"). It is used in many faith traditions besides Buddhism, including Jainism and Hinduism; in India, for example, it may be found on greeting cards, wedding invitations, the opening pages of books, or images of the god Vishnu.

The swastika is among the oldest written symbols, dating back centuries before the development of written language.



Examples have been found in South Asia, Mesopotamia, Africa, and in North, Central, and South America. In Western culture, it dates back at least to the Neolithic Period. The swastika was used by Greeks, Celts, Anglo-Saxons, Romans, and in early Byzantine and Christian art, and known by names now perhaps only familiar to Scrabble enthusiasts: fylfot, gammadion, tetraskelion. Multiple examples exist on heraldry crests, mosaics, cups, pottery, and places of Christian and Jewish worship, to name a few. Whether this diffusion is a product of human migration patterns or independent invention is a question that will likely never be answered. Moreover,

in none of these early contexts is the swastika's referent clear; it may represent the sun or other astronomic phenomenon, serve as a fertility symbol, or indicate a connection to some phenomenon now lost to time. Or it may simply be a "good luck charm." The genealogy and meaning of the swastika in East Asia is somewhat clearer, as its usage in South Asian religious culture was well-established before the advent of Buddhism around 500 BCE. In earliest forms of Buddhism, there were no representations of the human form, so the first images were stylized footprints of the Buddha decorated with symbols, often featuring swastikas on each toe.

As Buddhist art came to embrace the human form in the first century CE, the symbol was often used as a decorative motif on the chest, palms, and soles, and was considered one of the key identifying marks of the Buddha.

As Buddhism migrated to East Asia in the second century CE, so too did its iconography. Along with the Om symbol (?), the stupa/pagoda, and the sacred lotus, the swastika flowed from



South Asia to Tibet and China, where it also developed into a symbol in the Chinese writing system (in fact, it may be the only character of clearly foreign derivation). It is said the Empress Wu recognized the swastika as a "source of auspiciousness" as early as 693, and the comprehensive Kangxi Dictionary (K?ngx? Zidian), compiled in eighteenth-century China, defines the left-facing swastika, pronounced wàn, as a "homophone for myriad [literally ten thousand] . . . used in Buddhist texts."¹ As both a decorative motif and written character, the swastika migrated to the Korean peninsula and thence to Japan,

where Buddhism found favor with the ruling classes as early as the sixth century CE. Over the course of a millennium, the manji ?? (literally "swastika symbol") established a permanent home in Japanese temple iconography, but also became an auspicious decorative motif on fabric, lacquer boxes, pottery, ceramics, and even family crests.

The Hooked Cross

Though the swastika enjoyed unbroken usage in Asia for centuries, it was only in the late nineteenth century that the symbol emerged as an iconographic force in Europe. In particular, populist scholars in Germany who sought the origins of a so-called Aryan "race" (supposed

Indo-Europeans, Nordic in appearance and the ancestors of the Germans) sought to establish common roots in Sanskrit and early German, in addition to other purported links. The archeologist Heinrich Schliemann discovered swastika patterns at the excavations of Troy and compared them to similar marks on early German pottery-thus merging the ancient Indian symbol with German nationalism, an idea that quickly took hold among like-minded contemporaries. The symbol soon became a widespread ornamental motif and, curiously, migrated abroad as a common good luck charm. For a brief window in the early twentieth

century, the swastika was something of a design phenomenon, utilized as a popular motif across the Western world. In the United States, it was used by Coca-Cola, the Boy Scouts, the Girls Club of America (their magazine was called *The Swastika*), and a host of lesser-known entities-an eBay search will turn up orange crates, good luck tokens, postcards, poker chips, playing cards, and many other items prominently featuring the symbol.

The consequent appropriation of the swastika by the Nazi Party is well-known and need not be reiterated here. In brief, a black, right-facing swastika, rotated forty degrees on its axis and set in a white circle, was adopted as official iconography by the Nazi Party in 1920. Known as the hakenkreuz ("hooked cross"), the symbol harkened back to the fictitious Aryans as virtuous invaders of lesser races and as a potent symbol for a nation bent on a similar course. The rise of the Third Reich and Germany's entry into WWII put an end to its popular usage worldwide, and the subsequent Holocaust ensured the swastika would never again be utilized in any benevolent sense in the Western world. In fact, it is illegal to display the symbol in some countries (Austria, France, Germany), and save for a few pre-Nazi era buildings that feature it as an architectural ornamentation, the swastika has remained in exile. Japan and the Present

This brief survey brings us back to the Starbucks in Tokyo and our traveler's shock at the screenful of swastikas seen in Figure 1. The original connection of the symbol to Buddhism, or at least to Asian religious traditions, is perhaps clear enough at this point. However, the swastika is not the only Buddhist symbol. Why not represent temples on Japanese maps with a dharma wheel, pagoda, lotus flower, or some other symbolic representation of the religion? Regrettably, it is not known why, or precisely when, the swastika was adopted for this purpose.

Author Todd Munson,
Courtesy
www.asianstudies.org



Can symbols be reclaimed from evil? The swastika and the problem of cultural appropriation

Over Diwali this year, a Hindu family discovered that their painstakingly crafted Rangoli - a South Asian decoration made up of coloured powder and rice - was destroyed by an Adelaide delivery man. This was not a xenophobic or a racist act. On the contrary, the delivery man thought he was doing the right thing by erasing the symbol contained within the decorations, for it was none other than the swastika.

In the United Kingdom around the same time, an Indian restaurant came under fire for displaying a swastika in a garland hung on their front entryway. Customers refused to eat there until they removed it. Ahead of the 2020 Olympic Games in Japan, a debate over the manji has led to proposals to drop the use of the symbol, because Japanese authorities feared how it might be seen by visiting Europeans.

These reactions are understandable. After all, the swastika represents a regime of hate, and a time in human history where millions of people were victims of genocide. To see this symbol be displayed cavalierly must be deeply disturbing.

As recently as March 2019, neo-Nazis used the swastika to deface an aged care facility in Melbourne that housed Holocaust survivors. Nazi ideology is alive and well in many parts of the world. No wonder, then, that many might deem it a moral duty to stamp out the Nazi

symbol wherever they see it.

The problem is, the swastika is not a Nazi symbol.

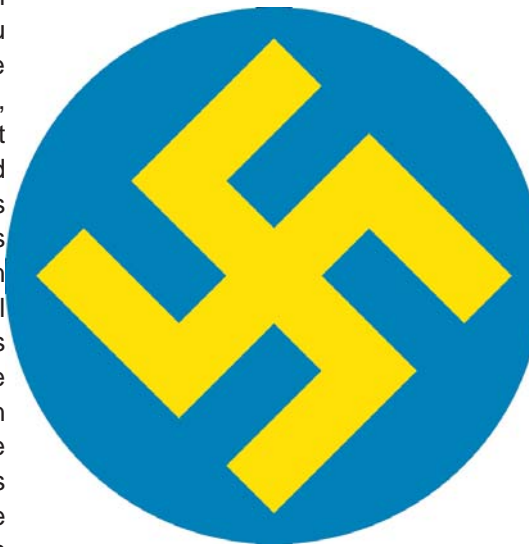
In his classic nineteenth-century book, *The Swastika: The Earliest Known Symbol, and Its Migrations*, which nevertheless remains one of the most comprehensive studies ever undertaken on a single symbol, anthropologist Thomas Wilson chronicles how the swastika has travelled all over the world.

The name itself came from Sanskrit, comprised of Su (good), Asti (being) and the suffix Ka. Within Hinduism, it is an auspicious sign that signifies prosperity and good luck, hence it is displayed during religious festivals. However, Wilson also discovered the symbol in use by indigenous peoples along the Mississippi and Amazon Rivers before 300 AD. He found it in the necklaces and garters of the Musquies and Iowas, as

well as in dig sites from ancient Greece to Italy, and even in sixth-century ornaments from Spain - all of which led him to theorise that the symbol had migrated to the rest of the world from India.

The Swastika came to Germany in 1871 by way of Heinrich Schliemann, a German archaeologist who had found thousands of variations of the swastika in a dig in the Hisarlik Mound, which archaeologists now believe to be the ancient site of Troy. He linked these findings to a proto-Indo-European

migration, asserting that the Swastika was an important symbol for European ancestors. His work later found purchase within the German Volkish movement, an ethnic and nationalist organisation that believed in the myth of an "original nation" comprised of people of a singular racial essence. Both Hitler and Goebbels were deeply influenced by Volkish ideology and, in the



1920s, began using the swastika as the symbol of an eternal German master race: the Aryan.

Despite its appearance around the world, the swastika's most enduring and significant use is still among the South Asian spiritual practices from which it sprang. The swastika used predominantly by Hindus is right-facing, where the arrows are pointing clockwise. The other swastika, which is in turn called the Sawastika, is left-facing or pointing anti-clockwise and is

more commonly found within Buddhism.

The Nazi symbol, or the Hakenkruz (hook-cross) is also right facing but that's where all similarities end. The Nazi swastika is often turned on its axis on a forty-five degree angle on a white circle with a red background, and their use of a symbol that had signified luck and benediction has now come to represent death and destruction - the antithesis of what its original meaning.

The Nazi appropriation of the swastika remains one of the twentieth century's starkest examples of how cultural appropriation has harmed originating cultures. The Nazi regime took a symbol out of its cultural context, appropriated it by divorcing it from its original intentions and then imbued it with meaning for which it was never meant - finally using it as a harbinger of evil.

Now, that misuse is all that anyone associates with the swastika.

It has been so thoroughly claimed by the Nazis that the very people from whose cultures it originates now have difficulty using it the way their ancestors have for centuries - at least, not without being thought to be lending their support to genocide. We cannot use our own names without it being the subject of public controversy, all

because of one historical moment of corruption.

Claims of cultural appropriation are often derided as belonging to the project of identity politics, but the inability of Hindus and Buddhists to practice their religions peaceably or to display their symbols proudly almost a hundred years after this ideological defilement shows that cultural appropriation can do real and lasting damage. It is all the worse when those seeking to stop us from using the swastika do so out of contempt, not for those from whom it was stolen, but for those who stole it. Can the swastika be reclaimed? Some say its weaponisation has made it irredeemable. Others believe it can be reclaimed, and indeed should be. In response to the incident involving the Rangoli in Adelaide, the Hindu family asked for the education, not punishment, of the delivery man, saying they understood his actions because "most people don't know the real roots of the swastika." People should not have to give up their traditions because they were misused by others. That seems wholly unfair to those who never wanted them to be appropriated in the first place. Nazis should not dictate how millions of people practice their religions in the twenty-first century. Maybe a little awareness of culture and history is all we really need.

By Sangeetha Thanapal,
Courtesy abc.net.au

Why are swastikas built into homes across Northwest Texas?

The homeowners say it's not what you think

The swastika is one of the strongest symbols of hate of the past century - an image Adolf Hitler and the Nazis made synonymous with death and destruction - so why is it built into homes across Northwest Texas?

The owners of these homes emphasize it's not what you think. It's not Nazi - it's Navajo.

"A 5,000-year-old symbol got misused for 28 years, and it poisoned the well," American Indian researcher, author and shopkeeper of Bahti Indian Arts said. One home in Plainview, Texas, features two swastikas, one next to the front door and another on the side of the house.

A home in Memphis, Texas, shocks passersby with a red swastika, boasting from the brick facade "Eventually, I'm going to tear this house down, but we're thinking about just leaving that [symbol] because it attracts a lot of people," homeowner Jessie Morales said.

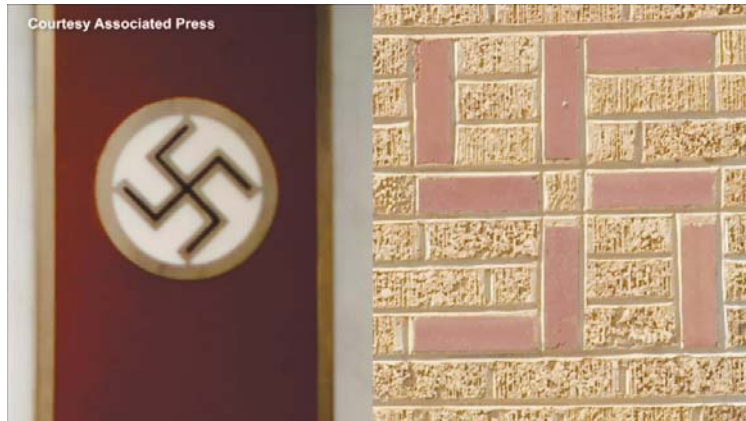
Morales and his family own the house, which was built before World War II, and the house next door, where they've lived for 25 years. The home is just doors down from notable World War II veteran, Cleatus Lebow, who received a Congressional Gold Medal after surviving the sinking of the USS Indianapolis.

