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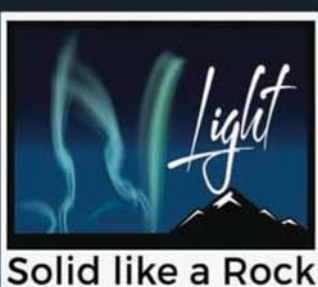
Blame Game

India's Republic Day Marked With Massive Protests by Farmers.

- Farm leaders overestimated their ability to control a large and diverse group, while Delhi Police underestimated the scale of the rally.
- Violence erupted across India's capital city of New Delhi on Tuesday when thousands of farmers protesting the government's agricultural reform bills rode tractors past police barriers and clashed with officers.



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America resumes relation with India under the profess of Biden

(Insider Bureau)- The political ties between USA and India have renewed as the term of the new president of the USA begins. When Joe Biden takes oath as the 46th President, he is, hopefully starting a new chapter of cordiality between the two countries.

The White House spokesperson affirms the Indo-US relationship as Biden confirms on resuming it. Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi is looking forward in having a word with the new US president as soon as the meeting with allied countries would be held.

Jen Psaki, the white house press secretary elaborates the news and says that Biden who has already visited India quite a many times would be visiting again, soon. He looks forward in holding on the strong bond of these two countries and values the bipartisan successful

relationship that they always had. He recalls the time from 2008 when Biden had visited India and had played a major role in the approval of US Congress in the civil nuclear deal between the two countries as a chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

In reference to this topic, Biden had also visited India in 2013 only as a Vice President this time. In 2016 he also led a joint session of the US Congress which was held by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. They shared quite a rapport since then till Biden came to the power and was elected the US President in November 2020.

Likewise news floats - it might prove that Biden is fond of India and Indians. Hence, he has nominated at least twenty Indian Americans, of which thirteen are women, in a number of key positions in his administration. As

per the indication, seventeen of them are going to be a part of the White House power circle.

The high number of Indian American representation is the indication of changing times. Another major point in the new administration is, of course, the new vice-president Kamala Harris. She is the highest-ranking woman to hold office in US history and the first Indo-American as well as the first person of South Asian descent to hold this office.

According to Joe, Kamala Harris is the one behind cementing the relationship between the two countries. Further information states that Kamala Harris is of Indian origin. Her mother, Shyamala Gopalan Harris is from Chennai and came to the US after being married to the Jamaican Donald Harris.

Indian Prime Minister Modi congratulated Biden soon after he was sworn to be the American president. He tweeted a message and showed interest in continuing and committing to the Indo-US relationship in future. He made it clear that the countries would



stand hand in hand unified and face global challenges together by dealing all the hardships, maintaining peace and security. He wants the relationship to soar to even greater heights as they share a substantial and multifaceted bilateral agenda by getting engaged economically, creating a link between the citizens. He looks forward to introduce strategies that would strengthen the India-US partnership.

As the new policies settle in the US, both the countries grew an interest in knowing the policies that would approach the Indian

land. Antony Blinken, the nominee Secretary of States also boasts of the bipartisan relationship of the two but one thing that bothers him is the climate. According to him, India is poised over for next two-three decades till he catches up with China in terms of emission.

Biden gave a lecture on democracy at his inaugural speech on the day he was elected. This also proves that he has a democratic mind as he speaks of implementing and prevailing democracy all over the US, letting the citizens continue enjoying freedom.

Chinese New Year - 'Year of the OX' Will be organized vittually



STONY BROOK, NY (Insider Bureau)- The Suffolk County Asian American Advisory Board and the Holiday Inn Express-Stony Brook will be giving a warm welcome to the "Year of the Ox" for this Chinese New Year with a virtual celebration on February 12 at 6 p.m. The event will be held via ZOOM and live streamed on YouTube. For more information visit: www.scaaab.org

The free virtual event will feature an entertaining professional variety show, cultural presentations and raffle. Chinese New Year is the longest national holiday in China and New Year's

day is the most important date in the Chinese calendar. The virtual celebration will include a raffle, with many prizes, including one free nights' stay at the Holiday Inn Express-Stony Brook. The Holiday Inn Express-Stony Brook has sponsored the Chinese New Year event for the past eight years.

Registration for the raffle is FREE, but you must register through: www.scaaab.org.

The Stony Brook vicinity has one of the largest Asian-American populations on Long Island.

The Holiday Inn Express Stony Brook is located at 3131 Nesconset Highway in Stony

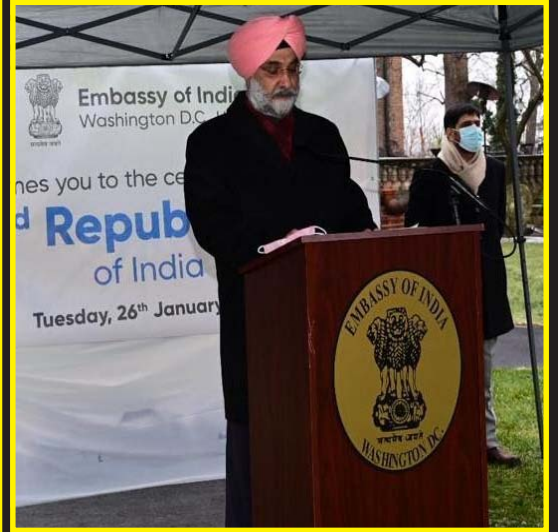


1 in 7 children faces hunger.

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



Celebration of 72nd Republic Day



(Insider Bureau)-The 72nd Republic Day of India was celebrated in Washington D.C. with a flag-hoisting ceremony on 26th January, 2021 at the India House. Members of the Indian community joined the celebrations in large numbers virtually, in view of the local public health guidelines due to COVID 19. Ambassador of India, H.E. Taranjit Singh Sandhu, unfurled the tricolor, which was followed by singing of the National

Anthem. In his remarks to the community, Ambassador complimented them for their work during the pandemic and their role in bringing India and the US closer. He said that the Indian Government "looks forward to working with the new Administration, led by President Joseph Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris. From outer space to nanotechnology, from the Indo-Pacific to climate change, from healthcare to

education & IT, there is a recognition, that our partnership can benefit, not just our two nations, but the entire world." The Address by the Hon'ble President of India on the eve of Republic Day was played. This was followed by a short cultural program involving local artist and rendition of patriotic songs by students of Gandharva School of Music, Richmond and a violin recital by Mr. Kamalakiran Vinjamuru.

Rotary District 7255 participated in Million Mask Challenge

(By a staff reporter) Hicksville New York: Rotary District 7255 recently was a part of the Million Mask Challenge where over 300,000 masks were given out to be distributed across Brooklyn, Queens, Nassau and Suffolk Counties. The Rossi Family Foundation sponsored the mask contributions and the event organization was done by Rotary Past District Governor Jack Solomon. Forty one clubs from the District and Rotarians came to the Sears Parking lot on Broadway in Hicksville, New York for getting the masks allotted to

their Club for further distribution to the needy people in their communities. Present were Fire Trucks and members of Fire Departments of Glen Cove and Hicksville to receive the surgical masks for their use as our first responders, front line and essential workers!

Citations and Proclamations were given out by the representing officials of the Offices of Senator Kevin Thomas, Nassau County Executive Laura Curran and Supervisor of Town of Oyster Bay Joseph Saladino to Rotary District 7255 Governor - Jaqueline Yonick,

Rotary District 7255 Governor Elect - Mel Ellwood, Rotary Club of Hicksville South Club President - Nilima Madan, RCHS Project Chair - Quddus Mohammed and RCHS Project Co Chair - Sandy Bhatia

In spite of so much being done for safety for the continuing concerns of the Covid Pandemic this timely effort, for a great cause and good of needy individuals, will go far. It was amazingly organized and supported well and a great experience to see so many Rotarians come together. As a participating club Rotary Club of



Hicksville South received 15,000 masks and distributed them to recipient organization representatives present, there and then namely, SACSS – South Asian Council of Social Services, Domestic Harmony Foundation,

United Methodist Church of Hempstead (further to several churches), Asian American Community Services, Kingdom Family Ministry and others. RCHS will also shortly be giving

Hempstead Town Celebrates 72nd India Republic Day With a Ceremonial Flag Raising Over Town Hall

Supervisor Don Clavin and the Town Board recognized the holiday as an important celebration of freedom in the world's most populous democracy, and thanked the Indian-American community for their contributions to America's largest township.



deep ties produced through this transoceanic partnership extend to the individual level as well, with the United States being home to



(Insider Bureau)- Hempstead Town Supervisor Don Clavin was joined by members of the Town Board and dignitaries from the Indian American Forum for a ceremonial hoisting of the National Flag of India to mark the 72nd India Republic Day. The small socially distanced ceremony held outside of Hempstead Town Hall was an important show of solidarity between the world's most populous democracy as it observed its historical day of transition to a republic, and America's largest township. What's more, the event was streamed live on the Town of Hempstead Facebook Page and featured a special message from

the Consulate General of India, New York, Mr. Randhir Jaiswal. "The Town of Hempstead is the proud home of a great number of Indian-American families who continue to add to the incredible diversity found in the economic, civic, and cultural life of America's largest township," said Supervisor Don Clavin. "Our community is better for their contributions, and I am glad to celebrate this important day with my Indian-American neighbors." The histories of both the United States and the Republic of India have been interwoven through the decades since the original Republic Day whereupon the two nation's emerged as intrinsic partners on the world stage. The

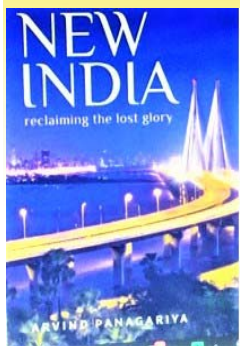


a large and fast growing Indian American community.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has forced celebrants to reimagine traditional Republic Day festivities both in the

Town of Hempstead and elsewhere, Supervisor Clavin and the Town Board felt it necessary to observe the holiday which honors the adoption of the Constitution of India on January 26, 1950 and the transition of the nation to a republic. The limited event still featured the recognition of three honorees by the Town of Hempstead and the Indian American Forum, as well as patriotic song performances and blessings from Pandit Samiran Chakraborty of New York Kali Mandir Temple. Nipun Marwaha performed the American and Indian National Anthems and Jyoti Gupta led the patriotic song medley. The event was sponsored by the Indian American Forum, Long Island Ladies Circle, Indian Association of Long Island and the India Day Parade Committee. Also in attendance was Chairwoman of the Indian American Forum Indu Jaiswal and Bobby Kumar Kalotee, Chairman of Friends for Good Health and Nassau Health Care Corporation Board Member.

Dr. Arvind Panagariya Discusses How India will Regain its Lost Glory at Gopio Republic Day Talk



(Insider Bureau)-In an insightful and thought provoking talk and discussion, which was moderated by Dr. Thomas Abraham and Dr. Neerja Arun Gupta, the author of the latest book, "New India - Reclaiming the past Glory," Dr. Arvind Panagariya shared with the attendees from across the world on ways India can "regain the lost glory." The talk and discussion followed by rendering of patriotic songs were part of the India's 71st Republic Day celebrations on Zoom organized

by the Global Organization of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO) on Saturday, January 23rd. Dr. Thomas Abraham, Chairman of GOPIO International welcomed the participants from all continents, from USA to Australia, to New Zealand, and provided a brief introduction to the birth and the programs by GOPIO. While pointing to the impact of COVID on human life, he expressed hope that a new beginning with the vaccination rolled out. He showed how with the initiatives from GOPIO, today

how PIOs/NRIs have become elected officials across the globe. "The election of Kamala Harris is a pride moment for all Indian Americans," he said.

In his introduction to Dr. Arvind Panagariya, Dr. Thomas Abraham said, "He is a Professor of Economics and the Jagdish Bhagwati Professor of Indian Political Economy at Columbia University. From January 2015 to August 2017, he served as the first Vice Chairman of the NITI Aayog, Government of India in the rank of a Cabinet Minister. During these years, he also served as India's G20 Sherpa and led the Indian teams that negotiated the G20 Communiqués during presidencies of Turkey (2015), China (2016) and Germany (2017). Taking the audience to the glorious days of India, the scholar said, India accounted for 38% of the total world economy in the

first millennium and it continued to grow in the second millennium. In the 17th century, India accounted for 20% of world's total GDP, with India and China accounting for 50% of total world economy. With the arrival of British rule, India began to lose its place in world with the Western nations growing at a faster pace while India's economy stayed stagnant. In 1947, when India got Independence from Britain, India's economy was mere 3% of the total world GDP, he pointed out. "With a GDP that just reached \$2.6 trillion, India is poised to become the world's third largest economy in less than a decade," Arvind Panagariya told an audience consisting of people from around the world who had joined together virtually to celebrate India's Republic Day on Saturday, January 22nd, 2021. "Now, India

is well poised to regain the lost glory," Panagariya said. During the posy Post-Independence period, India, after initial setbacks and slower growth embarked on a new path with former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao opening up the economy in the early 1990s, giving impetus to growth and sustained investment, Panagariya said. "India's watershed moment came in 1991, when we changed policy, and a New India began to emerge." Following in the footsteps of Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Narasimha Rao, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his government have expanded on the reforms, inviting more investment and brad-based growth, Panagariya said. From a mere 4% annual growth, India has been registering an average 8% growth in the past two decades, which is remarkable, he pointed out.

Federation of Indian Industry's US chapter formed

(Insider Bureau)-The US Chapter of the Federation of Indian Industry (FII) was formally constituted on Tuesday, January 12. In a virtual meeting, the members reaffirmed their commitment to promoting a strengthened relationship between Indian and US industries.

FII's Director-General Deepak Jain, who chaired the session, said the relations of both countries can be strengthened for the development of the industry. He urged the new committee to set its plans for the United States on those lines.

Mr Jain nominated Rachna Nath, Coordinator of the US Chapter, as Secretary of the US Chapter. Ms Nath, who will conduct and carry forward FII



activities in the United States, provided an introduction to FII to the members, and shared her vision to build the US Chapter as a backbone in US-India relationship.

She introduced the following members:

Dr Arvind Phukan and Sameer Jain as Vice Presidents

Babu Raman K as Joint Secretary

Nupur Jain as Treasurer

Sunil Hali as Advisor and an oversight for Communication

Rajan Gangahar as an Advisor and an oversight for logistics

Dr. Suresh Gupta as an Advisor and mentor

Mark Bardoloi, Radhika Siva,

Ramya Ranganathan, Akshay Jain as Executive Members

Hitender Mehta, Chairman of the International Affairs of the

FII, briefed members on the upcoming plans to build a strong corridor with North East and various chapters of FII in India and across the world, synchronized with which the newly elected cadres of the US Chapter would work. Members were explained about their role in the new FII chapter.

The main functions of FII's US Chapter will be to build relationships with leading US and international institutions, including the United Nations, Chambers of Commerce, and help US and Indian industries connect and associate.

Ms Nath proposed a vote of thanks. FII Vice President Dr Shailendra Vyas conducted the meeting.

Relief for spouses of H1B workers as Biden withdraws plans to shelve H4 work permits

With the Biden administration acting swiftly to issue clarity in this regard, H1B visa holders and their spouses eligible for the H4 work permit can now breathe a sigh of relief.

(Insider Bureau)-Less than a week since his inauguration, US President Joe Biden has decided to revoke the Trump-era rules concerning H4 work permits. This move comes as a great relief for spouses of H1B holders living in the United States of America, many of them, Indians. The US government's official data shows that Indian and Chinese workers account for a majority of H1B visas. In 2019, Indians filed 74 per cent of all H1B petitions while the Chinese accounted for 11.8 per cent.

During his second term, the then-president Barack Obama took a landmark decision in 2015 by allowing a certain subset of spouses of H1B visa holders to work in the US. The decision was challenged in courts and eventually overturned as Donald Trump took office.

Ever since 2017, recipients of the H4 work permit have been on the edge of their seats owing to changes in the rules fuelled by Trump's "Buy American and Hire American" policy aimed at appeasing the Republican vote

base. With the Biden administration acting swiftly to issue clarity in this regard, H1B visa holders and their spouses eligible for the H4 work permit can now breathe a sigh of relief.

According to the Cato Institute, Indians make up 75 per cent of the employment-based visa backlog in the US. "Over 2,00,000 Indians could die of old age waiting for green cards," the public policy research think tank said. Each year, the USA issues 1,40,000 green



cards and a single country's share cannot be more than 7 per cent.

Policy documents released by the Biden campaign during the

presidential election had hinted at the lifting of the cap on green cards and visas for immediate family members of green card holders.

Kamala Harris As Vice President Further Cements India-US Relationship: White House



(Insider Bureau)-The relationship between India and the United States has been further cemented with Kamala Harris as the vice president of the country, the White House

President Joe Biden respects the long bipartisan successful relationship between the two countries, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said.

has said. President Joe Biden, who was sworn in as the 46th President of the United States a day earlier, respects the long bipartisan successful relationship between the two countries, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki told reporters at her daily news conference. "President Biden, of course, has visited India many

times, respects and values the long bipartisan successful relationship between leader in India and the United States. It looks forward to a continuation of that," Psaki said responding to a question on India-US relationship under the Biden Administration.

The historic inauguration of India-origin Kamala Harris, she said,

further cements this relationship. "Obviously, he selected and yesterday, she (Harris) was sworn in the first Indian American to serve as president or vice president. Certainly, historic moment for all of us in this country but a further cementing of the importance of our relationship," Psaki said.

India lodges protest with Italy after Khalistan supporters vandalise embassy in Rome



(Insider Bureau)-India has conveyed its strong protest to the Italian authorities over vandalism of Indian Embassy in Rome ahead of India's Republic Day celebrations on January 26.

The Indian Embassy building in Italy's Rome was reportedly vandalised by Khalistan elements just ahead of India's Republic Day. Reports said that flags of Khalistan were raised at night and "Khalistan zindabad" was also scribbled on the walls. Sources told India Today TV that that Indian mission

has been constantly raising concerns with the Italian authorities and had done so recently as well in view of Republic Day.

"We have taken up this specific incident with them and conveyed our concerns. Safety and security of Indian diplomats and diplomatic premises is the responsibility of the host government," sources said.

They added that they are hopeful that the Italian authorities will take action against the perpetrators and prevent such incidents from happening in the future.

Indian-Origin Miss England Gets Covid Vaccine, Endorses Its Safety

(Insider Bureau)- First Indian-origin Miss England and frontline National Health Service (NHS) doctor Bhasha Mukherjee has received her first of the two COVID-19 jabs and endorsed the safety of the vaccines being rolled out among those most at risk from coronavirus.

The 25-year-old beauty queen and a medical professional has been working on the COVID frontlines at Pilgrim Hospital in Lincolnshire and Royal Derby Hospital in eastern England ever since she flew back from a humanitarian tour of India at the peak of the pandemic in April 2020.

As a healthcare ambassador for the British Indian community, the junior doctor has been active in spreading safety messages among ethnic minority groups which have been acknowledged as being at a higher risk from the deadly virus.

"It's good to know I'm protected and I'm sure my colleagues feel the same," said Ms Mukherjee. "I'm thankful as being BAME [black, Asian, minority ethnic],

I'm in a high-risk group. I feel so grateful to be in the position to have received the vaccine when millions are in the waiting line



across the globe. My prayers are with everyone who's waiting patiently at home, including my own family members who I hope will get their vaccines soon too," she said.

In reference to no adverse side effects from the jab, she added: "After a few hours, I even did a Zoom home workout and press-ups, all to celebrate."

Under the NHS accelerated vaccination programme, the Pfizer/Biontech and AstraZeneca

vaccines to immunise against COVID-19 are being administered to the priority groups of over-70s, care home residents and staff, and NHS workers at the frontline of combatting coronavirus.

"My colleagues and I found out just days before that we would be receiving it this week. I was so excited and nervous I was jumping on my seat before I got jabbed. The nurse giving me my injection told me to sit still or the photo would come blurry," said Mukherjee, the longest-serving Miss England after she was crowned in 2019.

Besides working on the NHS frontline, she has been carrying on with her Miss England pageant-related duties virtually and has also become an ambassador for the eco-friendly feminine hygiene brand Plastfree Pads.

Her efforts to spread awareness around the safety of COVID-19 vaccines follow reports of reluctance among the UK's ethnic minority communities in taking up the jabs.

Restricted Republic Day Celebrations By Indians Abroad Amid Covid



Beijing and several cities are currently experiencing a relapse of coronavirus cases. As a result, local governments have imposed measures to restrict public gatherings. China's National Health Commission on Tuesday reported 82 newly confirmed COVID-19 cases and one death due to the virus on Monday. In Singapore, the High

(Insider Bureau)-The Indian expatriates in China and Singapore on Tuesday celebrated the 72nd Republic Day in a restricted manner, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. In Beijing, Ambassador Vikram Misri unfurled the national flag at the Indian embassy where the celebrations were restricted to officials of the mission and their families in view of the prevailing COVID-19 situation in the Chinese capital and surrounding areas. Mr Misri read out President Ram Nath Kovind's address to the nation. He also released a special instrumental rendition of "Vande Mataram" produced by Chaiti Arts Foundation.

Commissioner of India, P Kumaran, led the Republic Day celebration at the mission by unfurling the national flag and reading President Kovind's message to the people through live streaming on Facebook. The ceremony was restricted to members of the High Commission for in-person presence due to COVID-19 safety measures. Later this evening, the Republic Day celebration will be held virtually. Recorded messages will be played on the virtual platform. Singapore Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, Dr Tan See Leng, will be representing the government, said the High Commission.

Indian-Origin US Lawmakers Named To Key Congressional Committees

(Insider Bureau)-Indian-origin US lawmakers Pramila Jayapal and Raja Krishnamoorthi have been named to key congressional committees on budget and the COVID-19 pandemic by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. While Congresswoman Ms Jayapal, 55, was named to the powerful budget committee, Congressman Mr Krishnamoorthi, 47, was appointed to a key Congressional committee on the coronavirus crisis on Tuesday.

The Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis was established to provide oversight of the federal COVID-19 pandemic response. "I am honoured to join Chairman Clyburn and our colleagues on this panel to provide vital oversight of the federal coronavirus response to protect the health and safety of the American people as we defeat the pandemic and rebuild our economy," said Mr Krishnamoorthi, serving as the US Representative for Illinois's 8th

congressional district since 2017. "I look forward to working with members of both parties as we ensure that the trillions of dollars in taxpayer funds dedicated to our country's response to this pandemic and its economic impacts are used as efficiently, transparently and effectively as possible," he said. Ms Jayapal, the US Representative for Washington's 7th congressional district since 2017, has been named as a member of the House Budget Committee that plays a key role in passage of the budget. Congressman John Yarmuth has been named to chair the House Budget Committee. Ms Jayapal is the first Indian-American woman to be elected to the US House of Representatives. She is leading the effort on USD 15 per hour as minimum wage. The US is the worst-affected country from the COVID-19 which has killed more than 420,000 people in the last one year.

Day after violence, farm leaders postpone February 1 march to Parliament

The farmers had decided to march to Parliament to mark their protest against the three contentious farm laws passed by the government in September last year.

(News Agencies)-A day after tractor rally called by farmers spiralled out of control and led to violence and chaos in the national capital, farmer leaders on Wednesday decided to postpone their proposed February 1 march to Parliament. The farmers had decided to march to Parliament to mark their protest against the three contentious farm laws passed by the government in September last year.

The farmers have now said they will hold jan sabhas (public meetings) and a one-day fast on January 30 to mark their condemnation against Mahatma Gandhi's assassination. The

protests will be against the forces that killed Gandhi, the farm leaders said.

Stating that most of the farmers were peaceful and a government conspiracy was designed to sabotage the rally, the farm leaders said that despite attempts to break it, 99.9% farmers were peaceful.

"The rally fell prey to government conspiracy. Some incidents took place. The government put the Punjab Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee

members in front of blockade put for us but there was no blockade for them," Balbir S Rajewal, Bhartiya Kisan Union (R) said minutes after Delhi

Police held the presser. However, the Samyukt Kisan Morcha has maintained that agitation against three farm laws will continue and has not been called off.

Carried out peacefully for nearly two months, the protest called by thousands of farmers turned violent after the tractor rally called by them took unapproved routes to enter into the national capital on Republic Day. This, in turn, halted the city-state till evening, crippling several traffic junctions and forcing the government to snap internet connections in parts of Delhi. The protesters also breached India's Mughal-era monument Red Fort



and unfurled a flag of their own atop one of the poles, inviting serious flak from citizens and leaders.

The Delhi Police on Wednesday filed at least 25 FIRs in cases related to the violence and chaos.

A majority of these cases have been registered under sections of rioting, causing hurt by

dangerous weapons, obstructing police from doing their duty, police have also filed some cases under heinous sections of attempt to murder and attempt to culpable homicide in clashes reported from the Red Fort, ITO and Ghazipur. In one FIR, police are also probing protesters for destroying CCTV cameras on the road.

Govt extends restrictions on flights between India and UK till Feb 14



The World Health Organisation announced on Wednesday that the UK variant of the disease has spread to 70 countries.

(News Agencies)-The government on Wednesday extended the restrictions in flights between India and the United Kingdom till February 14 to control the spread of the new variant of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19). The flight services between the two

countries had resumed earlier this months, but with restrictions. The flight services had resumed with limited capacity - 30 flights are operating including 15 each by Indian and UK carriers.

Civil aviation minister Hardeep Puri had tweeted the frequency

of flights between India and the UK saying the government will keep reviewing it. After the rapid spread of the new mutant strain of Covid-19 in the UK, India had put an embargo on flight services between the two countries in December last year. Initially, the ban was till December 31, but was later extended to first week of January. The flights from India to the UK started on January 6, while operations from the UK to India began on January 8.

After India resumed regular flights to the UK under its air

bubble agreement, 70 flights per week have been operated. But the number has been brought down to 30 in the wake of the new Covid-19 strain. The reduced number will stay after civil aviation ministry's order on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organisation (WHO) announced on Wednesday that the UK variant of the disease has spread to 70 countries.

This comes after recent announcement by a group of researchers that the coronavirus strain sweeping

Britain could be more deadly as well as more transmissible. Initially, British experts said that their evidence suggested the new strain circulating in the UK - one of several to have emerged internationally in recent months - was between 50 per cent and 70 per cent more transmissible.

Last week, however, the government said the new variant could also be 30-40 per cent more deadly, although it stressed the assessment relied on sparse data.

Three Rafale jets arrive in India after flying non-stop from France

In a big boost to the Indian Air Force (IAF), three French Rafale multi-combat fighter jets that took off from France on Wednesday in a non-stop flight to India landed at an IAF base. The jets flew over 7000km with in-flight refuelling. "The third batch of three Rafale aircraft landed at an IAF base a short while ago. They flew over 7000Km with in-flight refuelling. The aircraft got airborne earlier in the day from #IstresAirBase in France. IAF deeply

appreciates the tanker support provided by UAE Air Force," Indian Air Force tweeted. This batch is the third set of deliveries of the Rafale aircrafts to the IAF. The air force had ordered a total of 36 warplanes at a cost of ₹59,000 crore from France in September 2016. This delivery will take the number of Rafales in the IAF's inventory to 11. The second batch of the IAF's three Rafale fighter jets had reached the Jamnagar airbase in early November last

year before they flew to their homebase in Ambala. The first batch of five Rafale jets had reached the Ambala air base on July 29 after which they were formally inducted into the IAF in an event attended by defence minister Rajnath Singh, French defence minister Florence, chief of defence staff General Bipin Rawat and air force chief Marshal RKS Bhadauria.

After the Russian Sukhoi Su-30MKI that entered service in June 1997, the Rafale fighters are



the first imported jets to join the IAF in 23 years. The jets are capable of carrying out ground

and sea attack, air defence and air superiority, reconnaissance and nuclear strike deterrence.

Congress stoking unrest due to poor show in polls, says Javadekar

A day after violence broke out in the Capital when a section of protesting farmers marched to the Red Fort, Javadekar said, the government has already held 10 rounds of talks with the farmers and offered to put in abeyance the farm laws for 18 months, but the Congress does not want a resolution.

(News Agencies)-Union Minister Prakash Javadekar on Wednesday blamed the Congress for wanting to create a "situation of unrest" in the country and said the party has been provoking the farmers agitating against the farm laws. A day after violence broke out in the Capital after a section of protesting farmers marched to the Red Fort, Javadekar said, the government has already held 10 rounds of talks with the farmers and offered to put in abeyance the farm laws for 18 months, but the Congress does not want a resolution to the stalemate.

"These laws make an effort to give the farmers an option but the Congress does not want this to happen. I feel those who have lost elections, they are all getting together to spoil the atmosphere in the country," Javadekar said.

To bolster the BJP's claims that the farmer protests are being stoked by the Congress, the minister said, barring Punjab where the Congress is in power, farmers elsewhere are not agitating against the laws.