Morales added the symbol was

there when they moved into the neighborhood.

"Everybody thinks it's a [Nazi] swastika, but [that] swastika has got to be turned a little sideways," Morales said.

He's right. The swastika on the Nazi flag is right facing and tilted, while the Native American sign found on these homes is upright and facing to the left or right. But they're easily confused, and most wouldn't see the difference.



"One person asked me to take it off," Morales said.

The swastika is traced back not only to a number of Native American tribes, such as the Navajo and the Hopi, but also to Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism in Asia, where it is still used in ceremonies.

For the people of the Texas Panhandle, it also has historical significance, and historians said that in the Southwest, the symbol

actually used to mean something good - an ancient emblem of peace that predates Hitler by thousands of years.

Bahti has worked in Southwest American Indian art for decades, and he said that before WW2, the swastika was popular as a symbol of healing and blessing.

"It was a good luck symbol, so you saw it on saddle blankets, you saw it on stationery, you saw it on jewelry ... If I were building

in tornado country, I would want good luck symbols all over the place," Bahti joked.

It likely once adorned many homes across the region. Even a map of Hale County from the 1920s shows a location named "Swastika," which mysteriously disappeared at the beginning of WW2. "That symbol was hijacked, it was kidnapped, it was misused and abused, it was a victim of an evil mindset," Bahti

said.

One home in Pampa, TX, has dozens of swastikas on the outside and on the inside.

"People drive by, stop in the middle of our road, take pictures like we're crazy, but I find it to be something peaceful," homeowner Cindy Velasquez said.

Swastikas cover the chimney, the floor, the windows and even the shower of Velasquez's home. Every day for years, she says, dozens of passersby have stopped, shocked at the symbols. "Oh you live in the Nazi house, oh you live in the swastika house!" and I'm like no it's not. Do research on it, and you'll realize it's actually not," Velasquez said. The symbol actually caused her son, eighth grader Jeremy Helfer, to get in trouble at school when teachers mistook it for the Nazi swastika.

"I decided to put the symbol that's in our house on [a class project]. Well, I get sent out the classroom, got in trouble, they called my dad, and I was told never to draw it again," Jeremy said.

The home in Pampa was built in the early 1930s by W.R. Kaufman, who designed many buildings in the Panhandle and New Mexico - years before the start of World War II.

Bahti added that during the war, some Native Americans who had

the symbol on baskets, blankets and art burned them to prove their loyalty to the United States. After that, the symbol all but disappeared from many Native American cultures.

According to the Anti-Defamation League, "In the United States, the swastika is overwhelmingly viewed as a hate symbol."

For some, the swastika, no matter the context, may still conjure painful memories. In Germany, it is illegal to display the symbol. Still, Velasquez said she plans to keep the Native American symbols in her house that have been there for more than 80 years.

"We have no reason to change the house up ... [The symbol] was built into it, it should stay here because it's the meaning of the house. Someone put their heart and soul and thoughts into this house, and so I feel like it shouldn't be changed," Velasquez said.

Bahti agrees with her, saying taking down these sacred symbols would give Hitler power from beyond the grave.

"[The Native American symbols were] put up with the best of intents with a good heart for all positive reasons, and to take it down is to acquiesce to an ugly chapter in history," Bahti said.

By Laura Laughead, Courtesy www.everythinglubbock.com

Why did Hitler choose the swastika, and how did a Sanskrit symbol become a Nazi emblem?

The svastika, a cross with each leg bent at a 90-degree angle, is an important symbol in both ancient and modern religions. It indicates, among other things, good luck, the infinity of creation and the unconquered, revolving sun. So how did it become the symbol of the Nazi party? Short answer: the transition from auspicious svastika to despised swastika began in the late 19th century, writes historian and author Miles Russell

The story begins following the archaeological investigation of Hisarlik in Turkey by German antiquarian Heinrich Schliemann who believed it to be the site of Troy.

Finding the svastika on a variety of artefacts, Schliemann recognised



a similarity with designs found on sixth-century Germanic pottery, theorising that it represented an important and universal prehistoric religious symbol.

"The woman who gave birth for Hitler

Unfortunately, some academics and nationalists in the newly-unified Germany took this further, suggesting the presence of the svastika across Europe and Asia supported the idea of an ancient Aryan master race.

By the early 1920s, the swastika had been adopted as a symbol of the German Reich. So wedded to the poisonous ideology of hate, the Nazi swastika is today reviled in the West, although as an auspicious and sacred symbol in the East, the svastika remains popular within

Buddhist and Hindu society. Long answer: the swastika became a symbol of hatred and fear in the 20th century, but that belies its long history as a sign of fortune and hope. Here, Jonny Wilkes explains how the swastika came to be both reviled and revered

Heinrich Schliemann had grown obsessed with finding Troy, the lost city of Greek mythology, and believed the epics of Homer would show him the way. A wealthy businessman from Germany, in 1868 he set out with his copy of The Iliad to search the Mediterranean. Several years passed, the findings proved disappointing and he came close to giving up before a British amateur archaeologist named Frank Calvert made a suggestion: Schliemann should dig at the mysterious mound of Hisarlik on the Aegean coast of Turkey.

How did the Nazi party rise to power in Germany in 1933? And what were Hitler's motivations?

There, during the 1870s, Schliemann unearthed layers of civilisations dating back thousands of years, and declared the oldest to be Troy. The city of legend had been found - although it turned out to be a different layer than the one Schliemann thought - as well as a cache of jewellery, bronze, silver and gold. It was more than he had dared to hope. Yet in the ancient ruins he made another fateful discovery: some 1,800 depictions of a symbol that resembled a cross with bent arms: the swastika.

Hitler's millionaire backers: how Germany's elite facilitated the rise of the Nazis

News of Schliemann's sensational excavations spread far and wide, quickly followed by the swastika, which became a ubiquitous sign, visible throughout Europe and North America. Swastikas would appear in advertising, adorning buildings as architectural motifs, and worn on badges or medallions. Sports teams, from ice hockey to basketball, even named themselves the Swastikas, so closely was

the symbol associated with luck and success.

At the same time, however, the swastika's long history saw it become a favourite of German nationalists, who subscribed to a warped theory that they had descended from an ancient 'master race' known as the Aryans. This belief persisted into the 20th century, growing more pernicious until it appealed to Adolf Hitler, the leader of the burgeoning Nazi Party. He adopted the swastika as a symbol of the movement in 1920. Then, as the red flags emblazoned with a harsh black swastika on a white circle of the Third Reich were marched over Europe and the world went to war, it came to stand for hatred, fear, racial intolerance and genocide. A manifestation of evil, even.

Roger Moorhouse: How Hitler's diplomatic miscalculation led to WW2

The brutal blitzkrieg: the 1939 invasion of Poland

In a matter of years, the swastika had been corrupted and the symbolism it held to myriad cultures across many millennia reversed. A cross with arms bent at right angles meant many things to many people, but had always been used as a sign of hope and positivity. It could represent good fortune or prosperity; symbolise the Sun or the infinity of creation; or, as it still does in several religions, evoke a sense of the divine and call for auspiciousness. The word swastika itself derives from the Sanskrit svastika, meaning "conducive to well-being".

What is the history of the swastika?

The oldest-known example of the swastika dates back some 15,000 years. Discovered in Ukraine in 1908, an ivory mammoth tusk carved into the shape of a bird includes an intricate pattern of connected swastikas on its body, which may have been used as a fertility symbol. There is no knowing how the design first came about. It may have

simply been an elegant, easy-to-create geometric shape, although its inspiration possibly came from a comet in the night sky.

It was also in Eastern Europe that single swastikas were carved by the Vinca culture during the Neolithic period, some 7,000 years ago, before they became widespread from the Bronze Age. The swastika symbolised the Sun to the Illyrians; became a common sight on Mesopotamian coins; appeared on vases and clothing in Greece; formed mosaic motifs in Rome, and stands in as a stylised cross in Celtic design. There are 27 swastikas on the Iron Age Battersea Shield, found in London in 1857, but the symbol had been in Britain long before that as the so-called Swastika Stone on Ilkley Moor, Yorkshire, from c2,000 BC, shows. This carving resembles the swastika's shape, although with more curved arms and added spots.

The swastika, often known as a gammadion or fylflot, continued to be used throughout Europe, occasionally being subsumed into religious iconography. Early Christian art depicts the hooked cross to represent Christ's victory over death, while a left-facing version of the swastika showed up in reference to the Norse god Thor's hammer. Still a popular symbol in medieval times, the swastika can be seen today on surviving church decorations, coats of arms and on textile fragments from the 12th century thought to be from a dress owned by a Slav princess. The monastery school a young Adolf Hitler attended, Lambach Abbey in Austria, had swastikas carved on the stone and woodwork.

Yet the influence of the swastika reached much further than can be explained by the migration of peoples over the centuries. It has appeared in several cultures across northern Africa, including as window decorations in churches in modern-day Ethiopia, while also showing up in the Mayan, Aztec and Kuna civilisations of South and Central America. A number of Native American and First Nation tribes of North America, such as the Navajo, Hopi and Passamaquoddy, also adopted the symbol, which they called 'whirling logs'.

Undoubtedly the most enduring relationship with the swastika began in Asia, especially in In-

dia, among followers of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, for whom it has served as a holy symbol for millennia. To Jains, the swastika represents one of the 24 Tirthankara, or saviours, while Buddhists regard the symbol as the footprints of the Buddha. For Hindus, the right-hand svastika - a term that emerged c500 BC - is a sign of surya (the Sun) and auspiciousness, so is used to mark entrances, offerings, ceremonies, festivals and each year's account books. The left-hand version, the sauvastika, is symbolic of the night and the goddess Kali. The swastika remains as spiritually significant today, in the face of the stigma towards the symbol in the West brought on by the Nazis.

How did the swastika become a Nazi symbol?

Heinrich Schliemann's discovery of Troy in the 1870s set in motion the events that transformed the swastika, a symbol of fortune and hope for thousands of years, into a hated and feared sign of fascism. He concluded it to be a "significant religious symbol of our remote ancestors" when he unearthed 1,800 examples, but his colleague, Emile-Louis Burnouf, thought differently. Knowing the symbol appeared in India, Burnouf studied a sacred Hindu text called the Rigveda and claimed to have found a connection between the swastika and an enigmatic ancient people, the Aryans.

Supposedly, this 'master race' of white-skinned warriors constituted the peak of human civilisation, conquering lands such as India and bringing the swastika with them. The word Aryan itself derived from Sanskrit, like svastika. Pots from the sixth-century had been found in Germany with swastikas on them and scholars noted the similarities between Sanskrit and German as further proof that the Aryans had come from Germany. But the whole notion of this 'pure' race, as well as being deeply racist, was based on a misunderstanding. The Sanskrit word for Aryan (?rya) actually meant "honourable, respectable or noble" and referred to a social or linguistic distinction, not a separate ethnic group. But the theory of the Aryans' existence grew in popularity from the mid-19th century. The unification of Germany in 1871, the same year Schliemann started work at Troy, led to a swell of uninhibited nationalism in the

country and the idea that Germans descended from Aryans. To them, the discovery at Troy of their symbol, the swastika, proved they had been a dominant race. So while the swastika existed as a benign good-luck charm across Europe and North America, it simultaneously became an icon for German nationalists and anti-Semitic groups.

Why did Hitler choose the swastika?

When Adolf Hitler began his rise to power and looked for a symbol to encapsulate his movement, the Nazi Party and a strong future for Germany, the swastika became the clear choice. Hitler understood the power of an image and knew it would give the Nazi ideals an historic foundation. He could not adequately reconcile his view of Germany's Christian history with the religion's historical Jewish connections - essentially, that Christ was himself Jewish - so the idea that Germans descended from a white master race with a tried and tested symbol had great appeal.

The swastika, or hakenkreuz (hooked cross), became the emblem of the Nazi Party in 1920; Hitler himself took personal credit for designing the flag. It used the red, white and black of the old German imperial flag - a cunning move to link Germany's past with its future - but attributed new meanings to them. "In red we see the social idea of the movement, in white the nationalistic idea, in the swastika the mission of the struggle for the victory of the Aryan man," wrote Hitler in his 1925 autobiographical manifesto, Mein Kampf.

Mein Kampf: what happened to Hitler's money after his death?

The new design became the national flag on 15 September 1935 during the mass annual rally at Nuremberg. On the same day, two race laws were passed prohibiting marriages between Germans and Jews and declaring that only those of German blood could be citizens of the Reich. And so the act of cultural, religious and social theft that was the appropriation of the swastika was complete. It ensured that the Nazi flag would be associated with evil - under which a brutal war raged, atrocities committed and some six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust.

By Jonny Wilkes, Courtesy www.historyextra.com



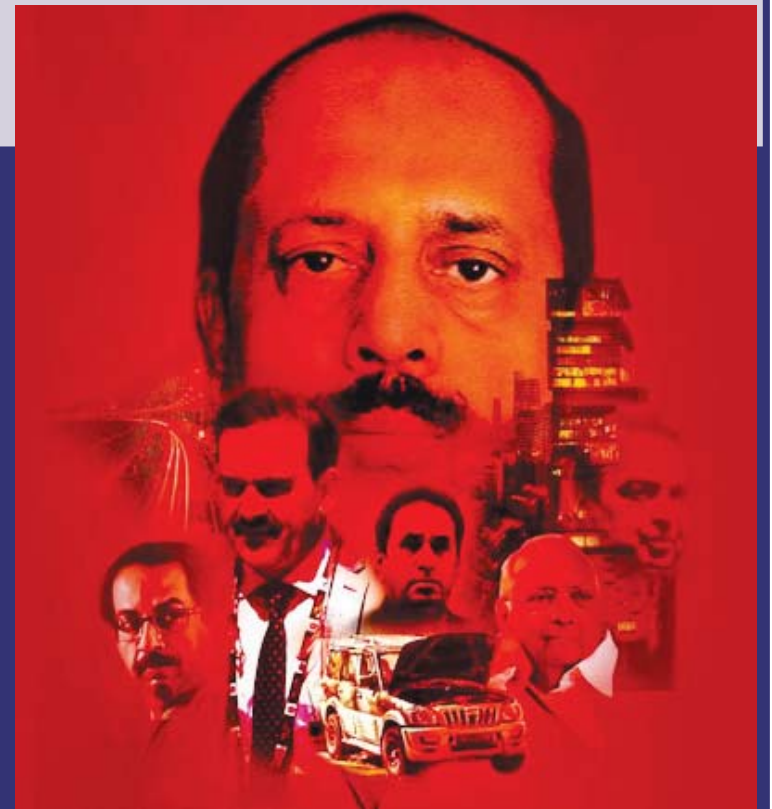
A bomb-laden car, murder, and crooked cops: All about Mumbai Bombgate

An amateur plot to extort India's richest man goes horribly wrong, lifting the lid off Mumba's murky khaki-khadi nexus and threatening the survival of the Uddhav Thackeray-led MVA government

Reality frequently outpaces fiction in Mumbai, home to the world's largest film industry. On February 25, even as Mumbai grappled with the fear of a second wave of infections following the biggest spike in coronavirus cases in over four months, one of India's most sensational real-life thrillers played out in the city's southern tip. Two hours past midnight, a light-green Scorpio SUV with a fake licence plate and a white Innova MPV snaked their way along the undulating Pedder Road that bisects Mumbai's poshest high ground, Malabar Hill and Cumballa Hill. The vehicles vended their way towards billionaire ridge, the Altamount Road on Cumballa Hill. Kumar Mangalam Birla has a house here, Mangalyan; the official bungalows of the BMC Commissioner, the RBI Governor and the Mumbai Port Trust Chairman are also in the same vicinity. But it was the tallest of them all, Mukesh Ambani's billion-

dollar residence Antilia, named after a mythical island in the Atlantic Ocean, that the vehicles seemed headed for. They stopped 300 metres away from the opulent, 27-storeyed personal residence of India's richest individual. Leaving the Scorpio parked on the pavement along the bend in the road, its driver boarded the Innova, and left. The next morning, at around 9 am, as Rajesh Singh, in front of whose grocery shop the Scorpio was parked, recalls, dark-blue safari suit-clad security members from the Ambani residence discovered the locked vehicle and intimidated the Gamdevi police. The traffic police arrived shortly after and smashed open a window to gain access. Scattered inside the vehicle were 20 gelatin sticks weighing 2.6 kg, but no detonator to trigger off the explosives. A terse note in Hindi explained why. "Ye to sirf ek trailer hai. Neeta bhabhi, Mukesh bhaiyya, family ye to sirf ek jhalak hai.

Agli baar ye saaman pura hokar tumhare pass aayega, aur poora intezaam ho gaya hai (This is only a trailer, a glimpse. Next time, the material will reach you in complete form. All arrangements have been made)." It was the kind of filmi jargon the Karachi-based underworld used when they wanted to extort money from city businessmen and film personalities in the 1990s. Gelatin sticks are used to blast rock sides for stone quarrying or breaking down rocks while building roads and bridges. They have frequently been used by the Maoists to make improvised explosive devices to attack security forces. Placed inside a vehicle and set off by a detonator, they expand at a supersonic speed to become superheated gas bubbles, exerting a pressure of over a million pounds per square inch that can blow passing vehicles into smithereens. Bombay experienced this first-hand on March 12, 1993, when the Pakistan army's ISI and Dawood Ibrahim's



gangsters teamed up. The military-grade RDX stuffed into parked cars and scooters triggered 12 bomb blasts that killed 257 people and maimed 800 others. On February 25, it wasn't the billionaire's tower that was the target but the motorcade that whizzes the first family of India Inc across the city. Bizarrely, the fake licence plates on the Scor-

pio had the same number as a vehicle in the Ambanis' security convoy.

Twists in the Antilia tale
On March 5, Mansukh Hiran, a 49-year-old auto parts dealer in Thane and the owner of the Scorpio, was found floating face down in the brackish waters of Retibunder, an armpit in north-eastern Mumbai.

The tipping point

In recent months, GDP growth has seen a sharp recovery, climbing from the precipitous fall in the first quarter of fiscal 2021 to -7.5 per cent in the second quarter and 0.4 per cent in the third.



When India entered its Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020, it was evident there would be major economic repercussions. While GDP growth, which crashed to -23.9 per cent in the first quarter of fiscal 2021, headlined the damage report, a less visible and mounting crisis is the enormous pressure on the banking sector, especially public sector banks. In January this year, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) warned of a looming credit crisis, projecting that the gross NPA (non-performing assets or bad loans) ratio for Indian commercial

banks would increase from 7.5 per cent in September 2020 to 13.5 per cent in September 2021. If the macroeconomic environment worsened, the ratio could even rise to 14.8 per cent, the central bank warned. (The gross NPA ratio, a measure of the banking sector's health, is the overall percentage of bad loans to total loans issued.) This doubling of NPAs will obviously weaken banks, they will have to make provisions for the expected defaults, reducing the capital available for new loans and making bankers more wary of lending, which would limit the

credit available to businesses to fund their activities. It could also raise the cost of credit, thereby stifling growth.

In recent months, GDP growth has seen a sharp recovery, climbing from the precipitous fall in the first quarter of fiscal 2021 to -7.5 per cent in the second quarter and 0.4 per cent in the third. The lifting of the national lockdown in the second half of fiscal 2021, the pent-up demand from the months spent in lockdown and the higher demand in the festive season that followed have all had a positive impact on growth. However, the rebound seen in manufacturing has not yet appeared in the services sector, the biggest contributor to India's GDP (over 55 per cent). Sectors like hotels, travel and tourism are still suffering.

To address the economic pain caused by the pandemic, the government and the RBI implemented a slew of measures last year, aimed at alleviating the stress on companies and

consumers. For instance, the RBI ordered a moratorium on all loan repayments until August last year and began long-term repo operations (under which it provides one- to three-year loans to banks at the prevailing repo rate). The government announced a fiscal stimulus under its Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan which, among other aims, sought to improve the competitiveness of domestic manufacturing. Another initiative was the ECLGS (emergency credit line guarantee scheme), under which small and stressed businesses could avail of government-backed loans. While these schemes were necessary at the time, they also imposed immense pressure on the financial sector.

The financial hit

The RBI is not alone in warning of a looming credit crisis. Saying that recent economic improvements mask underlying stress, ratings agency Fitch predicts banks will increasingly feel the pinch of rising

unemployment and struggling small businesses. 'Fitch believes that the disproportionate shock to India's informal economy and small businesses, coupled with high unemployment and declining private consumption, have yet to fully manifest on bank balance sheets', it said. JP Morgan's chief economist for emerging markets, Jahangir Aziz, says a major risk to India's economic recovery is the very real possibility that banking sector stress will leave millions of households and small businesses cut off from credit they need. He says the government, the central bank and many analysts are underestimating the level of permanent damage the Indian economy may have suffered as a result of the contraction last year during the pandemic. In the past few years, India's banking sector, valued at Rs 166 lakh crore, has seen big churn.



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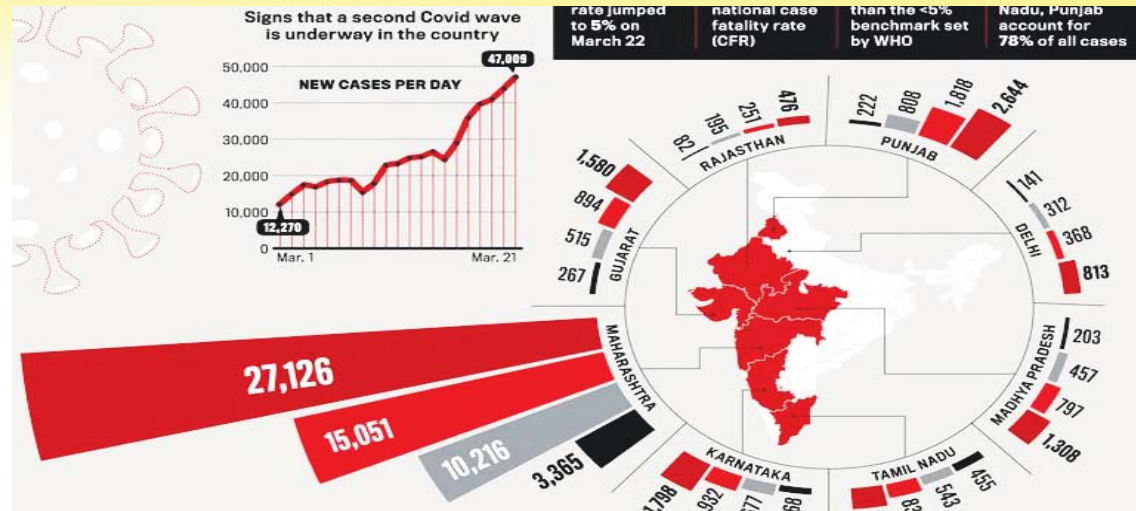
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Covid-19 second wave: Why there's a spike in active cases

IN the first week of November, even as India recorded 47,000 new cases within 24 hours and the total active cases stood at 500,000, the country's health establishment let out a collective sigh of relief. This was the first time since the pandemic began that the all-important R_0 (pronounced R-naught), a measure of how contagious an infectious disease is, had dropped below 1 (it was 0.88 on November 6). In a pandemic, an R_0 value of less than 1 indicates that the virus is going to eventually stop spreading since it cannot infect enough individuals.

India's R_0 value in November had foretold the eventual fall in Covid cases. Active cases began to drop steadily and the pandemic curve turned downward for the first time. As more people recovered from Covid and fewer got infected, states began to lift restrictions. For a while, it seemed the pandemic was nearing its end. But come February 11, and the curve turned the other way. The number of new cases per day began rising by the hundreds. By early March, roughly 1,500 more cases were being added every



day than during the lows in February. With most cases being reported from Maharashtra, health secretary Rajesh Bhushan declared the state was experiencing a second wave of Covid. Soon, similar spikes hit several other parts of the country.

Between March 14 and 22, Covid cases in India jumped 150 per cent. Around 130,000 new cases were added in three days alone and the daily count of 47,009 on March 21 was the highest yet in 2021. India's daily cases are now the third-highest, after the US and Brazil; the 'R' value of 1.32 is the country's highest since April 2020. The positivity rate is also rising,

from 1.6 per cent of samples testing positive in February to 5 per cent on March 22. The positivity rate in 13 states is higher than the WHO scare benchmark of under 5 per cent. It is 13.6 per cent in Maharashtra and 8.7 per cent in Kerala.

Data from the Union ministry of health and family welfare (MoHFW) suggests a fresh surge across the country. Since March 1, 70 districts have seen an uptick of about 150 per cent in their case load. Delhi's daily Covid count of 800 on March 21 was its highest this year, just as the 1,640 cases in Gujarat the same day were the highest

ever to be recorded in the state in a single day. Tamil Nadu's 1,385 cases on March 21 were the highest since December 14; the same day, Rajasthan saw 602 cases, the highest since January 1.