The Congress, however, pinned the blame for the violence on the BJP. Addressing the media, party spokesperson Randeep Singh Surjewala said it was a conspiracy to malign farmers and discredit them. "The facts (that) have unfolded over the last 24 hours, a concerted conspiracy, aided and abetted by the Modi Government took place to malign the entire farmers' movement. A set of people with premeditated motive of violence, who have nothing to do with the 'Samyukt Kisan Morcha', they were permitted to enter the premises, the sanctum sanctorum of the

Red Fort, the pride of India, climb on to its columns and put a flag there, this is sacrilege. This is unacceptable and those who did it, Deep Sidhu and Gang, they have been seen in the past cohabiting with the Prime Minister of India and Home Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi and Shri Amit Shah, ample evidence of which is now available in the public domain. Instead of arresting them, then and there, they were permitted to go back." The BJP retaliated by alleging that that the Congress is stoking unrest because of its poor electoral performance. Javadekar said just as the popularity of the BJP and Prime Minister Modi is continuing to increase, the Left parties and the Congress continue to face rejection in elections.



"The Congress is disappointed, it has been losing elections and the Communists are also losing (in elections), therefore in West Bengal they are trying to forge a relationship. They just want to create unrest through violence so that police have to take action or fire and there should be destruction of life and assets. The Congress is following provocative politics now," he said.

The minister who holds the portfolios of information and broadcasting and environment

and forests praised the Delhi Police for its handling of the situation on the ground. He said, "The Delhi Police showed exemplary restraint. They were attacked with swords, sticks, stones but the police showed restraint and this is admirable. The whole situation was brought under control within a short span of time."

"Congress and Rahul Gandhi should apologise because such kind of negative politics is not good for the country," he said.

Abhay Chautala Drives Tractor To Haryana Assembly To Quit Over Farm Laws



(News Agencies)- Abhay Singh Chautala, the lone MLA from his party Indian National Lok Dal (INLD), resigned from the Haryana Assembly on Wednesday, two weeks after announcing that he would quit if the centre did not withdraw its controversial agriculture laws by Republic Day.

The 57-year-old is a three-time MLA from the Ellenabad seat and is from a party that counts farmers among as a key vote base. He drove to the state assembly complex in Chandigarh in a green tractor to submit his resignation.

Like most parties from the agrarian northern belt, he had been under pressure to demonstrate his allegiance to the farmers protesting the laws. Earlier this month, in a letter to the speaker he had criticised the centre for imposing "black laws"

in an "undemocratic way" and indicated that his conscience would not allow him to remain silent any longer.

"If the Government of India does not withdraw these three 'black laws' by January 26 then this letter should be considered as my resignation," Mr Chautala wrote to Speaker Gian Chand Gupta.

He pointed out that the centre was refusing to agree to the farmers' demand despite more than 60 deaths - many of which were suicides - reported so far. He also said that as a "responsible" member of the assembly, he was willing to play any role in the protests. Last month his father and party chief Om Prakash Chautala, a former Haryana Chief Minister, too had written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging him to scrap the laws.

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How Rakesh Tikait Has Regained The Upper Hand For Farmers

One blunder nullifies another blunder and the new blunder creates a new situation. This is how one can describe the present game of cat-and-mouse between the government and farmers. There is no denying the fact that the farmers committed hara-kiri on Jan 26 when a section amongst them decided to storm the Red Fort and hoisted a religious flag there. But the original blunder was the decision to hold a tractor rally within Delhi. Till then, the farmers' agitation had been hailed as peaceful, non-violent, disciplined and Gandhian. For almost two months, they sat on the road and the world took note of them. They had no reason for theatrics to make themselves heard or be noticed.

Their agitation had forced the government not only to listen to them but also to climb down. So it was beyond comprehension what they wanted to prove with a tractor march other than to showcase their strength. Now, one can safely say that they were wrongly advised as their strength was something that had already been proven.

The decision-makers of the movement did not realise that it is always difficult to control and discipline a rally. And if a rally is on the move, then it is even more difficult to manage. In such rallies, it is easy for anti-social elements and government-linked saboteurs to mingle in the crowd garb of volunteers and create mayhem at the opportune time. This is exactly what happened and discredited the movement. It is good that after the Red Fort fiasco, the farmers decided to cancel their march to parliament on Feb 1 (Budget Day).

But the government committed a blunder too. Last night, the UP government falsely assumed that farmers had lost support and sympathy amongst the public. It decided to uproot the agitating farmers camping at the Ghazipur border. By late evening, it appeared that the police would not have much difficulty in having this camp vacated but with an emotional outburst, farmers' leader Rakesh Tikait turned the tables on the administration. His tears proved more powerful than the might of the UP government. His address resonated across the entire Jat land of western UP, which till then had been lukewarm in extending support to him.

Tikait, this far, has been seen as a government 'stooge'. He was also perceived as a loose cannon and an irresponsible leader. He was blamed by his own friends for provoking farmers to

move towards the Red Fort. The high-handedness of the UP government turned him into a victim from a villain and his support swelled overnight; now, he is a hero. The police had to retreat. It could neither arrest him nor uproot the protestors. Had the police waited a few more days, Tikait would have been reduced to a non-entity. This blunder has altered the whole narrative. Farmers

who were losing support, especially in urban areas, are now gaining sympathy. Western UP can emerge for them as a new power centre like Punjab and Haryana. If the Yogi government

decides to indulge in more theatrics, it could be counterproductive for the BJP in "Jat land". This area has firmly supported the BJP in the last six years, specially after Muzaffarnagar riots in 2013.

The UP state elections will take place in February next year. It is not without reason that Akhilesh Yadav, Arvind Kejriwal, Tejaswi Yadav, Ajit Singh and other political leaders have called up Rakesh Tikait after his emotional outburst. Now a 'Kisan Mahapanchayat' is also taking place in Muzaffarnagar. Let us not forget, it was a Mahapanchayat like this which, after the Muzaffarnagar riots, played a pivotal role in the defeat of Akhilesh Yadav and huge gains for the BJP. This momentum was so strong that the BJP in 2017 formed the government in the state after over a decade; in 2019, it won 64 of a total of 70 parliamentary seats. Can the BJP afford to lose its support base in UP?

The farmers too have to understand that they can't hold onto their agitation for eternity. The ecosystem at the moment is not supportive of any democratic movement. Every movement is branded anti-national and Pak-sponsored. A section of the media is hell bent on supporting the government in any movement against it. Like the farmers' movement, the anti-CAA Shaheen Bagh movement was also branded an anti-India protest. When students in JNU and Jamia were beaten up by the police and masked persons, vast swathes of the media, like now, had hailed the Delhi Police. Other democratic institutions have also surrendered to the executive. In this situation, a minor mistake can prove to be catastrophic. Farmers' leaders should rethink whether to accept the government's proposal to suspend the three contentious laws for 18 months, while continuing to negotiate with the government. This will still be construed as victory. **By Ashutosh, Courtesy NDTV**



A Wake-Up Call For A Slumbering Democracy

In the 19th century, when democracies were increasingly becoming popular across Europe, not everyone was a fan of the movement towards the universal franchise. In fact, the populace was looked on as a mob who the wielders of power had to tame. In Britain for example, the view held by some was that democracy should be introduced in stages with some arguing that the right to vote should be based on those who own property and belong to a certain class. Others like J.S. Mill argued that there should be a "variable franchise" rather than a universal one, where the right to vote would depend on the education one had. Walter Bagehot, another prominent economist, proposed that the monarchy be used "as a theatre" that would not only entertain the masses but also distract such distracted masses from the true wielders of power.

Fortunately for India, the views of individuals like Bagehot did not find resonance with the framers of our Constitution. Instead, in what was a bold and forward-thinking approach to democracy, India's citizens gave to themselves a Constitution that guarantees universal adult franchise where a right to choose your government and exercise your franchise did not rest on whether you owned property or whether you had an education. The framers of our Constitution considered the right to vote as a power that would, in essence, make India's populace responsible for those it votes into power. Along with this right, the Constitution also contemplates responsibilities for those who are meant to safeguard our democracy from a despotic and corrupt government. India may not have a monarchy that can be used as a theatre to entertain the masses while despots

(mis)rule, but a large part of the press (especially television news) now fulfils the role that Bagehot contemplated would be fulfilled by the monarchy. TV journalism or TV "media", which would be more accurate, has taken a shocking turn over the past few years and Arnab Goswami's brand of such media news represents, possibly, the worst of this new movement where news is just used to distract people from reality rather than informing them of the real state of the country. Arnab, when he came on TV, shouted at us to be patriotic, to be nationalistic and acted as a flag bearer of Indian "values" against those who he viewed as the enemies of the country. However, as is often, the case with Hindi movies where the villain in the story is often the one who pretends to be holier than thou by putting a tika or going to temples, Arnab's recently released WhatsApp chats (as part of the TRP scam case) reveal that there is little holy about either this government or the kind of "news" that is peddled by his channel. The WhatsApp chats reveal disclosures that amount to treason by India's most well-known prime time "patriot". These chats reveal that Goswami shared news about the Balakot strikers, three days before the actual strike over a casual WhatsApp chat. It does not take a genius to understand that details about a potential strike by India's armed forces (including the fact that such a strike may occur) are required to be limited to only the high offices of the Prime Minister, the Home Minister, the Defence Minister and the National Security Officer. Any compromise on the maintenance of such secrecy can have catastrophic effects including the loss of lives of our armed forces.

By Dr Ajoy Kumar, Courtesy OutlookIndia



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Squeezing hedge funds to make a quick buck is too much fun to last

The squeezing of the hedge funds, or at least a few of them, is splendid entertainment. The pure bizarreness of the rise in GameStop's share price since the start of this month – a 25-fold rise at the peak – beats anything seen in the dotcom mania at the turn of the century. But the lesson of 20 years ago should be remembered: when it looks easy for anybody to make quick money speculating in stock markets, the party is probably about to end.

This Reddit crew prefer a different narrative, naturally. For them, cranking up share prices and trying to create hell for short-selling hedge funds is about beating Wall Street at its own game. And give the traders credit, their loosely coordinated tactics worked like a dream at GameStop. The likes of Melvin Capital, the short-selling hedge fund forced into a bailout, never saw the rebel alliance coming.

But let's not pretend the hedge fund industry is now in tatters or won't learn from the experience. For starters, a large part of it doesn't dabble in obscure video gaming retailers. Currencies, government bonds and interest rates are what excites the "macro" crowd. For short-selling hedge funds, the new power of Reddit's traders (for as long



as it lasts) probably won't be viewed as an existential threat. It'll be regarded as another factor to incorporate into strategies.

Stage one for the hedge funds was about taking bets off the table elsewhere to inspect the new landscape. Stage two may involve reading the Reddit breezes to get a possible edge. Indeed, when the dust settles on the GameStop saga, it would not be a surprise to learn that rival hedge funds joined the squeeze on Melvin and its co-travellers. Hedge funds also like to eat their own.

The wider picture is that these unusual stock market events tend not

to appear out of nowhere. The oddity this time is that the shares in the spotlight are those of struggling and half-forgotten companies – aside from GameStop, there's AMC, the US cinema chain, and Nokia and BlackBerry. Back in 1999 and 2000, the speculation centred on new internet companies with little revenue. But the new version still looks like a familiar case of speculative excess that will end badly for many.

One common theme is fear of missing out. Redditors who had the nous to get out of GameStop in time will have made life-changing fortunes – they

even publish their paper winnings with screenshots. The advertising is powerful but works best for the early-comers. Another ingredient is the notion that stock market risks have reduced. The rip-roaring recovery in share prices after last year's initial Covid plunge helped on that front.

And a critical factor is access to leverage, or magnified bets. In the UK, spread-betting firms are doing great business – IG Group reported a 55% increase in active clients in its last half-year figures. In the US, retail investors are using futures and options, another way to increase the size of a punt. "One of the surest signs that a bubble is close to bursting is when the retail investor piles in with leverage," says Albert Edwards, at the investment bank Société Générale. "And if the retail warrior millennial mob are angry now, wait until they lose their shirts in any market collapse."

He blames the US Federal Reserve for creating an environment in which stock market investors believe central bankers, dishing out cheap money, have their back. He's usually a gloomster but he has a point. GameStop is so much fun it can't last.

By Nils Pratley, Courtesy
The Guardian

The most dangerous situation humanity has ever faced

For a year now, the world has been ravaged by the horrors of Covid-19. It has caused millions to lose their jobs, overwhelmed health care systems and dramatically changed how we live. The disease has killed more than 2 million people and infected 100 million around the globe. Even so, we face fundamentally greater threats to humanity than this pandemic. We refer to the catastrophic dangers which nuclear weapons and climate change pose -- dangers that preceded this pandemic and will persist long after it ends. Unfortunately, and unlike the priority given to developing a vaccine against the virus, little progress was made to reduce the danger of the world's nuclear weapons arsenal or to effectively slow the carbon emissions warming our planet in 2020. The sudden appearance and confused response to the virus makes all too clear how ill-prepared the world can be when it has to deal with an unprecedented threat of global magnitude. This is why the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists



announced Wednesday that the hands of the iconic Doomsday Clock remain at 100 seconds to midnight -- as close to the end of humanity as the clock has ever been. The temptation, of course, in a dark hour is to cling to even the faintest signs of light and hope. And the truth is that there are some encouraging signs now emerging. However, we continue to teeter at the brink and moving the Clock away from midnight would provide false hope at a time when urgent action is what is

needed. In 2020, the nuclear powers continued their blind and bellicose march toward catastrophe -- with the recklessness of spending to "modernize" weapons systems matched only by recklessness of world leaders' rhetoric. As we see it, the potential for the world to stumble into nuclear war increased last year. Despite this looming danger, there is little dialogue, but lots of accusation and blame shifting. Governments also failed to sufficiently

address climate change in 2020. While the pandemic-related economic slowdown temporarily reduced carbon emissions in 2020, atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations hit a record high -- and it was one of the two warmest years on record. At a time when fossil fuel use needs to decline rapidly to avoid the worst effects of climate change, oil and gas demand instead are projected to recover to pre-pandemic levels. As we noted in the 2020

Doomsday Clock statement, the existential threats of nuclear weapons and climate change have intensified in recent years because of a threat multiplier: the continuing corruption of the information ecosphere on which democracy and public decision-making depend. This "infodemic" came into even greater focus as governments struggled to contain and confront the pandemic.