The surge has but naturally left the government apprehensive. On March 17, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called the rise in Covid cases as the start of a 'second wave' and urged all states to step up testing, create micro-containment zones, and step up the vaccination drive. "Our confidence should not become overconfidence. Our success should not turn into negligence. We have to

stop the second wave," he said. MUTATIONS to blame?

Two broad reasons are being cited to explain the surge in cases. First, Covid variants from the UK, Brazil and South Africa, which are known to be more infectious than the previous strain of the virus in India. The possibility of a new homegrown variant is also not being ruled out. After a UK variant was detected in January, the Indian government increased genome sequencing. Ten institutes, including the Hyderabad-based Centre for Cellular & Molecular Biology (CCMB), were tasked with sequencing about 5 per cent of all samples in India. Around 7,000 variants, with 24,000 mutations, have so far been found in India, but none of these mutants increases infectivity or the severity of symptoms.

On March 23, an analysis of 401 samples sent from Punjab to the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) found 81 per cent of them testing positive for the UK variant of the virus. Punjab, as on March 24, had the third highest number of active cases in the country and the highest case fatality rate (CFR), the proportion of deaths among total individuals infected.

A study by the Imperial College London found the new strain in the UK to have an 'R' value of 1.45, while it was around 0.92 for the previous strain. The new strain is far more infectious, and those infected by one strain can get re-infected by another and transmit it. In all likelihood, a second infection from a different strain will result in mild to moderate symptoms. According to CCMB director Dr Rakesh Mishra, mutations by themselves aren't causing the spike. "We need to study a larger number of samples over a longer period to ascertain if the new variant or a homegrown variant is causing the infections," he says. Several health experts, including virologist Dr Gagandeep Kang and AIIMS Delhi director Dr Randeep Guleria, have emphasised the need to scale up India's genome sequencing capacity. According to Dr Kang, there is no other way to rule out another big wave in the future triggered by more infectious Covid variants. Adds Dr Mishra: "All new strains can be kept at bay if people adopt Covid safety measures, mask, social distancing and hand hygiene."

Where are the food parks?

India's ambitious attempt to develop large food processing hubs across the country has not yielded the desired results. At the heart of the failure lies a tale of misguided policies, botched implementation and basic infrastructure issues

When Varun Chaudhury, executive director of Nepal-based CG Corp Global, the makers of Wai Wai noodles, applied to build a food park in India, he expected the effort to be an extension of the work his company already does. A leader in the food processing industry, the Rs 13,000 crore conglomerate's business in India spans several sectors, from FMCG (fast moving consumer goods) to hospitality. Nonetheless, Chaudhury, who is steering the group's FMCG arm, says he found the experience unexpectedly challenging, with what he describes as complicated and stringent regulations.

On the face of it, the government seems to be doing all it can to encourage the private sector to build and operate food parks, for instance, a Rs 50 crore cash subsidy is given as a grant to businesses that meet certain

conditions, an incentive that Anand Jha, CEO of Pristine Foods, calls a "one-of-a-kind initiative". What derails the effort is a host of nuts-and-bolts issues, from project allocations, land acquisitions, overcomplicated rules, poor marketing and a lack of



involvement by state governments. Though India is a world leader in food production, it processes only a small fraction of the output, an RBI (Reserve Bank of India) note from March 2020 estimates it at less than 10 per cent. The Rs 85,000 crore food processing industry employs about 1.77 million people in 39,748 registered

units, with an aggregate output of \$158 billion (Rs 11.5 lakh crore). An assessment by Invest India says the industry could grow to \$500 billion (Rs 36.6 lakh crore) by 2025. To boost investment, the government has sanctioned 37 food parks under its Mega Food Park (MFP) scheme, with 21 operational and 16 under implementation. On February 5, Rameswar Teli, minister of state for food processing

industries, informed the Rajya Sabha that the government "has been implementing the MFP scheme to create modern infrastructure for the food processing industry". However, only one, Patanjali's MFP in Haridwar, is a success. The government had projected that each park would

have 25-30 operating units, with Rs 250 crore of total investment, Rs 450-500 crore of annual turnover, producing 5,000 direct and indirect jobs, and benefitting about 25,000 farmers. However, most MFPs are home to between zero and eight units.

India's food park scheme was first introduced in 1992-93. At the time, state governments were responsible for such projects, and lacking linkages with up- and down-stream facilities (raw materials, transport, etc), they were designed as industrial estates. In 2007-08, the central government announced its MFP scheme, which looked to the private sector to build and operate such facilities, with plans to develop infrastructure like cold storage units, ripening chambers, warehouses and packaging facilities that could be leased out to farmers, small manufacturers and local entrepreneurs.

The ghost of Khalistan

Recent arrests point to Pakistan's game plan of reviving the Khalistan movement by using the local criminal network in India. The farmers' protests could be another rallying point for secessionists based abroad.

The team from Punjab police's counterintelligence wing drove through the night to Lucknow on February 8. They were following a tip-off from Jagroop Singh, a gangster arrested the previous day from Veroval village in Amritsar district. The team had recovered five Chinese pistols from Jagroop and, more importantly, the whereabouts of his accomplices. Among them, the counterintelligence sleuths caught up with Jagdev Singh Jagga, who was travelling from Lakhimpur in Uttar Pradesh to Lucknow, and brought him to Punjab. Another Punjab police team arrested gangster Gurbinder Singh in Nanded, Maharashtra. With this, police said they had busted a module of the Khalistan Tiger Force (KTF) plotting assassinations in India allegedly on the instructions of Paramjit Singh Pamma, a UK-based militant of the Babbar Khalsa International (BKI).

The arrests weren't one-off. On December 7, the Delhi police special cell nabbed Gurjeet Singh and Sukhdeep Singh, criminals allegedly hired by gangster Sukh Bhikhariwal to murder Balwinder Singh Sandhu, an anti-Khalistan activist from Punjab's Bhikhiwind, in October 2020. Sandhu had received the Shaurya Chakra, India's third-highest peacetime gallantry award, in 1993 for his fight against militants in Punjab's Tarn Taran district in the 1990s. Bhikhariwal, who was deported from Dubai and arrested this January, alleges that instructions for the murder had come from Lakhbir Singh Rode, the Lahore-based chief of the International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF). BKI and ISYF are among the militant groups that, in the 1990s, were at the forefront of the violent separatist movement in Punjab for an independent 'Khalistan'. In the past six years, more than 20 incidents, including murders of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Hindutva leaders and attacks on Sikh preachers, have been linked to Khalistan separatists. Officials say such

attacks are being carried out to sow disharmony in Punjab, and fear that the ghost of the long-dead Khalistan movement is now sought to be revived, mostly from overseas. Pamma and Rode are among nine notorious Khalistan masterminds operating out of five countries, say security officials. The others in the list are Germany-based Gurmeet Singh

members, one of Pakistan's many terror proxies.

In a September 2020 paper, 'Khalistan: A project of Pakistan', published by the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, a think-tank in Ottawa, veteran Canadian journalist Terry Milewski warned about the threat to India and Canada from a renewed Khalistan movement. 'For Canadians, Pakistan's actions pose a real

ENEMIES OF THE STATE
THE KHALISTAN MOVEMENT DRAWS FUEL FROM A GLOBAL NETWORK OF OPERATIVES, SAY SECURITY OFFICIALS

OLD HORSES

 Paramjit Singh Panjwar He is the chief of the Khalistan Commando Force. Based in Lahore since 1994; wife and two sons live in Frankfurt. Allegedly runs a narcotics smuggling network in India.	 Wadhawa Singh Babbar The Lahore-based chief of Babbar Khalsa International. Prior to demonetisation, he was allegedly handling the counterfeit Indian currency network for the ISI.	 Gajinder Singh 'Hijacker' Chief of the Dal Khalsa International. Mobilises support for Sikh preachers and dominates Sikh politics from Lahore.	 Ranjeet Singh Neeta The Lahore-based chief of banned terror group Khalistan Zindabad Force has links with Hizbul Mujahideen. Using drones, this network allegedly sends ammunition into Punjab.	 Lakhbir Singh Rode Nephew of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and head of the International Sikh Youth Federation. Reportedly stays at Nankana Sahib in Lahore; allegedly mobilises Khalistan forces in Europe.	 Mehal Singh Babbar A former IAF officer, Mehal heads the Babbar Khalsa International (Resham Singh Group). He is allegedly very close to Khalistan groups in Europe and the UK. Was last spotted in Europe.
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NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

 Gurpatwant Singh Pannu The founder of Sikhs for Justice migrated to the US in the 1990s and began running a taxi. Later, he turned attorney to help migrants from Punjab get political asylum in the US.	 Paramjit Singh Pamma A petty criminal in the 1990s, he allegedly worked with terrorists like Wadhawa Singh Babbar and Jagtar Singh Tara. Took political asylum in the UK.	 Gurmeet Singh Bagga Lives in Germany. He allegedly provides drones for his associate Ranjeet Neeta in Pakistan to drop consignments in Punjab.	 Mo Dhalwal Vancouver-based, considered to be close to Canadian politician Jagmeet Dhalwal. Launched the Poetic Justice Foundation and is considered to be the brain behind the media 'toolkit' on the farmers' protests.	 Hardeep Singh Nijjar Heads the Khalistan Tiger Force, is based in Vancouver. Allegedly promotes terrorist activity in India by identifying potential recruits and arranging for their training.	 Bhagat Singh Brar Based out of Canada. Frequently visits Pakistan allegedly to meet radical community leaders and ISI officials to allegedly organise and coordinate anti-India activities abroad.
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Bagga and Bhupinder Singh Bhinda of the banned Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF); KZF chief Ranjeet Singh Neeta, BKI chief Wadhawa Singh Babbar and Khalistan Commando Force (KCF) chief Paramjit Singh Panjwar, all based in Lahore; Hardeep Singh Nijjar (in Vancouver) and Gurpatwant Singh Pannu, the New York-based founder of Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) (see Enemies of the State).

These individuals, officials say, have been using a network of local criminals, gangsters and drug dealers to carry out targeted killings in India. Security agencies also see the hand of Pakistan's ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) behind the attempts to revive the Khalistan movement over the past decade. Khalistan and Kashmir reportedly made up the Pakistan army's 'K2' plan to encourage secessionism in the 1980s. Sandhu's alleged killers, for instance, were caught with three Hizbul Mujahideen

and present national security risk. As the Khalistani cause has little traction in Punjab, Pakistan's support of Khalistani extremists entails leveraging extremists based in Canada, including supporters with ties to terrorism,' the report said.

Indian officials say the ISI has been using drones since 2019 to offload weapons and drugs in the border areas of Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir. At least a dozen cases of drone-based consignments have been detected since September 2019. Central and Punjab security agencies also believe Khalistan militants are using religious organisations and the ongoing farmers' protests over the contentious central farm laws to attract Punjab's youth to their cause. Ravneet Singh Bittu, the Congress MP from Ludhiana, alleges Khalistan elements having infiltrated the farmers' agitation taking place at Delhi's borders since last November. He blames the January 25 assault



on him at the Singhu border on Khalistan sympathisers.

Not only Punjab, Haryana is equally wary, given that its Sirsa, Hisar, Ambala, Fatehabad, Yamunanagar and Kurukshetra districts were once the hunting ground for Khalistan separatists. "We are watching the movement very carefully and treading cautiously. We will neither allow radicalisation nor violence," Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar told INDIA TODAY.

KHALISTAN 2.0

At its peak in the mid-1990s, the Khalistan movement, one of India's most violent insurgencies, had claimed 21,532 lives in a span of a decade and a half. The dead included 8,090 separatists, 11,696 civilians and 1,746 security personnel (1,415 from the Punjab police alone).

The movement began in April 1981 with US-based Khalistan ideologue Ganga Singh Dhillon demanding an independent Sikh homeland during a seminar in Chandigarh. This coincided with the rise of a charismatic militant figure, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who fortified himself with his followers inside Amritsar's Golden Temple in 1983, an event that led to Operation Blue Star or the storming of the temple complex by the Indian Army in June 1984 and the assassination of then prime minister Indira Gandhi by

her Sikh bodyguards in October.

By the mid-1990s, a determined fightback by security forces had wiped out the insurgency in Punjab. But the terror modules shifted base out of India. The leaders of four of the nine modules, Rode, Babbar, Neeta and Panjwar, and Dal Khalsa (International) founder Gajinder Singh 'Hijacker' operate from Lahore. Panjwar, believed to be a vital player in the Sikh radicalisation campaign, was earlier allegedly into smuggling of arms, narcotics and counterfeit currency into India and expanding the Khalistan network in Europe.

THE FOREIGN HAND

Khalistan 1.0 found strong echoes in the prosperous Sikh community in Canada, the US and the UK. The movement's second avatar now has a far more influential Sikh diaspora extending logistical support. It, officials allege, includes organisations like the SFJ and the Canada-based Poetic Justice Foundation (PJF), apart from the conventional Khalistan network. Their propaganda, which is also carried out through gurdwaras in their countries, is primarily built around Operation Blue Star and the anti-Sikh riots that followed Indira Gandhi's assassination.

The SFJ was launched in 2007 by Pannu, an immigrant cab driver-turned-attorney, to seek justice for victims of the 1984 riots.



Fuel price hike: A burning issue

High fuel costs threaten to stoke inflation and prompt spending cuts by consumers, hurting India's fragile post-pandemic recovery

At a time when Covid-19 has already taken a toll on thousands of lives and millions of livelihoods, there comes a new burden for consumers—soaring fuel prices. Over the past year, petrol prices in Delhi have risen nearly 24 per cent, with diesel prices rising 23 per cent. On February 22, petrol was priced at Rs 90.58 a litre in the capital, while diesel cost Rs 80.97. Rates were even higher in Mumbai, with petrol at Rs 97 a litre and diesel at Rs 88.06, both lifetime highs. In a few cities, such as Sri Ganganagar in Rajasthan and Anuppur in Madhya Pradesh, petrol has crossed the Rs 100 per litre mark.

Not only are high fuel prices burning a hole in consumers' pockets, they are also threatening to stoke inflation via increased transportation costs. A further spike in inflation could potentially prevent the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) from cutting lending rates, dampening India's efforts to engineer a sharp post-Covid

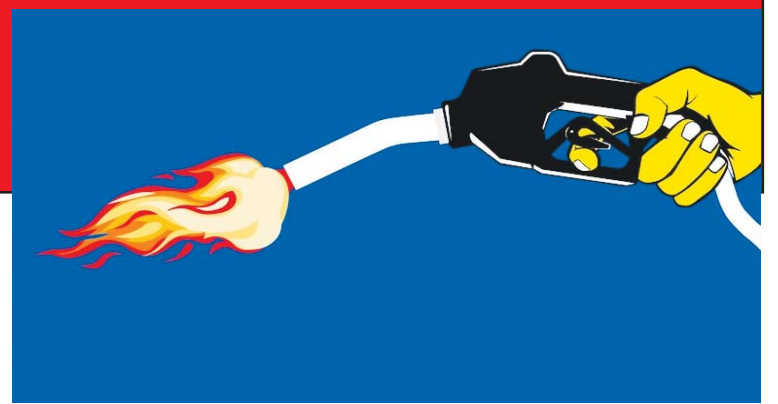
rebound in growth. A recent survey by Local Circles, a community-based social media network, of 22,000 citizens across 291 districts, showed that Indians are cutting back on spending to cope with rising fuel prices.

There are two reasons for the soaring fuel prices. One is the increase in the price of crude oil in the international market. The price of Brent crude, the raw material imported by Indian refineries, was about \$63 a barrel (about Rs 4,560) on February 22. This is a steep rise compared to crude prices in late March last year, when the world went into a lockdown. Crude prices had then crashed from the highs of over \$70 a barrel (Rs 5,065) in January 2020, to around \$14 to a barrel (Rs 1,013) on March 31. By May, prices had risen to the \$20 (Rs 1,447) mark, and ever since, have largely trended upward. The development of vaccines for Covid-19 and higher fuel demand post the lockdowns led to a revival in international crude oil

prices. Moreover, Saudi Arabia, the second-largest oil-producing nation after the United States, voluntarily cut oil production by one million barrels a day for the months of January and February in a bid to bridge the supply and demand imbalance. "Saudi Arabia is seeing a big threat to oil demand due to the continuing lockdown in several parts [of the world]," says Prashant Vasishth, vice president and co-head of corporate ratings at ICRA. OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) nations have also adhered to agreed supply cuts over January.

THE CRUDE IMPACT

India imports over 80 per cent of its crude oil requirements. Therefore, the increase in global crude prices directly impacts domestic fuel prices. In 2019-20, India imported 270 million tonnes of crude oil at a cost of \$120 billion (Rs 8.76 lakh crore). With the economy emerging from the lockdown, the demand for fuel has soared, necessitating higher im-



ports. In December, oil imports were about 29 per cent more than the previous month and about 11.6 per cent higher than a year earlier.

Since 2010, when petrol prices were decontrolled in India, prices have moved in tandem with international crude rates (the decision to decontrol diesel prices was implemented in 2014 to similar effect). Prices of petrol and diesel in India are fixed based on a 15-day average of benchmarked Arab Gulf fuel prices. Between April 1 and December 10 last year, petrol prices were revised 67 times. These revisions hit the headlines as fuel prices reached historic highs. "There are two main reasons behind the fuel price rise. The international market has reduced fuel production—[oil-producing] countries are pro-

ducing less fuel to gain more profit. This is making consumer countries suffer," Union petroleum minister Dharmendra Pradhan said on February 21.

But crude prices alone aren't responsible for the soaring cost of fuel. Additional duties and cesses levied by the Centre and state governments are also to blame. "Crude oil breached the \$60 a barrel mark only on February 8, 2021," points out Madan Sabnavis, chief economist with Care Ratings. Additionally, even when crude oil prices were in the region of \$60-65 a barrel around January 20-24 last year, the price of petrol in Delhi was much lower, at Rs 73-74 a litre, and that of diesel, around Rs 67-68 a litre. Therefore, the role of taxes and cesses in the fuel price cost can't be ignored, he argues.

The Jat engine



If the events of this year's Republic Day, when lumpen youth hijacked what had hitherto been a determined yet peaceful farmers' protest and led a siege of the iconic Red Fort, threatened to derail the movement, Rakesh Tikait's tears on Beating Retreat Day (January 28), when police tried to force-clear protesters from Ghazipur, put it right back on track. His emotional outburst not only re-energised the movement, but it also led to something more

momentous, bringing the Jats of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana together in solidarity with the Punjab farmer, undermining the central government's insinuations that the movement was confined to Punjab, that it was being used by Khalistani forces to further their own radical agenda and was the work of 'andolanjeevis', professional protesters who live off agitations.

Before long, Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) president Chaudhary Ajit

Singh, son of the legendary Chaudhary Charan Singh, buried his long-standing differences with the sons of Mahendra Singh Tikait, the renowned farmer leader of UP. The Tikait brothers, the elder Naresh, president of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), and Rakesh, its national spokesperson, were widely believed to have been behind Singh's defeat from Muzaffarnagar in the 2019 Lok Sabha election. The rivalry ran deep till very recently, for instance, instead of attending the BKU dhama on the Ghazipur border, Ajit Singh's son and RLD general secretary Jayant Chaudhary attended the farmers' dharna in Baraut in Baghpat district. Tikait's passionate appeal on January 28 changed all that, with Chaudhary tweeting in support the same night.

In neighbouring Haryana, too, after dissociating themselves from the movement in the wake of the

Rakesh Tikait's impassioned appeal has resuscitated the farmers' movement and given the Jats a leader to rally around, making the government's task that much more difficult.

Republic Day hooliganism, the khaps in the state once again backed the agitation. The mahapanchayat convened by the Sarva Jatiya Kandela Khap on February 4 had thousands turning up in solidarity. Attending it were the newly-anointed Jat leader Rakesh Tikait, BKU (Rajewal) chief Balbir Singh Rajewal and Aam Aadmi Party leader Gurnam Singh Chanduni, all three of whom have worked closely as part of the Sanyukt Kisan Morcha, the umbrella organisation of all farmers' unions protesting the contentious farm laws. For the BJP, the silence of Jannayak Janata Party (JJP) leader and Haryana deputy chief minister Dushyant Singh Chautala can only have sounded ominous.

LOSING THE PLOT IN UP

It is in UP that the consolidation of the Jat vote spells the maximum trouble for the BJP, given that the state goes to polls a year

from now. According to the 1931 caste census, 99 per cent of the Jat population in the state is concentrated in the 26 districts of the Agra, Aligarh, Saharanpur, Moradabad, Meerut and Bareilly divisions. Together, these six divisions account for 136 of UP's 403 assembly seats and 27 of its 80 Lok Sabha seats. RLD's Ajit Singh had been a prominent Jat leader in western UP till the Muzaffarnagar riots of 2013 left the region deeply polarised and saw Jat loyalties shift to the BJP. "Before the Muzaffarnagar riots," says R.K. Singh, a former professor in the political science department of Meerut University, "Jats and Muslims used to vote together in western UP. After 2013, the Jat and Muslim voters found themselves on opposite sides. The Jats left the RLD and went with the BJP. As a result, the BJP became stronger with the support of the Jat vote in western UP while RLD became weaker."

Georgia-based companies face boycott calls over voting bill

Opponents of a law that changed voting rules in Georgia are calling for boycotts of high-profile Georgia based companies, including Delta, Coca-Cola and Home Depot. The legislation's opponents say the companies didn't do enough to defeat the measure.

Republicans who passed the law say the measure is needed to stop illegal voting, playing on discredited claims of widespread fraud in last year's presidential election. Opponents say the legislation, and similar measures being considered in other states, amount to voter suppression efforts that will reduce minority voting. President Joe Biden has called the bill "Jim Crow in the 21st Century" and "an atrocity." The companies have issued

statements saying they support everyone's right to vote, expressing some disappointment with the legislation signed last week by Gov. Brian Kemp. "Over the past several weeks, Delta (DAL) engaged extensively with state elected officials in both parties to express our strong view that Georgia must have a fair and secure election process, with broad voter participation and equal access to the polls. The legislation signed this week improved considerably during the legislative process," said the statement from the Atlanta-based airline. "Nonetheless, we understand concerns remain over other provisions in the legislation, and there continues to be work ahead in this important

effort."

But that statement sparked backlash among bill opponents, who said Delta's comments were too supportive of the bill - highlighting the public-relations minefield the companies find themselves in.

"Delta's big mistake was claiming any credit at all, even if it had some positive impact on reducing the worst parts of the bill," said Brayden King, a business professor at Northwestern University who has studied the impact of corporate boycotts. After the initial criticism of its statement - and criticism of the legislation by some business leaders elsewhere in the country - Delta came out with a much stronger statement against the new law early



Wednesday.

"I need to make it crystal clear that the final bill is unacceptable and does not match Delta's values," said the statement to Delta employees from CEO Ed Bastian. "After having time to now fully understand all that is in the bill, coupled with discus-

sions with leaders and employees in the Black community, it's evident that the bill includes provisions that will make it harder for many underrepresented voters, particularly Black voters, to exercise their constitutional right to elect their representatives. That is wrong."

This IPO fail is a warning for the 'everything wins' rally



In recent months, investors haven't been able to pile quickly enough into the fast-growing companies hitting public markets. But the mood was different Wednesday in London, where shares of Amazon-backed food delivery service Deliveroo dropped as much as 30% in their first day of trading. The plunge wiped out roughly £2.3 billion (\$3.2 billion) in market value.

Deliveroo's stock was last trading at around £3.00 (\$4.14), about 23% below the price at which

shares listed. The £3.90 (\$5.36) IPO price was already at the bottom of the company's targeted range.

Sophie Lund-Yates, an equity analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown, said there appear to be a few reasons the IPO ran into trouble.

Another food delivery service, DoorDash, saw its shares soar 85% in their first day trading on the New York Stock Exchange in December. But since then, markets have become more unpredictable, as investors try

to assess the effects of an expected increase in prices later this year. Deliveroo cited "volatile" market conditions when it priced at the low end of its range. There's also growing concern about regulatory action surrounding gig economy companies. Uber is reclassifying its 70,000 drivers in the United Kingdom after the country's Supreme Court upheld

a ruling they should be classified as workers and not independent contractors. Its drivers will now be entitled to a minimum wage, vacation time and a pension. Several large institutional investors, including Aberdeen and BMO Global Asset Management, said last week that they would not participate in Deliveroo's IPO because they

had concerns about competition, regulation and the way the company treats its delivery riders. "If the government turned around and said it needed to treat workers as employees and include a mandatory 5% pension contribution, for example, that path to profitability for Deliveroo [becomes] incredibly murky," Lund-Yates told me.

Donald Trump launches new website for personal office after social media bans

Donald Trump is back online.