The now widespread and wanton disregard for science and the large-scale embrace of conspiratorial nonsense -- often driven by political figures and partisan media -- undermined the ability of responsible national and global leaders to protect the security of their constituents in 2020. Nonetheless, we do see some positive developments that could turn back the hands of the Doomsday Clock next year. The election of a US President who respects science, acknowledges climate change as a profound threat and supports international cooperation puts the world on a better footing to address global problems.

How unruly farmers tried to embarrass India on Republic Day

The tractor-borne unruly farmers were minutes away from India Gate when they were blocked by New Delhi Range police.

While Delhi Police will be releasing photos and videos of those unruly farmers involved in tractor rally, there is evidence to show that the agitator mob was all out to disrupt the 2021 Republic Day and cause international embarrassment to the Modi government. After piecing the threads with top police and intelligence officials, the Hindustan Times has learnt that the farmer groups flouted all conditions and routes agreed in their meetings with Delhi Police interlocutors with an aim to disrupt the parade.

There is evidence to indicate that the farmer mob on powerful 45 horsepower tractors had reached Bhairon Road at 10.45am and were mere four minutes away from breaching the parade. These agitators breached the Ghazipur border in East Delhi by 9am and moved on NH 24 via Nizamuddin Bridge. Had the New Delhi range police not blocked the Bhairon Marg by bus barriers, the Republic Day Parade would have

been disrupted by unruly farmers carrying both National and religious flags.

According to top police officials, after being blocked from entering the C-hexagon in India at Bhairon Marg, the agitators moved towards the A-point on the ITO intersection and the W point next to Supreme Court by 11.30 am, with the parade just minutes away from being breached. Again, the presence of mind of two DCPs saved the day as bus barriers were deployed, as a result of which the mob moved towards the Red Fort. The New Delhi Range managed to hold the Fort India Gate not only during the parade but also during the at-home at Rashtrapati Bhawan.

While the Delhi Police brass is examining how the northern, eastern and western borders were breached despite prior instructions from the Delhi Police Commissioner, S N Shrivastava, the fact is that as many as 394 policemen were

injured and the number is going up. Despite all provocations, including religious flags being hoisted by unruly farmers, the Delhi Police exercised total restraint and did not open fire at the mob. "While a number of senior police officers were of the view that firing should have been opened at least at the Tarn Taran youth who hoisted the religious flag atop Red Fort, others said that restraint was the better option. We have registered cases, identified those involved and notices will now be sent under Indian Penal Code (IPC) including the discretion of national monument and disrespect to the National Flag," said a top police officer on condition of anonymity to Hindustan Times.

Delhi Police Commissioner Shrivastava met his Special Commissioners this morning and it was decided to throw the book of law at the unruly and anti-social elements. It was for this very reason the Delhi Police was extremely reluctant in allowing



tractors in Delhi and were forewarned by others that the agitating farmers on Tikri, Singhu and Ghazipur borders would flout the law. The landlord-farmers, for the past week, had been telling the Delhi Police interlocutor that they want to march on Rajpath, perhaps to vandalise the same area as was done during the protest led by farm leader Mahendra Singh Tikait back in 1988.

After agreeing to start the tractor parade on designated routes, the unruly farmers started attacking

concrete barriers as early as 8am and weaponized the tractor to provoke the Delhi Police.

We have 394 injured policemen. But had Delhi Police given to provocation and opened fire even on that man who hoisted the religious flag, everyone would have blamed us by portraying farmers as innocent victims. It would not have mattered to anyone that these unruly mob was using tractors to run down police officers and personnel," said a senior special commissioner of Delhi Police.

Covid-19: The power of global cooperation

While 2020 will be remembered as the year a global threat touched nearly every person on the planet, we hope 2021 will be remembered as the year the whole world benefitted from an equitable and effective Covid-19 response



Two decades ago, we created a foundation focused on global health because we wanted to use the resources from Microsoft to improve as many lives as possible. Health is the bedrock of any thriving society. That fact has never been clearer than it has been over the last year, as the pandemic has upended lives here in India and around the world. Even though our foundation had been concerned about a pandemic scenario for a long time - especially after the Ebola epidemic in West Africa - we were shocked by how drastically Covid-19 has disrupted economies,

jobs, education, and well-being. In India, Covid-19 has cost over 150,000 lives, sickened over 10.5 million people, and impacted the economy.

While 2020 will be remembered as the year a global threat touched nearly every person on the planet, we hope 2021 will be remembered as the year the whole world benefitted from an equitable and effective Covid-19 response. If there is reason for optimism, it's that over the past year, the world has seen the largest public health effort in its history: One involving policymakers, researchers,

health care workers, business leaders, grassroots organisers, religious communities, and so many others around the globe working together in new ways. That kind of shared effort is important, because in a global crisis like this one, you don't want companies making decisions driven by a profit motive or governments acting with the narrow goal of protecting only their own citizens. You need a lot of different people and interests coming together in goodwill to benefit all of humanity.

Philanthropy can help facilitate that cooperation. Because our foundation has been working on infectious diseases for decades, we have strong, long-standing relationships with the World Health Organization, experts, governments, and the private sector. And because our foundation is specifically focused

on the challenges facing the world's poorest people, we also understand the importance of ensuring that everyone involved in the pandemic response is considering the unique needs of low-income countries, too.

To date, our foundation has committed \$1.75 billion to the fight against Covid-19. Most of that funding has gone toward producing and procuring crucial medical supplies. For example, we backed researchers developing new Covid-19 treatments, and we worked with partners to ensure that these drugs are formulated in a way that's easy to transport and use in the poorest parts of the world so they benefit people everywhere. We've also supported efforts to find and distribute safe and effective vaccines against the virus. The fact that Covid-19 vaccines are

already becoming available is a stunning testament to the power of global cooperation. No one country or company could have achieved this alone. Funders around the world pooled resources, competitors shared research findings, and everyone involved had a head start thanks to many years of global investment in technologies that have helped unlock a new era in vaccine development.

As the world's largest manufacturer of vaccines, India is playing a crucial role in these efforts. Our foundation, along with Gavi, has partnered with India's Serum Institute to scale up their manufacturing capabilities for production of Covid-19 vaccines in large quantities so that populations in lower- and middle-income countries can access quality vaccines at affordable prices.

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India's quest for a strong, high-end State

Hindutva is filling in a historic vacuum of creating a pan-Indian, centralised State. This explains the churn

The descent into anarchy on the streets of Delhi on Republic Day, due to the unruly protests of a set of farm unions, has sharpened the focus on the frequent eruption of protests in recent times. This has spawned a sense of uncertainty and flux. Yes, there is a churn underway, but its reasons are far deeper than recognised. For most of its history, India has not had a unified pan-Indian State. There have been few short-lived episodes of a single State ruling most of the Indian subcontinent, but, usually, different political entities have ruled various parts of India. In India, 100-150 years of a strong Centre would give way to centuries of fragmentation, unlike China, where centuries of a strong, centralised State would give way to 100-150 years of fragmentation before the rise of another centralised State.

India has had what can be termed as low-end States - marked by the absence of an effective centralised salaried bureaucracy, a salaried army, and direct tax collection from the vast portions of the area under their rule. Instead, these States depended on kinship networks to govern their territories, and on regional satraps to provide troops and collect taxes. This weakened State effectiveness, and unlike

the pharaohs of Egypt or emperors of China, India's rulers could not govern people at the grassroots.

This also meant that they lacked the capacity to annex and govern distant regions from the core, and preferred the acceptance of suzerainty and tributes from defeated rulers. The Indian tradition of reinstating the defeated rulers or their kin to the throne was a mere



acknowledgment of the lack of State-capacity to annex those regions.

So, whenever we had a pan-Indian State, it was a low-end State, and numerous autonomous regional satraps would overthrow the central ruler sooner than later. Another important feature of Indian Statecraft was the influence exercised by bodies such as the Buddhist Sangh, merchant guilds or the Brahmin priestly

class on the polity. There were a few attempts to create a high-end State, but they did not last long.

The 16th-century Akbar-Todarmal reforms in revenue administration, tax collection, and documentation of the population was the last attempt. It was the British who created a unified pan-India State with an extensive bureaucracy impacting lives even at the village level; a census; a unified judicial

system; a central army; and the systematic co-option and suppression of local elites. But it, too, was a ghost empire with only two-thirds of India under its direct rule, and a minimalist bureaucracy interested only in extracting revenues and suppressing the population.

The process of consolidation accelerated greatly under the Republic of India when, for the first-time, the central government could exercise direct control over

the population and assert its power. But the process also caused resistance and backlash, manifesting itself in the form of secessionist movements, religious extremism, and a form of federalism, which often descended into a tool of blackmail by regional elites to extract concessions. The Indian polity tried to overcome this problem by co-opting local elites - first, under the Congress, as an alliance of the urban upper-caste elites and zamindars from local dominant castes and, then, by coalition politics. But it could never discipline local power centres and deep caste lobbies undermining State power. The rise of Hindutva has disrupted the status quo, as it represents a centralising, though not homogenising, force in Indian polity. The clash between the centripetal and centrifugal forces has been a constant feature of Indian polity through the millennia. One way to look at Hindutva and its vision of a unified Indian State, is as the modern avatar of centripetal forces that have found an effective vehicle in the Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The march of the BJP even in non-traditional regions is

unsettling the old arrangements and challenging the rule of regional elites of dominant castes. Its push for projects such as Aadhaar, Goods and Services Tax and National Population Register-National Register of Citizens; attempt to assert control over the Byzantine bureaucracy; modernise the armed forces; and crack down on tax-evasion promises to build on the gains of the past two centuries and transform India into a high-end State. This is unprecedented and will require cutting the aristocracy or the traditional regional elite out of the equation. This is what is leading to a substantial pushback, with even allies representing regional elites walking out and taking a hostile stand. It is fuelling anxiety and unrest, and manifesting itself in the forms of protests. The most difficult challenge is the one posed by the agrarian power centres in the countryside. However, this time, India's transformation might be irreversible. It is witnessing an economic transition, urbanisation, social change, the rise of Hindutva and increasing support for a strong Centre - all interlinked processes, leading to a strong, high end, unified State.

**Courtesy Hindustan Times,
By Abhinav Prakash Singh**

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.



Want To Revive Media Credibility? Try Some Transparency

Unless the media is fair, it cannot play its rightful role in a democracy. Being free is not enough; being fair is equally important.

On our 72nd Republic Day, a stocktaking of our four pillars of democracy shows some interesting trends. Whether it's the Legislature, Judiciary or Executive, there are challenges galore. But when one looks at the Fourth Estate, the challenges appear particularly daunting. We often debate whether the Indian media, that reflects a vibrant democracy in action, has been true to its ideals. Some developments of the recent past show that the media world needs to do some introspection. In the Indian media today, three distinct strands are visible. One, the television media, that has grown exponentially in the last few years, attracting eyeballs and revenues, has fallen in credibility. Some incidents may have hogged headlines lately, but the fact is that when it comes to the trust quotient, the touchstone of the media in a democracy, the television media has a lot of catching up to do. Former Financial Times Editor Lionel Barber wrote recently,

albeit in a different context, that the Press "must now resurrect a much-maligned principle: hearing both sides". He called this "bothsidesism". Outlook readers would recollect a similar debate on the site some time ago.

"Bothsidesism" is all the more important when one is faced with fractious debates and even polarising impulses. Unless the media is fair, it cannot play its rightful role in a democracy. Being free is not enough; being fair is equally important.

Two, there's been a mushrooming of the digital media. Almost everyone believes that digital is the future. While it's true that the mushrooming of digital outlets reflect the noisy democracy that we are, one cannot be sure if the new ventures also can claim to provide an even-handed, balanced, both-sided account of our world.

Three, readers still trust the printed word. The newspapers and magazines may have come under severe pressure in the last one year due to the pandemic,

but, by and large, they retain readers' trust. This is reassuring. There may be aberrations, but the newspapers and magazines have negotiated the pulls and pressures well to deliver what is expected of them.

Some of the finest reporting, whether during the pandemic or during agitations like the present farm impasse, has come from young, enterprising journalists. So, the future looks promising. Now, let's look at the charges against the media. Foremost is that a significant section of the media has turned an uncritical spokesperson of the ruling party. While the media should ally with the government in nation-building, its relationship with the government of the day, ideally, should be adversarial. Speaking truth to power should be the universal norm. One, however, cannot regard X Govt as an adversary and Y Govt, during some other time, as an ally. Constructive criticism only strengthens a democracy. It's equally true that any agenda-



driven journalism debases journalism. "Bothsidesism" is a useful mantra to live by.

In a democracy, the Fourth Estate will always be an important pillar. The media wields enormous power. While the legislature, judiciary and executive are part of constant scrutiny, somehow the media remains in an ivory tower of its own making. For instance, we don't know how journalists are recruited, or how editors are appointed, and so on.

Look at the world of politics. After sustained campaigns, civil society pressure and Supreme Court interventions, politicians

aspiring to contest elections now have to declare their earnings, assets, educational qualifications etc. There is always pressure on the judiciary to introduce an element of transparency in their functioning and also in judges' lives. The media world should similarly consider injecting transparency into their overall functioning. Without invading someone's privacy, it will strengthen their case if media people, especially the leaders, followed by others, declare on their respective organisation's websites, their earnings, assets etc on an annual basis.

Bill and Melinda Gates: Covid-19 will change how the world thinks about health forever



At this time last year, the world was just starting to understand how serious a novel coronavirus pandemic could get.

Only a few weeks after we first heard the word "Covid-19," we were closing our foundation's offices and joining billions of people worldwide in adjusting to radically different ways of living. For us, the days became a blur of video meetings, startling news alerts, and microwaved meals - and we are well aware of how lucky we are compared to others. Over the past year, Covid-19 has killed over two million people worldwide, sickened millions more, and thrust the global economy into a devastating recession. The experience of living through a pandemic has driven home

what many people in developing countries knew all too well already: Health is the bedrock of any thriving society. If your health is compromised - or if you're worried about catching a deadly disease - it's hard to concentrate on anything else. Staying alive and well becomes your priority to the necessary detriment of all other things.

If you live in a wealthy country like the United States, chances are that last year was the first time an infectious disease has upended your life. That's because in high-income countries infectious diseases are no longer what epidemiologists

would call "a meaningful health burden." In low-income countries, however, infectious diseases like malaria and tuberculosis are still major killers and adjusting life to account for a highly contagious pathogen is unfortunately nothing new. (Just ask the millions of people who sleep under a bed net each night.)

But in 2020, a virus that had no regard for borders or geography upended lives all over the world, collapsing some of those distinctions between rich countries and poor countries. In doing so, it brought new meaning to the term "global health." In the past, "global health" was rarely used to mean the health of everyone, everywhere. Instead, "global health" was a term that people in rich countries used to refer to the health of people in non-rich countries - essentially a synonym for "developing country health." If you attended a global

health conference any time in the last decade, you were much more likely to hear about diseases in Uganda than diseases in the United States. This past year, though, that changed. In 2020, global health went local. We all saw firsthand how quickly a disease you've never heard of in a place you may have never been can become a public health emergency right in your own backyard. Viruses like Covid-19 remind us that, for all our differences, everyone in this world is connected by a microscopic network of germs and particles - and that, like it or not, we're all in this together.

Although history will probably remember these as the darkest days of the pandemic, hope is finally on the horizon. It's possible that by the time you read this, you or someone you know may have already received a Covid-19 vaccine. The fact that these vaccines are already

becoming available is, we think, pretty remarkable - and all credit is due to the largest public health effort the world has ever seen. No one country or company could have achieved this alone: Funders around the world pooled resources, competitors shared research findings, and everyone involved had a head start thanks to many years of global investment in technologies that have helped unlock a new era in vaccine development.

Of course, developing safe and effective vaccines is only the beginning of the story. Now, the world has to get those doses out to everyone who needs them - in high-income and low-income countries alike. Until vaccines reach everyone, new clusters of disease will keep popping up all over the world, and lives will continue to be lost. That's why we were glad to see the United States include \$4 billion for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, in its latest Covid-19 relief package.



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With its inaction, the culpability of India's political Opposition

The inability of India's current parliamentary Opposition to command the political leadership of such struggles is more a result of political weakness than sinister design. But is it even trying to engage with popular

Images of farmers, in their tractors, clashing with the Delhi police at Red Fort, far beyond the designated routes for their march, are unlikely to fade from public memory. There is little doubt that what transpired on January 26 will inflict serious damage to the popular support for the ongoing agitation that had, until then, displayed remarkable discipline with the two-month-long peaceful sit-in at Delhi's borders. The script that has played out is not very different from what transpired in Delhi exactly a year ago. Shaheen Bagh emerged as a powerful "Occupy" movement against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA). It inspired similar sit-ins across the country and altercation over one such protest in Delhi precipitated what were the most horrific riots in the National Capital in three-and-a-half decades.

The reactions to both these chain of events have been on expected lines. Those who support the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) argue that these movements have always been a

smokescreen for anarchic and violent elements, which aim to disturb peace to undermine the government. Their opponents claim that events which turn violent are engineered by State and non-State actors closer to the BJP - with the blame then deflected on to protesters to



erode the legitimacy of the movement.

Irrespective of the merits of the argument, these developments are creating a dangerous schism in society. The majority believes that the State is justified in using its might to crush such protests, while a significant minority is developing a deep persecution complex. This is dangerous for any democracy.

But there is a missing actor in this story - India's parliamentary Opposition. Not only has its conduct been half-hearted in building parliamentary opposition to legislations - remember, the BJP still does not have a majority in the Rajya Sabha - it has shown, at best,

a token presence in the extra-parliamentary struggles on such issues.

Neither the Shaheen Bagh sit-in nor the farm protests were led by political parties. Many celebrate the non-political nature of these protests and have described them as some sort of new wave of democratic, even revolutionary, upsurge. Such proclamations

have rhetorical value but protests by non-established leaders leave an important political vacuum - the question of accountability.

Is it fair to blame the Shaheen Bagh protesters for the spontaneous sit-in in another part of Delhi the night before the communal riots erupted in the capital? Should the team of farmers, which had been negotiating with the government, be held responsible for the events of January 26? And if one cannot control the actions of a group claiming to champion a cause, no matter how justified, does it qualify for blanket ex-ante support?

The inability of India's current parliamentary Opposition to command the political leadership of such struggles is more a result of political weakness than sinister design. But is it even trying to engage with popular movements? Have Opposition leaders done their bit to instil a sense of discipline and organisation in return for their support to such struggles? Or are they opportunistically

hoping to ride on the emotional churn these leaderless movements generate, irrespective of their fall-out? Given the experience of both Shaheen Bagh and the farmer protests, the answer would have to be the third.

If it wants to be useful, the Opposition should be offering real solidarity in the short-run and political honesty in the long-run - on the ground. But its current actions appear to be that of a free-rider: Happy to take credit, while washing their hands off any blame.

Two starkly different historical examples offer a lesson here. In 1922, Mahatma Gandhi called off the non-cooperation movement after protesters set fire to a police station in Chauri Chaura. Seventy years later, as India witnessed the demolition of the Babri mosque, the BJP leadership claimed that it was not responsible for what transpired.

India's Opposition would do well to internalise the importance of political leadership of mass movements. Showing up will be a start.

Free speech and the death of a book

In the last four years, I have dealt with two such cases, and I have a small list of books. Most of my fellow publishers have also dealt with such cases in the last few years - in some cases they have won, in others they have withdrawn the book. A legal tool that is to be used sparingly is turning into a weapon wielded with far less care, far less thought

Last week, we at Juggernaut Books were served a cease and desist notice. The notice came from a school in Gurugram for one of our books about a murder of a student. The case became sensational, popularly known as "The 'X' (x, standing for the name of the school) School Murder". The school hadn't read the book, it was yet to be published. It was dismayed at the title - "The 'X' School Murder" - which it felt was defamatory. Moreover, a district court had ruled that the school's name couldn't be used while discussing the case in order to protect the identity of the juvenile who had been accused of the crime.

We received a court summon that very week where, among

other things, we argued that the phrase "The 'X' School Murder" had been used widely across every media outlet from 2017 to even a week ago. Even the father of the accused had used the school's name in a court case. We had used the title because it was how the case was known, and that, irrespective of this book, the name of the school was now associated with the crime, and unless they sued every media house (which they haven't), this association was not going to vanish.

That very day, the court granted a temporary injunction till the matter was decided. As we know in India, a temporary injunction, in practice, tends to be almost permanent - stretching for months and often years.

Temporary injunctions only work if they are temporary. In the United States, for example, the courts paused the distribution of Mary Trump's book on her uncle, former President Donald Trump, for a single day, till the matter was heard. It then heard the case and ruled in Mary Trump and her publisher's favour.

In contrast, our book on Ramdev remains locked up since 2017 because the main defamation case hasn't been resolved and there is an injunction on the book till then. Our case opposing the injunction is also in limbo. This may be the fate of this book too. Now, you can agree that the school had an argument. It's only reasonable for it to want to erase this unpleasant history. Or you could see it the other way. The



school has used an order that was passed to protect the juvenile accused, to protect itself and its reputation.

Both arguments are fair. And I am not going to push you to take sides. But what you should worry about is the process.

We had a strong argument and yet the injunction was granted in the first hearing, i.e. without the proper trial where substantial arguments, and proof are presented by

lawyers on both sides. It was granted in a system where the resolution will take a long time.

In theory, every lawyer will tell you that the courts tend to be extremely careful when passing pre-emptive injunctions because of this. What might be regarded as a temporary measure to maintain status quo, until a more informed decision can be made, can easily become the new status quo. The result? In the name of fairness, a book is gagged.

Covid vaccine is here, virus is already in retreat. Let's just wait our turn

If there is one thing that the pandemic should have taught us, it must be to wait in line, patiently, with at least six feet in between. No matter when you get the jab, our victory is assured.

The war has begun. We are battling a malevolent enemy which spreads unseen, invading most victims with such stealth that they aren't even aware they have been occupied, lurking in the shadows of our physiology to emerge in its deadly avatar when it strikes the sick and elderly. But our nation is prepared. With military precision, our weapons are leaving their factories under armed guard, transported with Coca Cola efficiency to the frontlines, in an epic struggle for our survival. The publication of the trials testifying to the safety and immunogenicity of two weapons, one of which is entirely indigenous, by prestigious medical journals, will soothe the frayed tempers of ethicists and scientists who fretted about short cuts being taken for political gains, while also pumping up national pride. Still, most of us are keeping our fingers crossed and hoping for the best.

Which brings me to an awkward question: How will we know if the vaccines are victorious if the enemy is not just in retreat but,

if the past month is a reliable predictor, may soon disappear beyond the horizon much before we reach our vaccination targets? Addressing this question requires us to confront a baffling observation: Why is it that India, in contrast to most other countries, seems to have navigated the epidemic with just one wave and with one of the lowest mortality rates in the world? A review of sero-prevalence studies, which are the best indicator of true infection rates, offers a plausible reason. The paper, published in the current issue of the WHO's bulletin, reports that sites in India had the highest infection rates on the planet. In Mumbai slums, for example, nearly 60 per cent of people surveyed many months ago had antibodies which indicated prior infection. These findings are replicated in a state-wide study conducted six months ago in Karnataka which reported that half the population had been exposed to the virus. Such astonishingly high infection rates also mean that the inferred

mortality rates due to the virus are very small, less than 0.1 per cent, and similar low rates are also seen in our neighbouring countries. For once, it seems, wealthy nations have been hit by an infectious disease much harder than the teeming billions of the poorest countries. Leaders of global health and public health scientists who predicted millions of dead bodies on the streets of Asian (and African) cities are bewildered by how much they were off the mark. These estimates had triggered the nationwide lockdown even when we had such few reported cases. But, in contrast to other countries, instead of "flattening the curve", our lockdown was immediately followed by a monumental peak of cases. This has led some to wonder whether the virus had already begun to circulate in the community even before the lockdown, which then actually led to the infection spreading like wildfire in the densely populated slums of our cities. The subsequent policies to ferry millions of infected persons to their villages smoothly



fast-tracked the infection across the country and, inadvertently, led us to herd immunity. And if hundreds of millions of people in India have already been infected, what saved us from an apocalyptic death toll was a combination of our youthful demographics and some other, yet to be deciphered, biological immunity to the infection. One thing we can say for sure is that this had nothing to do with drinking cow urine. Regardless of the truth behind India's unique tryst with COVID-19, it appears that we are about to vaccinate hundreds of millions of people to protect them from a virus which has already infected more than half of our population. Indeed, the government has itself indicated that the vaccination programme will intend to cover up to 60 per cent of the population to halt the epidemic, but all the data suggests we might have already

crossed that milestone through vaccination by the virus itself. Moreover, this poses an existential question: Should a country whose health system is in such shambles, as illustrated yet again this month by a devastating fire in a district hospital which killed 10 newborn babies, which is still a long way from universal coverage of proven vaccines which protect children from deadly diseases, which is witnessing the highest rates of malnutrition and TB in the world, be spending so much money on a vaccination programme for a disease which may be well on its last legs and which has a vanishingly low mortality rate? Is this why there is mounting hesitancy to be inoculated? After all, many people might be sceptical about taking a jab of a new vaccine with the associated, albeit tiny, risk of adverse reactions, for a disease which is yesterday's news.

India, Nepal and the lives on the ground

Tension between India, Nepal and China has severely affected the lives of tribal communities in disputed areas.



For age-old neighbours India and Nepal, the border was formally demarcated for the first time with the Treaty of Sugauli (1816). The original treaty drafted by the British East India company called for a "fluid border". Thus, when the region was delineated, the boundaries were not based on physical landmarks but on rivulets, which have since then considerably changed their courses. The current bone of contention -

Kalapani - lies in this ill-defined region. This issue returned to the forefront when the Government of India released its revised map of India in November 2019. The new map, in addition to the other changes, continued India's claims to the Kalapani region as a part of the Pithoragarh district in Uttarakhand. This publication was swiftly denounced by the Nepali officials. And in 2020, the Nepal government led by K P Sharma Oli introduced a

constitutional amendment which made changes to the Nepali map. The new map claimed the Kalapani region as a part of the Dharchula district in Nepal. The update also claimed the Lipulekh pass and the area of Limpiyadhura for Nepal.

The tri-junction of Kalapani-Limpiyadhura-Lipulekh carries immense geostrategic significance for India as it serves as a vantage point to keep track of Chinese movements. Thus, the constitutional amendment made by Nepal raised flags for the Indian government and signalled the start of a formal rift in diplomatic relations.

The contemporary interactions and diplomacy of these neighbouring countries are guided by the Indo-Nepalese

Friendship Treaty, which was signed in 1950. The treaty had opened up the borders and allowed citizens of both the countries, especially the ones residing on the fringes, to intermarry and conduct cross-border trades or jobs. Despite having its fair share of critics, the treaty did improve relations between both the countries, leading to the emergence of a unique "roti-beti relationship".

Perhaps it was a testimony to this cordial relationship that India's military stronghold in the region went unopposed by Nepal for years. As it has been well documented, in 1951, as a response to the Chinese invasion of Tibet, India had constructed several military outposts around the now-disputed territory of

Lipulekh pass. Additionally, in 1962, India had increased its military presence across this frontier in light of the Sino-Indian war. And post the 1962 war, this area has been under the aegis of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police. Political scientist Leo E Rose notes in his essay 'Nepal and Bhutan in 1998: Two Himalayan kingdoms' that "Nepal virtually ignored the Kalapani issue from 1961 to 1997, but for domestic political reasons it became a convenient India-Nepal controversy in 1998". And it is the opinion of several political experts that a similar route is being taken by the Oli to distract the masses from internal political challenges, and to unify the party and the country against a "common enemy".