The former president and first lady, Melania Trump, have launched a website to serve their personal offices. The website, 45office.com, comes after Trump's ban from social media sites in the aftermath of the January Capitol insurrection.

The site features a lengthy biography for the former president that starts, "Donald J. Trump launched the most extraordinary political movement in history, dethroning political dynasties, defeating the Washington Establishment, and becoming the first true outsider elected as President of the United States." It also includes more than a dozen pictures of himself, in which he is depicted boarding Air

Force One, greeting North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un and, yes, kissing a baby. Other photos are of the president and Melania Trump dancing at the inaugural ball and at black tie dinners in the White House. The website makes no mention of his two impeachment trials. It does reference how "the coronavirus plague arrived from China," and says that Trump "acted early and decisively to ban travel from China and Europe, which saved countless lives." As of Tuesday, Covid-19 has killed at least 550,371 people and infected about 30.3 million in the United States since last January, according to data by Johns Hopkins University.

Job-hunting expert reveals BIGGEST mistakes people make on their résumés, from bad formatting to using the wrong vocabulary - and shares tips for how to create a perfect version

A recruitment expert whose company claims to have helped hundreds of thousands of jobseekers find employment is sharing the biggest résumé mistakes that people make - and what they should do to fix them. Los Angeles-based Jonathan Javier, a founder and the CEO of Wonsulting, shares some of his best job hunting Do's and Don'ts

on TikTok, where his most popular videos have been viewed millions of times.

Javier says that some of the worst mistakes people make on their résumés and CVs are bad formatting, employing over-used words and vague descriptions, and submitting anything that's over one page long.

Javier's company has helped

people find jobs at major brands including Google, Facebook, PwC, Yelp, Snap, Deloitte, Microsoft, EA, and Cisco.

Wonsulting offers résumé reviews, interview prep, and assistance with job searches and LinkedIn strategies - and since launching

the company in 2019, Javier has seen quite a lot of résumés, many of which include the same mis-

takes, over and over. On TikTok, Javier serves up a few quick tidbits for free, running down some of the biggest and most frustrating mistakes people make - which may very well be costing them interviews.

First, Javier warns people not to leave a lot of white space on their résumés. White space should be

filled in with more bullets, with applicants making the most of the page to sell themselves.

Bad formatting is another mistake: He has seen résumés that are entirely written in bold font, or which are misaligned so that columns don't line up evenly.

He also stresses that résumés should never be multiple pages long.

Here's how much physical exercise you should do as per the air pollution

A new study suggests when to do more or less physical exercise on days when air pollution levels are high, so as to reap maximum health benefits that prevent heart and blood vessel disease in young people

Physical activity is important in preventing heart and blood vessel disease in young people so long as they don't undertake very strenuous activity on days when air pollution levels are high, according to a nationwide study of nearly 1.5 million people. The study was published today (Tuesday) in the European Heart Journal.

Until now, little has been known about the trade-offs between the health benefits of physical activity taking place outdoors and the potentially harmful effects of air pollution.

Previous research by the authors of the current study had investigated the question in middle-aged people at a single point in time, but this is the first time that it has been investigated in people aged between 20-39 years over a period of several years. In addition, the researchers wanted to see what happens when

people increase or decrease their physical activity over time.

The researchers from Seoul National University College of Medicine (South Korea), led by Professor Sang Min Park, looked at information from the National Health Insurance Service (NHIS) in South Korea for 1,469,972 young Koreans living in cities, who underwent two consecutive health examinations during two screening periods: 2009-2010 and 2011-2012. They followed up the participants from January 2013 to December 2018.

At each health check-up, the participants completed a questionnaire asking about their physical activity in the past seven days and this information was converted into units of metabolic equivalent task (MET) minutes per week (MET-mins/week). The participants were divided into four groups: 0, 1-499, 500-999 and 1000 or more MET-mins/week.

European Society of Cardiology guidelines recommend people should try to do 500-999 MET-mins/week and this can be achieved by, for example, running, cycling or hiking for 15-30 minutes five times a week, or brisk walking doubles tennis or slow cycling for 30-60 minutes five times a week.

The researchers used data from the National Ambient Air Monitoring System in South Korea to calculate annual average levels of air pollution, in particular the levels of small particulate matter that are less than or equal to 10 or 2.5 microns in diameter, known as PM10 and PM2.5. The amount of exposure to air pollution was categorised at two levels: low to moderate (less than 49.92 and 26.43 micrograms per cubic metre, $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, for PM10 and PM2.5 respectively), and high (49.92 and 26.46 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ or more, respectively).



Dr Seong Rae Kim, the first author of the paper, said: "We found that in young adults aged 20-39 years old, the risk of cardiovascular diseases, such as stroke and heart attack, increased as the amount of physical activity decreased between the two screening periods in the group with low levels of exposure to air pollution.

"However, in the group with high levels of exposure to air pollution, increasing the amount of physical activity to more than 1000 MET-min/week, which is more than internationally recommended levels for physical activity, could

adversely affect cardiovascular health. This is an important result suggesting that, unlike middle-aged people over 40, excessive physical activity may not always be beneficial for cardiovascular health in younger adults when they are exposed to high concentrations of air pollution." He continued: "Ultimately, it is imperative that air pollution is improved at the national level in order to maximise the health benefits of exercising in young adults. These are people who tend to engage in physical activity more than other age groups while their physical ability is at its best.

Social factors key in increased knee injuries among girls, women. Here's why

Girls and women are said to be between three to six times more likely to suffer an anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injury, where one of the key ligaments that helps to stabilise the knee joint is damaged

A new study has found that social and not just biological factors are responsible for increased knee injuries among girls and women. The findings of the study were published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine. Current approaches to a common and debilitating knee injury that occurs more frequently for women than men have focused for too long on biology at the expense of understanding social factors, said the authors of the study. Girls and women are said to be between three to six times more likely to suffer an anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injury, where one of the key ligaments that helps to stabilise the knee joint is damaged. The devastating injury, which in extreme cases can be career-ending for professional sportspeople, commonly occurs during sports that involve sudden changes in direction (for example basketball, football/soccer, tennis).

The difference in injury rates for men and women has not changed for two decades, but, this might be partly due to how injury prevention and management has been approached to date. Writing in the BJSM the authors argued that much of the focus still



centres on biological and hormonal factors, with little attention paid to how sex-based factors are affected by gender and might influence each other.

They suggested that gendered experiences matter in shaping girls' and women's participation in sport as well as disparities in injury outcomes. They demonstrated how this could play out across the life course with gendered expectations of physical abilities (e.g. 'throw like a girl'), to inequitable access to funding, training, and facilities for women's sport (for example disparities

in access to weight training). Finally, they suggested there may be a difference between post-injury rehabilitation for men and women recovering from an ACL injury. They say that these social and environmental factors play a much bigger role in how sports injuries occur than once thought, and urge that much more attention be given to these topics.

Dr Sheree Bekker from the Department for Health at the University of Bath (UK) explained, "We wanted to unpack the biases and assumptions that we were seeing in research into and practice

around sports injuries in girls and women. Specifically, we wanted to challenge the increasingly pervasive idea that this is simply a problem for girls/women because they are inherently prone to injury just because of their female biology. Approaching ACL injury prevention and management from a strictly biological view can propagate sexism in sport with detrimental consequences for girls and women."

Dr Joanne Parsons from the University of Manitoba (Canada) added, "Over 20 years of research focussed on biological traits has failed to decrease the ACL injury rate in girls and women. To make a difference, we need to approach the problem in a different way. The recent challenges that the NCAA women's teams faced with access to adequate training equipment is a perfect example of why we have to include society's influence when talking about injury risk for girls/women."

The NCAA represents the National Collegiate Athletic Association - a non-profit that regulates student athletes from over 1,000 North American institutions whilst also organising athletic programmes reaching nearly 500,000 college student-athletes.



Are you taking a flight in April? Here are the new rules you should know

If you have a flight on April 1 or anytime during the month, or are planning to book a ticket for a journey soon, then you will find a host of new rules in place. Flights will become costlier in April and, because of the raging pandemic, there will be increased surveillance at airports. In addition, some states

have imposed restrictions for incoming passengers. Here is all you need to know about the new rules:

Flight tickets becoming costlier The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has hiked air security fee which will make air travel costlier from April 1. For domestic passengers, the rise

will be of ₹40. For international passengers, it will be of ₹114.38. The DGCA in March asked airlines to deboard passengers in case they refuse to wear the masks, following which actions were taken as well. Now, the aviation authority has asked airport operators to impose spot fines, punitive measures in case

passengers are not maintaining Covid-19 guidelines. The help of local police authorities can also be sought in this regard. If you are arriving in Delhi As Delhi Disaster Management Authority has mandated, random testing of passengers will be done at Delhi airport. Those who will be found positive will be sent to

quarantine. If you are travelling to Bengaluru, a negative RT-PCR report will be mandatory, irrespective of whether you are coming from a Covid-19 hotspot state or not. This rule is not applicable to people travelling to the rest of Karnataka. If you are travelling to Gujarat from any states, a negative test report is mandatory in April. If you are travelling to Uttarakhand from Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Rajasthan, a negative certificate is a must from April 1. This is also applicable to those who are travelling by bus or train.

The Taste by Vir Sanghvi: Why I am not travelling abroad

In this week's The Taste, Vir Sanghvi shares, "I fear being stuck in a strange country with Covid and recent stories from the Maldives are not reassuring."

I write this minutes after I have cancelled two trips scheduled for the next week. The first was a work trip to Bangalore. As of now, things are not so bad in the Karnataka capital but the numbers of Covid cases are rising and my colleagues and I both felt that it would be too risky to plan meetings that required travel. The second one was to Dubai. By the time I was due to leave for Dubai, I would have had both my Covid jabs and my hosts assured me that something like fifty per cent of the population of Dubai was already vaccinated. It was not, they said, like the situation that prevailed over Christmas/New Year when lots of people went to Dubai, said they had a great time and then suddenly vanished from view. It was only when you probed a little deeper that you discovered that they had all tested positive for Covid and were quarantining. Though I was assured that those days were long gone, and that Dubai was quite safe now, I was

still too much of a coward and cancelled the trip.

It made a difference to my state of mind, I think, that I had recently read about the Maldives experience. I went to the Maldives a month ago, had a great time and felt totally safe because you can't enter the Maldives without a Covid test and staff at the top resorts are tested regularly. My trip passed without incident. I took another test before returning and seemed to have avoided any infection.

But after reading horror stories in the papers about less fortunate visitors to the Maldives, I am beginning to wonder if I was too hasty in recommending that Indian tourists take advantage of the cheap deals on offer in the islands.

According to an article in last week's The Indian Express, a family that went to the expensive (but not deluxe) Dusit Thani resort in the Maldives were well-heeled and careful. They had tested negative for Covid but were

told that a passenger who had sat near them on their flight to the Maldives had tested positive. So they were tested again and found negative again. Even so, they were told they could not leave the resort for several days and were charged (though they did get discounts) for their additional days of enforced stay. The food at Maldivian resorts can be expensive so they paid upto \$200 per head per day for meals plus the room rate and then, their Covid tests came to another \$840.

Nobody who saves up for a holiday in the Maldives expects to pay for another 14 days in some of the world's more expensive resorts. The Indian Express article quotes travellers who had budgeted ₹8 lakh for four or five days in an upmarket resort but ended up spending ₹30 lakh because of continued enforced detention and tests due to quarantine.

How do people test positive for Covid while on holiday in the



Maldives when the government asks for negative PCR tests from all visitors? Well it is partly because the tests are usually done 72 hours before you land. The virus can take up to four or five days to show up in a test. So if you have just been infected, the virus will not be detected till you have begun your stay in the Maldives.

Besides, there is nothing to stop you from being infected on the flight to the Maldives (and flights have been jam-packed), at the airport, on the sea-plane to your resort or from picking it up from a staff member at your hotel --- only the top resorts test every staff member very regularly. Others take the line that because the resort is isolated and staff

don't leave, the chances of staff being infected is low.

I guess the reports about the Maldives worried me because, though travel restrictions around Covid have eased, my biggest fear is still of testing positive in a foreign country and ending up stuck there. This usually involves either shelling out lakhs on hotel bills or being carted off to a not-very-nice government facility. Neither prospect is very appealing.

All this is particularly depressing because at some subliminal level, we thought that, after a year of suffering, Covid was behind us. I don't know what is responsible for the current rise in cases but there is no doubt that Covid is back.