PM Modi Should Stand Firm On Farm Laws



India's agitating farmers show no signs of fading away. Angry cultivators have been camped on the doorstep of Delhi for weeks through north India's biting cold winter. They have shown a talent for staying in the headlines as well, with attention-grabbing stunts such as staging a tractor convoy to rival India's official Republic Day parade. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government looks rattled. But it should hold firm. The reforms that have so incensed protesters go further in addressing Indian agriculture's most intractable problems than any previously contemplated. Those changes need to be protected, not abandoned. Three new laws in particular, passed hastily and in open defiance of parliamentary norms last year, sparked off the agitation. Now the federal agriculture minister, who has been deputed to negotiate with the protesters, has offered to postpone implementation. This follows a series of other concessions in December. The farmers camped out near Delhi, however, are campaigning against a whole slew of reform measures both real and imagined. They want a total and immediate repeal of the laws passed last year. In addition, they want the government to guarantee that the current system of state-run procurement of rice and wheat

will continue indefinitely - even though it hasn't been threatened yet. The farmers recognize they have got the government playing defense. There are cracks even within the ruling establishment. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's parent organization, the Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, has hinted that the government should compromise. This isn't a surprise. In spite of the rhetoric of its men in government, the RSS has never been sold on the whole "market economy" idea. Still, it's remarkably disappointing that the government seems willing to roll back some of its most substantial reforms to date because of the vocal opposition of the country's most heavily subsidized and richest agricultural producers. Let's not beat about the bush here: The government has already conceded too much. It has, for example, agreed to protect farmers' access to free electricity. This is not just unaffordable, it holds back the modernization of India's power sector and thus the growth of renewable energy. Authorities have also promised they won't go after farmers who burn agricultural

waste - a major contributor to air pollution across India's northern plains, home to almost all of the world's most unhealthy cities. What's at risk isn't just a couple of laws, but India's commitment to the transition to a more environmentally sustainable and equitable growth model. In their demand that unsustainable practices continue into a new and more environmentally conscious age, the protesters are reminiscent of France's gilets jaunes more than anything else. And Modi's government seems more inclined to buckle than even French Prime Minister Emmanuel Macron's - even though Modi, with a 78% approval rating, is far more politically secure than Macron. Given the stakes, it is galling how abysmal the government's political management and messaging has been. For one, it has failed to communicate its case effectively to those farmers who would benefit from the reforms and who could conceivably have prevented their colleagues from hijacking the narrative. It has alienated a long-term ally - a Sikh religious party

called the Akali Dal - that could otherwise have helped handle the reform's fallout. And the government should understand by now that reform of one subsidy is best introduced with a clear pathway to an alternative form of support. That simply hasn't been on offer. Before surrendering to the protesters, the government should at least try to work out what it might do to sweeten the deal it originally proposed. Modi and his advisers should also be under no illusions about the price of retreat. They tried to deal with the agricultural sector's problems once before, early on in Modi's tenure. Their attempt to strengthen the government's powers to acquire farmland had to be rolled back following noisy objections led by the political opposition. Objectively, those land-acquisition laws were as regressive as the new agricultural reforms are progressive - but that's not the point. The lesson is that Modi lost the initiative on reform in 2015 and never fully recovered it during his first term. Neither he nor India can afford to make the same mistake twice.

By Mihir Sharma,
Bloomberg

How I erred on Biden and Blinken

For a man who makes a career out of talking, I missed out on two God-given opportunities because I felt I had nothing to say. I met Biden in July 2013 in Delhi, but didn't take sufficient interest in him. In 2015, I interviewed Antony Blinken, but failed to stay in touch

I have to admit sometimes I am my own worst enemy. I turn my silly nose up at opportunities that others would grab with both hands. Well, as Joe Biden settles into the White House, I can't but regret two that I foolishly threw away. Or, to be more honest, failed to capitalise on. Had I done so this might have been a very different column. I met Biden in July 2013, but didn't take sufficient interest in the man. At the time, he was Obama's vice-president and visiting India. Hamid Ansari, our vice-president, hosted a dinner at Hyderabad House to which I was invited. For most people, this would have been an opportunity to get to know

someone who was, at the time, just a heartbeat away from the American presidency. Foolishly, I had different ideas. Shortly after I arrived, Ansari offered to introduce me to the American vice-president. But Biden was surrounded by people and I was hesitant largely because I wasn't sure what to say. I had also spotted someone else among the guests and was keen to talk to him. Bizarrely, that took precedence. So, today, instead of being able to claim Joe and I are buddies, I'm the guy who wouldn't go up and shake his hand. Everyone else did, but I stuck to the other end of the room chatting with another fool like me.

Unfortunately, this is not the end of my collection of sorry stories. In December 2015, I was offered an interview with Antony Blinken. At the time, he was Barack Obama's deputy secretary of state. Today he's Biden's secretary of state. Fortunately, I didn't say no. But, once again, I didn't take Blinken as seriously as I should have. It was a 30-minute interview and Blinken was truly engaging. Alas, I only realised that when I saw it again last week. Five years ago, it felt like another interview with an American official I would never meet again and probably never hear of as well. Well, the conclusion I'm hinting at is obvious and I'm pretty certain you've already worked it out for yourself. Journalists often lack judgement. We



aren't talent-sporters - at least I'm not - and we often fail to sniff out who's likely to rise to the top. Here were two occasions when good fortune was in my grasp but it slipped through my fingers. Worst of all, I wasn't even aware that was happening. Actually, my error with Blinken was even worse. He was in a tearing rush and I had stretched the interview way beyond the 20 minutes his minders had stipulated. I could see they were displeased.

Blinken, on the other hand, seemed to have enjoyed it. I don't remember his precise words but he was fairly emphatic in saying I should stay in touch. It sounded as if he meant it. But I never found out because I didn't bother to make the effort. So, once again, I can't claim I know the new secretary of state. Our meeting was more like ships passing in the night.

Courtesy Hindustan Times,
By Karan Thapar

CBI files closure report in 1999 attempt to murder case against gangster Chhota Rajan

Serving life imprisonment for the murder of journalist J Dey, gangster Chhota Rajan has about 71 cases against him, out of which the CBI has filed closure reports in at least 16 cases.

(News Agencies)- Aspecial CBI court on Wednesday accepted the closure report submitted by CBI in a 21-year-old attempt to murder case against gangster Chhota Rajan. One of the most dreaded gangsters in India at one time, Chhota Rajan has about 71 cases against him, out of which the CBI has filed closure reports in at least 16 cases. In at least half of these 16 cases, the court has accepted the closure report. Two weeks back, the special CBI court had accepted the closure report in a 1999 extortion case against Chhota Rajan. That case against 62-year-old Chhota Rajan was closed owing to lack of evidence.

On January 27, judge AT Wankhede passed an order in another case dating back to 1999 registered at the Andheri police station. In this case, Chhota Rajan was charged under sections 307 (attempt to murder) and 34 (common intention of few people) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) read with a few sections of the Arms Act. A resident of Jogeshwari (West), Mohammad Ali Abdul Sattar Shaikh was allegedly shot at a few times by three men around 1.45 pm on December 8, 1999. Shaikh was a garage owner who was at work when the armed men opened fire at him before fleeing the spot. A bleeding Shaikh was rushed to the hospital by relatives

and saved by doctors.

Mumbai police had registered a case and arrested the men who had allegedly committed the crime. A charge-sheet was also filed by Mumbai Police before the Special Designated MCOC Act court against five men including Chhota Rajan, who had been identified as a wanted in the case at the time.

Following the arrest and extradition of Chhota Rajan from Bali in December 2015, the CBI took over all the cases related to the underworld gangster. However, the CBI did not find enough evidence to prosecute Chhota Rajan in the case and instead filed a closure report.

Asked about the procedure fol-



lowed by the court in such cases, special public prosecutor Pradeep Gharat said, "The court summons the complainant in the case and tells them that the CBI has filed a closure report. The court then asks for their say. It is only after the complainant says that he/she has no objection to the closing of the case and the court is fully satisfied

that the court accepts the closure report." Chhota Rajan has so far been convicted in a number of cases, including the murder of journalist J Dey and an attempt to murder case involving businessman BR Shetty. In fact, Chhota Rajan is currently serving a life sentence in Delhi's Tihar jail after he was convicted in the J Dey murder case.

'Credit goes to the people...': A new Dharavi in the making



Achieving a milestone, Asia's largest slum colony, Dharavi, did not report a single Covid-19 case on two separate days in December 2020 and January 2021. In a major development, a significant behavioural change was witnessed among residents of the area.

(News Agencies)-Asia's largest slum colony, Dharavi, had reported its first Covid-19 case on April 1, 2020. It was a nightmare for Mumbai. Tension mounted at the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) Headquarters even as officials scrambled to put together a plan to avoid a potential disaster. It was a fight against an invisible enemy.

As days passed, many people had given up hope, saying that the Dharavi monster would soon become impossible to control. There was a state fighting to save its capital city -- not knowing what to expect. The efforts were on, but the Covid numbers were rising.

Red zones were marked and the BMC stepped up to contain the outbreak. The civic body engrossed itself in carving out containment and testing strategies while ensuring uninterrupted food and essential supplies.

THE 4-T MODEL

Soon, the actively-followed model of four Ts -- tracing, tracking, testing and treating -- became famous.

Door-to-door screening was conducted. Private clinics were pressed into service. Mobile vans were used to screen people. The population was surveyed and fe-

ver clinics were also set up for the high-risk category to ensure timely separation.

The suspected cases were then shifted to covid care and quarantine centres.

For the first time, drones were seen flying over Dharavi, blaring police warnings to residents, asking them not to venture out.

The BMC, bureaucrats, police and health workers were all up for a test. Mapping the lanes and by-lanes -- each having a culture of its own and a dense population made the task impossible to achieve.

But, in a way, history was made in 2020 as Maharashtra succeeded in achieving what

looked outright impossible in the beginning.

A NEW DHARAVI

In a remarkable feat, Dharavi, on two separate days in December 2020 and January 2021, did not report a single Covid-19 case. India Today TV visited Dharavi to witness the change on ground zero.

In a major development, the usual stench -- that characterised most areas -- is now missing.

The gutters aren't open and nullahs aren't overflowing as they used to before. The drains look clean. Moreover, the chances of witnessing kids defecating in open or people urinating or spit-

ting at random places have considerably reduced.

Mumbai hasn't seen a cleaner and organised Dharavi before. However, the usual crowding of people in the lanes or open bazaars can still be seen everywhere. There is usual chaos in Dharavi again as life is back to normal, but people there are now less careless and following order.

Right outside the Dharavi Police station, India Today TV saw at least half a dozen BMC officials with a pen and a receipt book, imposing fines on those not wearing masks. Across the street, a BMC garbage truck was seen at work.

Sasikala, expelled AIADMK leader and Jayalalithaa's close aide, released after 4 years in prison

(News Agencies)-Expelled AIADMK leader VK Sasikala has been released after serving four years imprisonment in a corruption case at a prison in Bengaluru. Sasikala was on Wednesday released after the formalities for her release were completed at the state-run Victoria Hospital, where she is undergoing treatment for Covid-19 infection, which she had contracted a week ago, along with

her sister-in-law J Ilavarasi.

"Yes, she has been formally released," Parappana Agrahara Jail Superintendent V Sheshamurthy was quoted as saying by news agency PTI. Independent legislator T T V Dhinakaran, Sasikala's nephew and founder of Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK) visited the hospital after she was released by jail officials. Sasikala to remain in hospital. Sasikala would remain at the

Victoria hospital for another three days as mandated under the Covid-19 protocol, though she is now asymptomatic and her symptoms have reduced.

"As per protocol, she will be discharged on 10th day (January 30) if she is asymptomatic and free for oxygen support for at least three days," the hospital said in an official bulletin. A large number of supporters of the 66-year-old close aide of former Tamil

Nadu Chief Minister late J Jayalalithaa lined up outside the Victoria Hospital, raised slogans in her favour and distributed sweets in celebration.

Why was Sasikala in jail?

Sasikala was in prison since February 2017 along with Ilavarasi and late Jayalalithaa's foster son VN Sudhakaran in connection with the Rs 66 crore disproportionate assets case.

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India records 12,689 fresh coronavirus cases, 137 fatalities in last 24 hours

India recorded 12,689 fresh coronavirus cases and 137 more deaths due to the infection in the last 24 hours, the Union Health Ministry said on Wednesday.



While Delhi has recorded 6,34,229 cumulative positive cases and 10,820 deaths till now, Maharashtra reported 20,13,353 cases and 50,862 fatalities.

West Bengal's Covid-19 tally rose to 5,68,650 on Tuesday as 295 more people tested positive for the infection, while nine

(News Agencies)- India recorded 12,689 fresh coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours, pushing the country's tally to 1,06,89,527, according to the Union Health Ministry on Wednesday morning.

With 137 more deaths due to the Covid-19 infection, the total number of fatalities in the country has touched 1,53,724.

As on Wednesday morning, there are 1,76,498 active coronavirus cases (down by 768) and the total recovered cases went up by 13,320 to 1,03,59,305.

fresh fatalities pushed the state's coronavirus death toll to 10,131, a health bulletin said. As many as 409 more people have been cured of the disease, pushing the recovery rate among the patients in the state to 97.16 per cent. Meanwhile, India has vaccinated a total of 20,29,480 people since the immunisation drive started on January 16.

On Tuesday, the health ministry said that 9,102 new coronavirus cases were reported in India - this was the lowest daily spike the nation witnessed after 8 months.

New, Contracted Reality From A Flatcar



(News Agencies)- IT doesn't bear reiteration for most of us, but a new survey report puts in print the obvious: the employment scene in India is worse than two years back, particularly for the salaried class. Still, the findings are unexpected, given the optimism that the lifting of the lockdown would push things towards normality, as economic activities pick up and jobs are created. It really hasn't worked out the way it was envisaged, as work from home (WFH) seems to remain in vogue

globally, leading to a shift towards flexi or contract jobs.

"The employment scene is quite bad. We did see some improvement in September, when it rose to 398 million. But there has been a steady deterioration, though not worrying, in the last three months, with the number of salaried jobs falling to 389 million in December, which is lower than two years back, when it was 398 million," says Mahesh Vyas, MD and CEO of Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE).

NYC: STOP THE SPREAD OF CORONAVIRUS!

New Yorkers working together can slow the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19) in New York City.



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



STAY HOME IF SICK

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



PROTECT THE MOST VULNERABLE

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



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Raging virus, few shots. How Brazil missed its chance to secure COVID-19 vaccines



(News Agencies)- Weeks after other Latin American countries began inoculating their citizens against coronavirus, Brazil finally administered its first shot on Jan. 17 using China's Sinovac Biotech Ltd vaccine. With efficacy of just over 50% - barely above Brazil's threshold for regulatory approval - the Chinese shot was not the government's first choice. But for now, there is little else available. The country's principle strategy - to manufacture 100 million doses of the AstraZeneca PLC vaccine locally - has been

plagued by repeated delays. That effort isn't expected to yield a finished product until March at the earliest. AstraZeneca last week sent 2 million emergency doses to help Brazil get started. Meanwhile, Brazil's Health Ministry has yet to sign deals with other vaccine makers. The delays leave Brazil's 210 million residents vulnerable to one of the worst coronavirus outbreaks on the planet. Brazil has tallied more than 218,000 COVID-19 fatalities, second only to the United States, and vaccinated less than 0.5% of its

population. Brazil's vaccine rollout is just the latest misstep by its Health Ministry, which President Jair Bolsonaro has stocked with active-duty and retired military men with little public health experience. Those newcomers failed to grasp how quickly they needed to move to secure supplies amid heated global competition, and the importance of hedging their bets by striking deals with multiple manufacturers, according to interviews with more than a dozen current and former officials, pharmaceutical executives, diplomats and public health experts.

The ministry's hesitance led to a missed opportunity back in August to order 70 million doses of a vaccine made by Pfizer Inc and BioNTech SE, with delivery starting in December, Pfizer said in a Jan. 7 statement.

Reuters also viewed an internal Health Ministry WhatsApp chat log, containing thousands of messages exchanged between senior officials last year as the global race for vaccines was

heating up. The messages reveal that the new leadership team prioritized hydroxychloroquine and its cousin chloroquine, anti-malarial drugs championed by Bolsonaro as COVID-19 treatments despite little scientific evidence that they work.

"There was not sufficient focus on the vaccines, and a lack of technical vision," former Health Minister Nelson Teich told Reuters in an interview. Teich resigned in May in a disagreement with Bolsonaro over the hydroxychloroquine strategy.

Reuters sent a detailed list of questions for this story to the president's office, which directed queries to the Health Ministry. The ministry did not respond.

Bolsonaro - who contracted the coronavirus last year and says he won't take any COVID-19 shot - has defended his government's vaccine rollout. "With respect, nobody would do better than my government is doing," he said in a Jan. 15 television interview. While many nations have struggled to obtain vaccines as

manufacturers strive to meet global demand, Brazil was better positioned than many. It has a long history of successful inoculation drives, and its state-funded production facilities can churn out vaccines at scale.

The federal government squandered those advantages, said Marcia Castro, a native Brazilian and professor at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health in Boston.

"It's a succession of errors that began from the start of the pandemic," she said. "And sadly, we're measuring those mistakes in the number of deaths."

HYDROXYCHLOROQUINE OBSESSION

The AstraZeneca shot was supposed to be the main pillar of Brazil's inoculation plan. According to a person involved in the deal, the Cambridge, England-based firm started talking to the Health Ministry about buying its vaccine around early June.

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Chinese vaccine trial in Dhaka fell through. Its state media blames New Delhi

Chinese firm Sinovac Biotech told Bangladesh in September last year that it didn't have money to pay for the vaccine trials and its request for funding to CEPI had been declined.

(News Agencies)- Trials for Chinese Covid-19 vaccine Sinovac were halted in Bangladesh last year due to meddling by India, China's state media has claimed in a report on Tuesday, accusing New Delhi of torpedoing Beijing's efforts to push its vaccine in Dhaka. The claim reported in the Global Times, a nationalist tabloid run by the Communist Party of China, is Beijing's response to a report in the Hindustan Times that outlined how Bangladesh rescinded its decision to allow Covid vaccine trials last October after a last-minute demand by Chinese firm Sinovac Biotech that Dhaka co-fund the trials. The Global Times report said the trials, according to the agreement sealed in July, were to start in August. It also confirmed that according to the initial agreement, Bangladesh did not need to share the cost. "But the clinical trials were delayed until October due to the Indian government allegedly meddling in the two sides' cooperation during the period," the report - one of the many that China's tightly-controlled media has published to target vaccines made by India and western companies - said. According to Sinovac Biotech's 22 September letter to the Bangladesh letter, the trials scheduled in August had to be pushed back due to delay in approvals from Dhaka. The company had, according to this letter seen by Hindustan Times, claimed that it had "reallocated our funds for the trial (in Bangladesh) to trials in other countries, since, at the time, we were uncertain about the ultimate approval of the trial in Bangladesh." Sinovac Biotech also claimed that it had requested the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), an organisation set up to

accelerate the development of vaccines against emerging infectious diseases, to fund the trials in Bangladesh but this application was rejected. "However, we are working on plans to partially rectify the funding situation by the end of October-early November, though we will still require co-funding to complete the entire trial in Bangladesh," the company said in its letter to Bangladesh's health minister Zahid Maleque. Maleque told news agency Reuters in October that Dhaka wouldn't go ahead with the trial because the company's demand for funding was contrary to their original agreement. "We are not co-funding the trial. That was not in the agreement. They never asked for money when they approached us... As per agreement, they'll bear all expenses of the trial, they'll give us 110,000 free vaccines and they'll share the technology so



that our pharmaceutical companies can make the vaccine to Dhaka on January 21 and facilitated a commercial contract of 30 million doses with the Pune-based Serum Institute of India. In sharp contrast to the Chinese approach, New Delhi sent a gift of two million doses of Covishield vaccine to Dhaka on January 21 and facilitated a commercial contract of 30 million doses with the Pune-based Serum Institute of India.

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NYC Mayoral Candidate Shaun Donovan Announces Diverse, Experienced Senior Team to elevate his Campaign of Ideas

After a strong fundraising haul, Donovan taps top talent to bolster campaign efforts.

NEW YORK, NY - Former Obama-Biden Housing Secretary and Budget Director Shaun Donovan today announced new additions to his Mayoral campaign, including former Pennsylvania State Director at Biden for President Brendan McPhillips to serve as Campaign Manager, Amelia Adams as Senior Advisor, and former Biden for President Georgia Press Secretary Jeremy Edwards, who takes on the role of Press Secretary. Donovan announced that Aicha Bamba will serve as Political Director, Rameera Robbalaa as Organizing Director, Candace Wint as Operations Director, and Danny Rodriguez as communications associate. They join a talented group of strategists and political operatives with decades of experience in grassroots organizing, communications, fundraising and field operations. "Our campaign of ideas has

attracted top tier talent with experience driving critical local, state and national elections and grassroots campaigns," said Shaun Donovan, Candidate for Mayor of New York City. "Our team reflects the diversity of New York City and the diverse network we are building across the city, state and country who believe in my vision to repair, rebuild and reimagine a City that

works for everyone." "The next mayor will have the incredible task of managing New York City through its recovery from COVID, and from years of neglect and mismanagement at the local and federal level. Thankfully, New Yorkers have an amazing opportunity to elect a proven leader and crisis manager with a long track record of fighting for housing justice here

in New York - and as President Obama's Housing Secretary and Budget Director, he understands that a budget is a moral testimony rather than an accounting sheet," Brendan McPhillips, Campaign Manager, New Yorkers for Donovan. "I am excited to help elect Shaun Donovan so he can get to work leading New York City to a recovery that lifts up everyone."

The new hires come after a successful financial filing that reflects the campaign's ability to build the broadest coalition of support. New Yorkers for Donovan campaign has so far raised over \$2.6 million in contributions and expected matching funds during the course of his campaign after raising a remarkable \$954,000 in the most recent filing period.

You should update your iPhone right now

(News Agencies)-Apple is urging iPhone and iPad users to promptly update their operating systems to fix security bugs that may have already been exploited by hackers. On its support webpage, the company said three security flaws "may have been actively exploited." It did not reveal too many specifics about the bugs, noting "Apple does not disclose, discuss, or confirm security issues until an investigation has occurred and patches or releases are available."

The issue is a link in an exploit chain, meaning a hacker would need to exploit further bugs for it to be fully executable. The company declined to comment further on any attacks. The company pushed out the security patches on Tuesday as part of its new iOS 14.4 software, which also includes fixes for keyboard lag and allows smaller QR codes to be read by the camera. Apple said two security issues stem from its WebKit, an open source browser engine used by Safari and iOS

browsers. "A remote attacker may be able to cause arbitrary code execution," the company said in the description notes. Meanwhile, Kernel, an Apple developer framework, was also affected. The exploits were reported by "an anonymous researcher," according to the webpage. Apple prides itself on device security but it's not immune to exploits. Last year, Google researchers found several websites with code that allowed hackers to quietly infiltrate iPhones.

Renzi or bust? Italian parties' options narrow in government crisis

(News Agencies)-Italy's ruling parties are reluctantly coming to terms with the prospect of having to forge a new deal with the centrist Italia Viva party which quit the government and forced this week's resignation of Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, political sources said on Wednesday. The government crisis could hardly come at a worse time, with Italy in its steepest recession since the end of World War Two and having registered 86,000 deaths from COVID-19. Conte, a lawyer with no direct political affiliation, still hopes to pull together a new administration to manage some 200 billion euros (\$240 billion) that Italy expects from a European Union fund to help relaunch its COVID-battered economy.

Yet as the political crisis deepens, lawmakers from the main planks of the coalition, the 5-Star Movement and the Democratic Party, are pushing Conte towards negotiating again with Italia Viva's leader



and former premier Matteo Renzi, despite the bitter recriminations amid his walk-out last week.

"I have spoken to Italia Viva members and we can work together. Since Conte doesn't have enough support we should talk to them," a 5-Star lawmaker who asked not to be named told

Reuters. Conte, now a caretaker prime minister after handing in his resignation to the head of state on Tuesday, has got little response to his impassioned call for unaligned lawmakers to fill the hole left by Renzi and his party.

He needs around 10 in the upper house Senate where his

coalition is most fragile, but his hopes that waverers would join the government's ranks to avoid the risk of new elections are dwindling by the day.

"Not many people are up for this, not everyone is ready to blatantly contradict his political history to guarantee

his future," said Andrea Cingini, a senator from the centre-right Forza Italia party which is often cited as a possible source of support for Conte.

President Sergio Mattarella is unlikely to give Conte a fresh mandate if the premier cannot offer him a guarantee that he now has a stable majority, a senior PD Senate source told Reuters. Patching things up with Renzi looks like the only option, he said.

For its part, Italia Viva says it has no veto against a return of Conte with a new policy platform, but it is playing its cards close to its chest.

"Conte is not the only option. We don't want to discuss names, let's first focus on the policies," said Teresa Bellanova, an Italia Viva senator and former minister.

If Conte does not get enough support, Mattarella may ask another candidate to try to form a government. Dissolving parliament and calling elections two years ahead of schedule would be his last resort.

'San Francisco can't figure out how to safely open schools but they have time to cancel Lincoln':

Fury as board votes to rename 44 schools honoring 'racists' such as Washington and Jefferson

(News Agencies)-The San Francisco school board has voted to strike the names of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln from the district's institutions, it was revealed Tuesday.

The former presidents were among the historical figures deemed by the board members to have ties to racism or have 'dishonorable legacies' in a 6-1 vote, which will see 44 San Francisco Unified School District schools forced to change their names.

The controversial move follows a wave of anti-racism protests that swept the country last summer in the wake of the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, resulting in statues of Confederate leaders, in particular, being torn down.

The decision in San Francisco resulted in anger from some policy makers, including Arkansas senator Tom Cotton, who believe the school board should instead be concentrating on how to bring students back to in-person learning during the pandemic. Among the other names on the newly banned list are Francis Scott Key, who wrote the words to the national anthem; former presidents William McKinley, James Garfield, James Monroe and Herbert Hoover; Revolutionary War hero Paul Revere; and author Robert Louis Stevenson. Even current senator Dianne Feinstein's name did not

escape the chopping block, as the first female mayor of San Francisco and lifelong Democrat became the only living person whose name was noted for removal.



The schools now all have until April 19, 2021, to come up with a proposal for a new name to be presented to board.

As well as the lack of focus given to school reopenings, the \$400,000 price tag to replace the signage at all the schools was also criticized in light of the district's budget deficit.

The price could rise to more than \$1 million to include new uniforms and gymnasium floors while the budget deficit could reach \$75 million next school year. The school board had voted in 2018 to establish a task force to study the names of district schools and determine which ones would be replaced, as calls mounted to replace those of historical figures tied to slavery. It came

after the 2017 death of Heather Heyer at the hands of white supremacists in Charlottesville, Virginia.

A volunteer panel was established and reviewed all 144 school names in the district, sending its recommendations to the board. The plans were moved forward in early 2020 after the Black Lives Matter protests erupted and the criteria expanded to include slave owners, colonizers, and those associated with genocide or oppression. The panel was also advised to focus on people 'who engaged in the subjugation and enslavement of human beings,'

who 'oppressed women,' or who 'otherwise significantly diminished the opportunities of those amongst us to the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness'. Feinstein Elementary, which takes its name from senator, will be forced to change its name due to allegations she replaced a damaged Confederate flag outside of City Hall when she was mayor in 1984. The flag was part of an 18-banner historical display outside of City Hall and been there for 14 years before she took office. The San Francisco native refused to replace the flag after it was taken down a second time by protesters and announced that the Confederate flag would never fly there again but it was not enough to save her from Tuesday's list.

On his first day, Secretary of State Blinken commits to rebuilding U.S. diplomacy worldwide

(News Agencies)-Antony Blinken began his first full day as U.S. secretary of state on Wednesday promising to repair ties with global partners and show the world that America can lead, while tackling climate change, the erosion of democracies and other complex issues.

Greeted in the lobby and outside by a crowd of State Department employees limited by coronavirus measures, Blinken, who served as No. 2 at the State Department under former Democratic President Barack Obama, was greeted with applause. "The world is watching us intently right now.

They want to know if we can heal our nation. They want to see whether we will lead with the power of our example... and if we

will put a premium on diplomacy with our allies and partners to meet the great challenges of our



time," he said. As challenges he cited the coronavirus pandemic, climate change, the global economy, threats to

democracies, fights for racial justice, and the dangers to

security and global stability posed by rivals and adversaries. He did not answer a reporter's question about where in the world

he would place the highest priorities. Past President Donald Trump's "America First" policies frayed Washington's traditional strategic alliances. The Jan. 6 storming of the U.S. Capitol by a pro-Trump mob further marred America's global standing. Blinken said the State Department must work to establish a united front with allies to counter the challenges.

"I know that the State Department I'm walking into today is not the same one I left four years ago," Blinken said. "A lot has changed. The world has changed. The Department has changed. ...The world is watching us intently right now. They want to know if we can heal our nation."

Police detain brother of jailed Kremlin critic and search properties, say Navalny allies

(News Agencies)-Police in Moscow detained Oleg Navalny, the brother of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, and searched the homes of the opposition politician's associates and other properties linked to him, his allies said. Tens of thousands of people took to the streets on Saturday to demand that the Kremlin release Alexei Navalny from jail, where he is serving a 30-day stint for alleged parole violations, which he denies.

Police had said the protests were illegal and OVD-Info, a monitoring group, said officers had detained close to 4,000 people. Navalny's allies plan to hold new rallies this Sunday. Ivan Zhdanov, director of Alexei Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, tweeted that Oleg Navalny had been in his brother's apartment as it was being searched.

Oleg Navalny was released from prison in 2018 after serving three-and-a-half years for an embezzlement conviction that critics say was designed to put pressure on his brother Alexei and smother dissent. Alexei Navalny was given a suspended sentence in the same case.

Zhdanov said police appeared to be conducting the searches as part of an investigation into calls to hold protests, which breached social distancing restrictions imposed because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"They started breaking down the door," he tweeted.