Don't fall for myths, rather detox the right way post Holi with these tips

There are several myths floating around the internet when it comes to post-Holi detoxing. It's time to bust them and offer a deeper insight into what helps with a happier and healthier life! Every festival comes with its own essence and flavour. Holi is a festival of colours and playful bonhomie, and one inevitably ends up in self-indulgence and over-eating. Sweets and fried foods have always been an integral part of festivities. Sugary and fried foods always end up making you feel sluggish, tired and bloated. But none of this stops us from either playing Holi or binging on our favourite sweets. So, what do people usually do?

The most common and popular solution is doing a detox plan. But, do you really need it? Let me bust a few myths about doing a detox first:

Myth 1: Your body needs help to detox

Fact: The body has an innate ability to not only assimilate nutrients, but also to limit the accumulation of potentially harmful toxins. It is naturally protected from toxins by natural barriers, which include the GI system,



lungs and the skin. The toxins which somehow cross these barriers are shuttled to the body's detoxification system (liver), which decreases the negative impact of toxins and finally removes them from the body via urine and faeces. Thus, the body needs no external help to remove toxins as long as its vital organs are healthy and functioning normally.

Myth 2: A detox helps in restoring health in the long run

Fact: Our bodies are already

equipped to handle occasional indulgences, but if you overindulge too often, even detox can't repair it. Excess fat and sugar gets stored as fat in the liver, leading to a condition called fatty liver. This condition gradually deteriorates its functioning. To restore health, switching to a sustainable diet with lean protein, whole grains, fruits and vegetables will give you all the benefits.

Myth 3: Detox is always safe

Fact: If done for a longer duration, it can be dangerous, as it

can lead to electrolyte imbalance, vitamin and mineral deficiencies, diarrhoea, other stomach problems and extreme fatigue.

Myth 4: Detox aids in permanent weight loss

Fact: Due to loss of fluids and muscle mass, detox might trigger weight loss, but it's neither healthy nor sustainable. On resuming normal eating, you will regain the lost weight.

The right way to DETOX:

Never use detox as a weight loss method. Do a detox plan (like fast-

ing, full day liquid or raw fruit and vegetable diet etc.) only for a day or maximum two days, just to help the body ease off its digestive system and remove excess bloating. The best time to do a detox plan is right after a party, festival or a holiday that involves a lot of binge eating and no exercise. Always get an appropriate detox plan in consultation with a nutritionist to avoid possible after effects.

But external detox is and will always be a quick fix. For a more permanent solution, follow the rule of "RELAX", and help your body detox and rejuvenate naturally.

1. 'REST WELL

To help your body rejuvenate quickly, give it adequate rest. Sound sleep helps relax the nervous system, reduces stress hormones and replenishes other hormones that enable the body to recharge faster.

2. 'Eat healthy food

Simple homemade food with balanced nutrients will naturally support the body's own detoxification process. Do not miss any meal just to compensate for all the junk you've eaten.

Eating just two sausages a WEEK increases your risk of heart disease and early death by up to 51%, study warns

Eating just two sausages per week increases your risk of cardiovascular disease (CVD) and early death, a multinational team of researchers have warned.

The team, led by experts at McMaster University and Hamilton Health Sciences in Canada, tracked the diets and health outcomes of 134,297 people from 21 countries spanning five continents, including Brazil, Argentina, Canada, Sweden and China.

They found a 46 per cent higher risk of major CVD events, like heart disease and stroke, as well as a 51 per cent higher risk of death among those who ate at least 150g a week of processed meat, compared with those who ate no processed meat.

Assuming 75g is a single sausage, this equates to just two sausages per week - but the risk applies to any form of processed meats, the experts warn. Processed meats are meats that have been preserved by smoking or salting, curing or adding chemical preservatives. Consumption of processed meats - such as sausages, ham, pâté, corned beef, smoked meat, salami and cured bacon - should be completely avoided, according

to the American Society for Nutrition, which published the study.

Research published earlier this month has already revealed just one rasher of bacon a day increases the risk of getting dementia by 44 per cent.



It's also already known that eating a lot of processed meat increases your risk of bowel cancer.

In 2015, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced that consumption of processed meat is 'carcinogenic to humans'.

But research has also shown that also that processed meat causes CVD - which a general term for conditions affecting the heart or blood vessels, including blood pressure, stroke and

vascular dementia.

All the different types of CVDs combined make it the number one cause of death globally, taking an estimated 17.9 million lives each year, according to WHO.

'We found an adverse association

between processed meat intake and health outcomes,' researchers say in their new paper, published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition.

'These findings may indicate that limiting the intake of processed meat should be encouraged.'

Consumption of unprocessed red meat and unprocessed poultry was not found to be associated with mortality nor major CVD events.

The amounts of preservative and food additives in processed and unprocessed meats differ markedly, which may partly explain their different effects on health, according to the team.

'The totality of the available data indicates that consuming a modest amount of

unprocessed meat as part of a healthy dietary pattern is unlikely to be harmful,' said study co-author Dr. Mahshid Dehghan at McMaster University, Canada.

Evidence of an association between meat intake and CVD has so far been inconsistent.

'We therefore wanted to better understand the associations between intakes of unprocessed red meat, poultry, and processed meat with major cardiovascular disease events and mortality,' said study author Dr. Romaina Iqbal at the Department of Community Health Sciences and Medicine, Aga Khan University, Karachi, Pakistan

To learn more, the team worked with data from the Prospective Urban Rural Epidemiological (PURE) study, a long-term study launched in 2003 by Dr. Salim Yusuf, Director of Population Health Research Institute, Canada.

PURE study is the first multinational study that provides information on the association between unprocessed and processed meat intakes with health outcomes from low, middle and high-income countries.

Godzilla vs Kong movie review

A lizard and a monkey achieve what Christopher Nolan couldn't

Godzilla vs Kong movie review: Loud, ludicrous, and featuring a final showdown that will likely make its target audience lose its mind, the latest MonsterVerse film is an improvement over its predecessor.

Godzilla vs Kong

Director - Adam Wingard

Cast - Alexander Skarsgard, Rebecca Hall, Millie Bobby Brown, Kyle Chandler, Bryan Tyree Henry, Julian Dennison

The worst thing to happen to Hong Kong since the protests, Godzilla vs Kong is too cartoonish to make you care about the collateral damage. Had it been a tad more self-serious (like the last major matchup movie, Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice), the wanton destruction in its third act would've been unforgivable. While most other cinematic universes have stumbled, Legendary's MonsterVerse continues to charge ahead almost out of sheer will, if not audience interest. Until now, the franchise had been a classic case of diminishing returns. While 2014's Godzilla appropriately updated the character to suit modern sensibilities, Kong: Skull Island made the mistake of populating its cast with too many human

beings; Godzilla: King of the Monsters took this a step further, and tried to convince viewers around the world that watching Kyle Chandler overcompensate for the lack of a script was a better alternative than watching a couple of CGI lunks punch each other for a couple of hours. It wasn't.

Which is perhaps why there is only a bare minimum Kyle Chandler here - a possible federal offence in any other movie, but all things said and done, a wise move in Godzilla vs Kong.

None of these movies, however, have cracked the code. The human-to-kaiju ratio in this film is still skewed, and not everyone has the skill required to inject humanity in primates that Matt Reeves brought to his Planet of the Apes movies, but Adam Wingard, directing his first blockbuster, certainly tries his best.

Our sympathies are clearly meant to be with Kong, not just because we share near-identical DNA, but because he's been given the greater character arc

of the two titular Titans. He's almost an underdog here, positioned as humanity's best bet/last defence against a particularly peeved off Godzilla. Sensing the presence of a new Monke, Godzilla's lizard brain kicks into gear, and he makes landfall in Pensacola - an event that probably made for some fabulous Florida man headlines the next day.

Here's what Wingard does in this film that neither Gareth Edwards, nor Jordan Vogt-Roberts, nor Michael Dougherty managed in the three films that came before. He hasn't quite solved the human problem, but at least his film is leaner than the others. Clocking in at well under two hours, Godzilla vs Kong isn't dominated by wall-to-wall action, and is propelled with a singleminded goal - to arrive at the final showdown. The humans are all essentially pawns that help move the plot along, until they're swept off the board to let the two Titans sort it out like gentlemen at the end.



It's somewhat ironic (and slightly fitting) that the most heartfelt moments in the movie involve two characters that can't speak. While the first film was rather sombre, each subsequent entry in the MonsterVerse has only gotten goofier - an indication, perhaps, of just how far the pendulum has swung away from the Nolanism of the early 2010s, towards the more Marvel-friendly tone that dominated the latter half of the decade.

Godzilla vs Kong is utterly ridiculous. But when it needs to be, especially for its audience, it can be very entertaining. To arrive at those 20 minutes of mayhem, however, you will have to tolerate unnecessary world-building and a clearly disinterested Alexander Skarsgard playing a scientist.

The film's box office certainly suggests that people are willing to put up with this; Godzilla vs Kong has managed to do what Christopher Nolan's Tenet couldn't -- audiences are lining up to watch this slugfest on the big screen.

The final showdown is a thing of beauty, choreographed with uncommon clarity by Wingard. It unfolds in Hong Kong, at nighttime, with the two Titans lit by neon skyscrapers. Unlike Edwards, who (very wisely) framed the kaiju from a ground-level, thereby heightening the scale, Wingard shoots the action as if from a virtual helicopter. The styles couldn't be more different from each other, but the objective, and the results, are the same.

Akshay Kumar Reveals first Look for Ram Setu as Shooting Begins for the Blockbuster

International megastar Akshay Kumar has given fans a taste of his character for the upcoming blockbuster Ram Setu, with the star beginning shooting for the film which will dig deep into the excavation of the popular Ram Setu.

One of the busiest stars in Bollywood, Akshay Kumar recently finished a well-deserved holiday and instantly got back to work. The star wrapped up filming for Atrangi Re over the weekend and jumped straight into this new project, which will



certainly be a unique one for the actor. Akshay Kumar will play an archaeologist in the film and this new look was inspired by several Indian and international professional archaeologists who work in the field. Sporting a stylish look, Akshay Kumar gave fans the first glimpse of what to expect. The photo shows him wearing a pair of glasses, while his hair is longer than usual. The scarf around his neck certainly oozed sophistication too!

Joining Akshay Kumar in Ram Setu, will be

Jacqueline Fernandez and Nushratt Bharuccha, who will star as the film's lead actresses.

The production for Ram Setu will follow strict protocols to ensure the safety of all those involved with the film. This includes regular health checks to mitigate any COVID-19 risks.

Known for always interacting with his fans, Akshay Kumar was keen to know what they thought of this look. Sharing this post with his 100M+ followers:

"The journey of making one of the most special films for me begins today. #RamSetu shooting begins! Playing an archaeologist in the film. Would love to hear your thoughts on the look? It always matters to me." Fans have been eagerly awaiting the release of Ram Setu since Akshay Kumar gave them a first glimpse on Diwali last year! Although a release date is yet to be announced, fans will still get to enjoy seeing Akshay Kumar in action, with films such as Sooryavanshi, Prithviraj and Bell Bottom on the horizon.

A.R. Rahman launches Ehan Bhat and Edilsy Vargas, Cinema's Next Big Actors, with 99 Songs

Oscar and Grammy Award-winning musician A.R. Rahman discovers an all-new expanse of his artistry as he turns producer and writer for 99 Songs. With this film, a romantic musical, the maestro also introduces to the world the next big actors to watch out for - Ehan Bhat and Edilsy Vargas.

The enigmatic talent, presence and gravitas of Ehan and Edilsy have got netizens excited to see a fresh pairing on the big screen. The actors

will be seen undertaking a musical quest in this love story presented by Jio Studios. A.R. Rahman says, "It is my pleasure to introduce the talented lead cast, Ehan Bhat and Edilsy Vargas. They both are very promising and have a lot of potential in them. I wish them a great

cinematic journey ahead."

An elated Ehan Bhat shared, "I am humbled with the response that Edilsy and I have been getting since the launch of the 99 Songs

trailer. The support a n d encouragement for our film and its music is heartening. I am grateful to Rahman sir for giving us this opportunity which doesn't come easily for someone with absolutely no background in Bollywood. It has

been such an unbelievable journey." 99 Songs will release in Hindi, Tamil, and Telugu on 16th April, 2021. Presented by Jio Studios, the film is produced by A.R. Rahman's production company YM Movies and co-produced by Ideal Entertainment.



Yami Gautam shares first look as mastermind Naina Jaiswal from A Thursday

Yami Gautam took to Instagram to share the first look of her character, Naina Jaiswal, from her upcoming direct-to-digital thriller, A Thursday. Yami, who will be essaying the role of a school teacher Naina in A Thursday, referred to the character as the 'mastermind'. Along with the first look, Yami also shared a picture of herself with director Behzad Khambata. A Thursday, also starring Neha Dhupia, Dimple Kapadia, Atul Kulkarni and Maya Sarao in important roles, is based on unthinkable events taking place on a regular Thursday. **YAMI SHARES A THURSDAY FIRST LOOK**

Yami shared her first look as Naina Jaiswal on Instagram, along with a candid shot of herself with director Behzad Khambata. The director-actor duo seems to be discussing a scene, set in a playschool, where Yami is sitting at what looks like a kids' table with Lego pieces around her. Behzad, on the other hand, is reading to her from a piece of paper, as the two smile.

Along with the pictures, Yami wrote, "The Mastermind. Naina Jaiswal in #ATHursday (sic)."

Behzad Khambata also shared the same two pictures on his Instagram handle.

Ronnie Screwvala's production house, RSVP Movies, which is financing the film, also unveiled the much-awaited look of Yami

Gautam.

YAMI GAUTAM AS NAINA JAISWAL

Yami will be essaying the role of a simple school teacher, named Naina Jaiswal. Her look is kept very clean and pristine, in keeping with her character.

A Thursday revolves around the life of a playschool teacher, who takes 16 toddlers hostage. The audience can expect an edge-of-the-seat thriller like A Wednesday. Ronnie Screwvala, who produced A Wednesday, will also back this one.

YAMI AND NEHA DHUPIA KICKSTARTED A THURSDAY

About two weeks ago, Yami Gautam and Neha Dhupia started shooting for A Thursday. Sharing a picture of the clapboard from the film's set, Yami wrote, "Breaking News: A series of unforgettable events are about to come your way, all that happened on #ATHursday (sic)."

Neha shared the same picture and wrote, "A day that changed everything... #ATHursday goes on floors. So Glad to be a part of this project. With big hug to this awesome team (sic)."

Tiger Shroff shot Baaghi 2 helicopter scene without a body double. On Tuesday Trivia

Two years after the phenomenal success of Tiger Shroff and Shraddha Kapoor's action-packed film Baaghi, the second instalment, Baaghi 2, released on March 30, 2018. Starring real-life couple Tiger Shroff and Disha Patani, the film boasted of some jaw-dropping action sequences and flawless stunts. When the trailer of the film released, the key highlights were Tiger-Disha's on-screen chemistry, the songs and, of course, the mind-blowing stunts. However, did you know that Tiger Shroff did not use a body double for shooting his action sequences in Baaghi 2?

Baaghi 2 completes three years today and

on this week's Tuesday Trivia, we will talk about how Tiger Shroff shot for some jaw-dropping action sequences without a body



double in the film. Everyone remembers the helicopter scene, right? The scene, that involved, not one, but two helicop-

ters, was shot in the jungles of Krabi, Thailand. Tiger Shroff and director Ahmed Khan admitted that shooting for the scene wasn't easy and involved a lot of risks. In fact, the actor had admitted in an earlier interview how shooting for certain action scenes in Baaghi 2 was most challenging. However, Tiger wasn't daunted by the challenges and performed all the stunts by himself, without a body double. "The helicopter sequence that is there in the film, that jump was very difficult for me because that involved a lot of risk factors."



Shah Rukh Khan drops a strong hint about his next film during #AskSRK session



Shah Rukh Khan, on Wednesday (March 31) afternoon, hosted an #AskSRK session for his fans on Twitter. The actor answered some

SHAH RUKH KHAN DROPS A STRONG HINT ABOUT HIS NEXT SRK is known for his witty replies and this time was no different. When a fan requested King Khan to spill the beans on his next, the superstar wrote, "Strong hint: apni sab next movies mein main star kar raha hoon!! Don't tell anybody please." Responding to another fan who asked SRK to announce his next formally, the actor wrote, "Announcements are for airports and railway stations my friend....movies ki hawa toh khud ban jaati hai (sic)." **SRK SAYS JALDI SHOOTING KARTA HOON**

Yet another fan requested SRK to return to the big screen. He wrote, "Sir please jaldi screen par par aao apko screen pe dekh ne ke liye pura theatre book karwa lunga araam se dekhunga par please aajo. 3 saal 3 mahine 31 days hogye hai (sic)." Replying to the fan, SRK wrote, "Really!! That's a long time even for patience. Jaldi jaldi shooting karta hoon don't worry." Shah Rukh Khan was last seen in 2018 film Zero starring Anushka Sharma and Katrina Kaif as the leading ladies. **SRK'S PATHAN ANNOUNCED BY VISHAL DADLANI**

Shah Rukh Khan will next be seen in Pathan. Vishal Dadlani had recently announced the film on Twitter, leaving all fans excited. SRK, however, has not announced the film yet. Taking to Twitter, Vishal Dadlani wrote, "No number from the past matters, no number in the future is too big! The whole world is waiting to watch @iamsrk! More importantly, we're all working towards a kickass film with great songs! #Pathan #VishalAndShekhar #SiddharthAnand @yrf @ShekharRavjani (sic)."

Priyanka Chopra to be seen in a Bollywood film next year, actress reveals



Priyanka Chopra will star in a Bollywood film next year. The actress revealed the same during an 'Ask Me Anything' session on Twitter. The actress's last Hindi film was *The Sky Is Pink*, which released in 2019. The biographical comedy-drama was directed by Shonali Bose and also starred Farhan Akhtar, Zaira Wasim and Rohit Saraf in lead roles. **PRIYANKA TO BE SEEN IN A BOLLYWOOD FILM NEXT YEAR**

A fan asked Priyanka Chopra about her upcoming Bollywood film. The fan wrote, "What's your next upcoming Bollywood movie?" Priyanka replied, "Next year!!!"

PRIYANKA ON WORKING WITH RICHARD MADDEN IN CITADEL

Priyanka is currently shooting for Amazon Prime Video's show *Citadel*. The series also stars *Game of Thrones* star Richard Madden. During the 'Ask Me Anything' session a fan asked Priyanka about her experience of shooting the show with Richard. She replied, "Richard is the best."

WHAT'S ON THE WORK FRONT?

Apart from *Citadel*, Priyanka will be seen in *Text for You*. She will also be seen in an Indian wedding comedy with Mindy Kaling. Priyanka Chopra is a part of *Matrix 4* and a film based on Maa Anand Sheela.

This Sassy Video Is Vidya Balan's Response To Those Who Say She "Only Wears Indian" Outfits

Let us start by saying that Vidya Balan is a queen in her own unique way of being a fashionista. There's no denying that Vidya Balan is particularly fond of traditional outfits but that should let one assume she cannot turn heads in a sequin dress. On Wednesday, Vidya Balan finally decided to address those who have something to say about her sartorial choices. So, she got a little creative on Instagram and came up with a super cool video. Set to the song *Woman* by BoA, Vidya can be seen strutting towards the camera in a yellow salwar kameez. What happens next, is an unexpected twist. She switches into a bodycon dress at the snap of fingers.



With her hair in retro waves and sporting scarlet lips, Vidya Balan is a sight to behold in green sequin. "When people tell me I only wear Indian... Snap!" she captioned her video. Here, take a look. For those who follow Vidya Balan must know that she is partial towards sarees, flooding her social media feed with "Saree not sorry" posts. In her Instagram story recently, she wrote: "Put me in a saree and I'll pose." Here's a glimpse at her "saree and sharmana." Here's a walk through Vidya Balan's closet on Instagram: In terms of work, Vidya Balan was last seen in *Shakuntala Devi*, a biopic on the legendary math genius. Vidya Balan will be next seen in *Sherni*, directed by Amit Masurkar. Vidya Balan will reportedly portray the role of a forest officer in the movie, the filming of which has been delayed because of the pandemic situation.



Dharmendra's Grandson Rajveer Deol To Make His Bollywood Debut

"Introducing my grandson Rajveer Deol to the world of cinema," tweeted Dharmendra

Dharmendra's grandson Rajveer Deol is all set to make his big Bollywood debut. The Bollywood veteran announced the news in his latest tweet on Wednesday morning. Rajveer, who is the son of actor Sunny Deol, will step into the film industry with a film which will be backed by Rajshri Productions. Dharmendra, in his tweet, asked his fans to "shower the same love and affection" that he and his sons Bobby and Sunny have received over the years. He tweeted, "Introducing my grandson Rajveer Deol to the world of cinema along with Avnish Barjatya's directorial debut. I humbly request you all to shower the same love and affection on both the kids as you have on me. Good luck and God bless." Meanwhile, the official Instagram page of Rajshri Produc-



tions also announced Rajveer Deol's association with the project and wrote:

"Rajshri Productions proudly announces the collaboration of Rajveer Deol and Avnish Barjatya in a coming-of-age love story. A beautiful journey awaits ahead." A few years ago, Rajveer's brother Karan Deol made his Bollywood debut with the film *Pal Pal Dil Ke Paas*, which was directed by their father Sunny Deol and produced by Sunny Sounds Pvt Ltd and Zee Studios. The film also featured Sahher Bambha. Karan Deol will next be seen in *Apne 2*, alongside his grandfather Dharmendra, his father Sunny Deol, and uncle Bobby Deol. The film is the second installment of the 2007 release titled *Apne*, which also featured Shilpa Shetty, Katrina Kaif

and Kirron Kher besides members of the Deol family.

Why so much mystery over Amit Shah-Sharad Pawar meeting

(SAI Bureau)-Maharashtra Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president Chandrakant Patil is the only person who has on record confirmed that Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief Sharad Pawar, accompanied by his Man Friday Praful Patel, met Union Home Minister Amit Shah in Ahmadabad on March 26 night.

Everyone else present at the meeting has neither fully confirmed nor denied it. In apparent confirmation, Amit Shah said, "Not all things can be made public." Patil did not name him but industrialist Gautam Adani was also present at the meeting.

Sharad Pawar has not made a single statement about the meeting. At the time of writing this article, he was admitted in Mumbai's Breach Candy Hospital, scheduled to undergo a surgery for gallstones. Praful Patel has said nothing on the record but sources close



to him did confirm that he and Sharad Pawar were in Ahmadabad on March 26 and did visit Adani. But they refused to make any statement about whether they met Amit Shah. On the other hand, the NCP - through its national spokesperson Nawab Malik - has unequivocally denied that a meeting between Pawar, Patel and Shah took place. Despite this, there are many the Maharashtra's political circle who believe that this meeting did take place. And, if we say that this meeting happened then we

have to search for the reason behind it. It is naïve to even think or believe that leaders who appear to be arch enemies do not meet each other and share their notes or thoughts about various topics concerning their politics. They always keep options open.

(Contd on page 28)

Covid-19 was third leading cause of death last year, CDC confirms in early data



(SAI Bureau)- Covid-19 was the third leading cause of death in the United States last year, after heart disease and cancer, according to provisional data released on Wednesday by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The death rate from 2019 to 2020 increased by 15.9%, going up from 715.2 to 828.7 deaths per 100,000 people, according to the report. The early data showed that the top 10 leading causes of death in 2020 were:

(Contd on page 28)

Now SpongeBob is canceled! 'Kwarantined Krab' episode about 'Clam flu' pandemic is pulled because it might stoke anti-Asian hate



(SAI Bureau)-Beloved children's cartoon SpongeBob SquarePants is under fire for two previous episodes, which have since been pulled from streaming services.

The decision comes as the rise in anti-Asian discrimination and violence linked to the coronavirus pandemic rocks the United States, which one of the two pulled episodes arguably touched upon.

It's the latest in a move toward sanitizing cultural staples that are now seen by some to be offensive: The company that looks after Dr. Seuss's books said it would stop publishing six of them that they

(Contd on page 28)

Infrastructure was a Trump punchline but is a window into Biden's soul

(SAI Bureau)- President Joe projects in developing countries like Biden's infrastructure plan is no joke. China. The program is the latest The huge -- more than \$2 trillion -- proposal he will unveil Wednesday covers an expansive and vital policy area that became a Washington punch line in the Trump administration and resulted in painful dashed hopes for previous presidents.



For Biden, infrastructure is about far more than fixing America's creaking and crumbling roads and bridges, airports and railroads that are often compared unfavorably to gleaming 21st century

(Contd on page 29)

Farm protests need a resolution, now



(SAI Bureau)- Even as political and media attention has shifted away from the farm protests to the assembly elections, it is important to note that the protests have not ended. Indeed, organisations, activists and farmers who are opposed to the three new farm laws have continued their agitation both at Delhi's borders and in Punjab, Haryana and parts

(Contd on page 29)