Zhdanov later said Oleg Navalny would remain in police custody for 48 hours on suspicion of violating sanitary and epidemiological regulations.

The Interior Ministry said in a statement earlier on Wednesday it had opened criminal cases against some of the participants in last week's protests. It did not immediately respond to a request for comment about the searches. Zhdanov later added that police had detained Ilya Pakhomov, an aide to Alexei Navalny, outside the opposition politician's apartment.

Senate Republicans unite behind failed effort to challenge Trump impeachment trial



Some Republican senators who backed Paul's motion said their vote on Tuesday did not indicate how they might come down on Trump's guilt or innocence after a trial.

"It's a totally different issue as far as I'm concerned," Republican Senator Rob Portman told reporters.

The senators voted after being sworn in as jurors for the impeachment trial.

Democratic Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, who moved to thwart Paul's motion, dismissed the Republican constitutional claim as "flat-out wrong" and said it would provide "a constitutional get-out-of-jail-free card" for presidents guilty of misconduct.

There is a debate among scholars over whether the Senate can hold a trial for Trump now that he has left office. Many experts have said "late impeachment" is constitutional, arguing that presidents who engage in misconduct late in their terms should not be immune from the very process set out in the Constitution for holding them accountable.

The Constitution makes clear that impeachment proceedings can result in disqualification from holding office in the future, so

there is still an active issue for the Senate to resolve, those scholars have said.

'MATTER OF POLITICAL CONSEQUENCE'

Fellow Republican Senator Lisa Murkowski, who has been critical of Trump, rejected Paul's move.

"My review of it has led me to conclude that it is constitutional, in recognizing that impeachment is not solely about removing a president, it is also a matter of political consequence," Murkowski told reporters on Tuesday. She joined fellow Republicans Mitt Romney, Susan Collins, Ben Sasse and Patrick Toomey in opposing Paul.

Trump is the only president to have been impeached by the House of Representatives twice and the first to face a trial after leaving power, with the possibility of being disqualified from future public office if convicted by two-thirds of the Senate.

He was acquitted by the then Republican-controlled Senate last February on charges of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress arising from his request that Ukraine investigate Democratic rival Joe Biden and his son. The House approved a single article of impeachment -

the equivalent of an indictment in a criminal trial - on Jan. 13, accusing him of inciting an insurrection with an incendiary speech to supporters before they stormed the Capitol. A police officer and four others died in the melee.

But reaching the two-thirds threshold required for conviction will be a steep climb. Trump remains a powerful force among Republicans and his supporters have vowed to mount election challenges to lawmakers in the party who support conviction.

Some Republicans have criticized Trump's false claims of voting fraud and his failed efforts to overturn Biden's Nov. 3 election victory. But no Senate Republicans have said definitively that they plan to vote to convict him. Although the Constitution calls on the chief justice to preside over presidential impeachment trials, a senator presides when the impeached is not the current president, a Senate source said. First elected to the chamber in 1974, Leahy is the most senior Democrat in the chamber and holds the title of Senate president pro tempore. The nine House Democrats who will serve as prosecutors set the trial in motion on Monday by delivering the article of impeachment to the Senate.

Forty-five Senate Republicans backed a failed effort on Tuesday to halt former President Donald Trump's impeachment trial, in a show of party unity that some cited as a clear sign he will not be convicted of inciting insurrection at the Capitol. Republican Senator Rand Paul made a motion on the Senate floor that would have required the chamber to vote on whether Trump's trial in February violates the U.S. Constitution.

The Democratic-led Senate blocked the motion in a 55-45 vote. But only five Republican lawmakers joined Democrats to reject the move, far short of the 17 Republicans who would need to vote to convict Trump on an impeachment charge that he in-

cited the Jan. 6 Capitol assault that left five people dead.

"It's one of the few times in Washington where a loss is actually a victory," Paul later told reporters. "Forty-five votes means the impeachment trial is dead on arrival."

Paul and other Republicans contend that the proceedings are unconstitutional because Trump left office last Wednesday and the trial will be overseen by Democratic Senator Patrick Leahy instead of by U.S. Chief Justice John Roberts.

Leahy, 80, was briefly hospitalized on Tuesday evening after not feeling well but was released after an examination, his spokesman, David Carle, said in a statement.

U.N. report accuses Yemen government of money-laundering, Houthis of taking state revenue

Independent U.N. sanctions monitors accused Yemen's government, in a report seen by Reuters on Tuesday, of money-laundering and corruption "that adversely affected access to adequate food supplies" and said the Houthi group collected at least \$1.8 billion in state revenue in 2019 to help fund its war effort. The annual report to the U.N. Security Council on the implementation of international sanctions on Yemen coincides with U.N. officials saying that the country is on the verge of a large famine with millions of civilians at risk. The monitors said Saudi Arabia deposited \$2 billion with the Central Bank of Yemen in January 2018 under a development and reconstruction program. The money was intended to fund credit to buy commodities - such as rice, sugar, milk and flour - to strengthen food security and stabilize domestic

prices. The U.N. investigation found that Yemen's Central Bank broke its foreign exchange rules, manipulated the foreign exchange market and "laundered a substantial part of the Saudi deposit in a sophisticated money-laundering scheme" that saw traders receive a \$423 million windfall.

"The \$423 million is public money, which has been illegally transferred to private corporations. Documents provided by the Central Bank of Yemen fail to explain why they adopted such a destructive strategy," according to the U.N. report.

The monitors said they view it as "an act of money-laundering and corruption perpetrated by government institutions, in this case the Central Bank of Yemen and the Government of Yemen, in collusion with well-placed businesses and political personalities, to the benefit of a select group of privi-

leged traders and businessmen." Yemen's Central Bank said on Wednesday the operations it carried out were transparent and compliant with international banking and trade requirements.

"The Central Bank determined the exchange rate based on Central Bank of Yemen law and sought to adopt a cautious policy in moving the exchange rate at a time when the market saw sharp fluctuations leading to price instability for basic goods," the bank said.

"The Central Bank believes the team of experts ... may have relied on allegations and misleading information from some anti-Yemen parties that target the Central Bank of Yemen and its presence and activities in Aden," the statement said, adding that the team of experts had been invited to Aden to examine documents. The U.N. report said that in areas controlled by the



Houthis the group was collecting taxes and other state revenue needed to pay government salaries and provide basic services to citizens. It estimates the Houthis diverted at least \$1.8 billion in 2019, "a large portion" of which was used to fund their war effort.

The Houthis did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the accusations in the

U.N. report.

A Saudi Arabia-led military coalition intervened in Yemen in 2015, backing government forces fighting the Houthis in a war widely seen as a proxy conflict between U.S. ally Saudi Arabia and Iran. U.N. officials are trying to revive peace talks to end the war as Yemen's suffering is also worsened by an economic collapse and the COVID-19 pandemic.

'Climate day means jobs day'

Biden sells his green vision as an economic boost as he signs orders to ban drilling on all federal land, abolish fossil fuel subsidies and make America a zero emissions country by 2050

President Biden also vowed not to forget energy workers who have lost jobs in the shift to more renewable, environmental fuel sources.

'We're never going to forget the men and women who dug the coal and built the nation. We're going to do right by them, make sure they have opportunities to keep building the nation and their own communities and getting paid well,' he said.

The orders kick off Biden's drive to combat climate change, an issue area young Democratic voters and progressive activists pressed him on during the presidential campaign. It was one of the four areas he vowed to tackle at the start of his presidency along with COVID, the economy, and social injustice.

In his plan, Biden rejected the Green New Deal branding pushed by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez among others but his measures are certain to be attacked by Republicans as over-reach and he's been accused of putting jobs at risk.

'We will do everything we can to fight this executive order,' Mike Sommers, the CEO of the American Petroleum Institute, told CNN Business. 'We will pursue every action at our disposal to push back, including legal options, if appropriate.' Republicans called the plan a job killer.

'Pie-in-the-sky government mandates and directives that restrict our mining, oil, and gas industries adversely impact our energy security and independence,' GOP Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers of Washington state, the top Republican on the House Energy and Commerce Committee, said.

'At a time when millions are struggling due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the last thing Americans need is big government destroying jobs, while costing the economy billions of dollars,' she said.

But Biden's initiatives do parallel some of main points of the Green New Deal, mainly tackling climate change while addressing economic and racial injustice. 'It's almost as if we helped shape the

platform,' Ocasio-Cortez quipped on Twitter of Biden's plan. She was part of a task force the merged Biden's middle of the road policies with the wishes of progressives.

Among the provisions in the executive orders is a directive to the secretary of the Interior to pause new oil and natural gas leases on federal lands or offshore waters. It also directs the secretary to double renewable energy production from offshore wind by 2030.

The orders are meant to fulfill Biden's campaign promise to

Biden's climate plans also strengthen measures to protect poor and minority neighborhoods from pollution.

'With this executive order, environmental justice will be at the center of all we do addressing the disproportionate health and environmental and economic impacts on communities of color, so called fenceline communities, especially those communities, brown, black Native American poor whites,' Biden noted.

He pointed out poor air quality is increasing the risk of COVID.



achieve a carbon pollution-free power sector by 2035 and put the United States on an irreversible path to a net-zero economy by 2050.

Biden also directed federal agencies to 'eliminate fossil fuel subsidies as consistent with applicable law,' according to a White House fact sheet.

It's unclear though which subsidies will be affected as tax breaks are a matter for Congress.

The oil and gas industry already noted their concern about Biden administration's plans.

'The first few days are giving us an indication of what the next four years could look like, and that's elicited some real concern, within the industry and broadly, outside the industry,' Frank Macchiarola, senior vice president of policy, economics and regulatory affairs at the American Petroleum Institute told The Washington Post. 'We're going to communicate how impactful such a policy would be, to both the administration and on Capitol Hill.'

'It's not just a pandemic that keeps people inside is poor air quality. Multiple studies have shown that air pollution is associated with an increased risk of death from COVID-19,' the president said.

And the orders direct the government to conserve 30 percent of all federal land and water by 2030; create a National Climate Task Force to assemble a government-wide action plan for reducing greenhouse gas emissions; establish a White House interagency council on environmental justice; establish a Civilian Climate Corps Initiative 'to put a new generation of Americans to work'; and make climate change a national security priority.

'Our plans are ambitious. But we are America. We're bold and are unwavering in the pursuit of jobs and innovation and science and discovery. We can do this, we must do this and we will do this,' Biden said.

Ahead of the signing, White House Climate Czar John Kerry and National Climate Advisor

Gina McCarthy previewed the president's argument that the climate plan will result in jobs.

'It is now cheaper to deal with the crisis of climate than destroy it,' Kerry said of why the administration was pushing this now as it combats COVID and tries to improve the economy. He argued there were jobs for workers in the solar and wind energy - positions that could be filled by oil and gas workers who lost their jobs.

'Unfortunately workers have been fed a false narrative, no surprise, for the last four years' about the shift to clean energy, Kerry said. 'They've been fed that somehow dealing with climate is coming at their expense. No, it's not.'

He and McCarthy, who joined Wednesday's White House press briefing, repeatedly pushed the job message as they advocated for tougher environmental policies.

'When we say climate change eventually, people are going to think jobs just like President Biden, when he hears the words climate change,' McCarthy said. 'In terms of the job issue, we're explicitly doing this because right now our economy is stagnant,' she noted.

Biden already has taken a series of actions to combat climate change - a dramatic reversal from the policies under former President Donald Trump.

On his first day as president, he signed the papers for the United States to rejoin the Paris Climate Accord after Trump removed the country from the climate agreement.

He also revoked a key cross-border presidential permit needed to finish the controversial Keystone XL pipeline - a move that angered Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and ended the \$8 billion pipeline.

Biden also created a climate czar position - adding it to the National Security Council - that is held by John Kerry.

Biden will also host a Leaders' Climate Summit on Earth Day, April 22, 2021. Some Democrats said Biden should do more, including Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer, who called on the president to declare a national emergency.

'President Biden should consider the declaration of a national emergency on climate change,' Schumer said on the Senate floor Wednesday morning.

'It would allow President Biden to tap additional resources,' he pointed out.

Biden stopped short of endorsing the controversial Green New Deal - a set of progressive ideas that called for trillions of dollars in spending on green initiatives and for the elimination of greenhouse gas pollution by 2015.

Instead, he came with his own plan - a more central approach that had some liberals grumbling it wasn't enough while garnering fire from the oil and gas industry, who complained his plan would result in lost jobs and revenue.

He brought his climate team in the administration, although he did nominate Rep. Deb Haaland to lead the Interior Department. She was a co-sponsor of Rep. Alexandria Ocasio Cortez's Green New Deal.

Biden's campaign climate plan infuriated the oil industry and became a battle cry in the key swing state of Pennsylvania, where fracking is a major industry. Biden ultimately won the state but Donald Trump repeatedly criticized him on the issue during the campaign in one of his more effective tactics against Biden.

Wednesday's plan does not ban fracking but does halt any new leases. Federal land accounts for less than a quarter of total U.S. oil production and much less for natural gas.

'And let me be clear because I know it's always comes up. We're not going to ban fracking. We will protect jobs and grow jobs, including through stronger standards like controls from methane leaks and union workers and willing to install the changes,' Biden said in announcing his climate plans.

The top three House Republicans, joined by 17 others, sent a letter to Biden on Tuesday warning him against suspending federal oil and gas auctions.

Taking such a step 'would be as extreme as it is radical, and it would only further divide the country.'

Lessons in popular resistance

The government was unusually assured about the impossibility of a debate around the issue. However, the farmers managed to generate a popular debate outside the house. Similar to the anti-CAA protests, the farm laws have invigorated the public sphere with both deliberative and participatory democracy. The lines have been drawn between the constituent and constituted power.

Agricultural output in India has been satisfactory over the last many years. The foodgrain farmers have been able to bring in a good harvest. Shock in the form of drought, excessive rains, rains during harvest season etc. is part of the agricultural cycle. Though farmers are used to dealing with extreme volatility due to fluctuations in weather etc., the lockdown created a challenge they had not anticipated. Producers of perishable commodities, other than millet producers, have had a particularly difficult season. In the nightmarish narrative of the pandemic in 2020, the agriculture sector and, specifically, the peasant was forgotten. This was a second blow to the peasantry in five years. Demonetisation in November 2016 occurred right at the moment of kharif harvest and the lockdown at the end of March was instituted just before the rabi harvest.

The new legislative acts, namely the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, the Essential Services Commodities Act, 2020, and the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, are designed in such a way that eventually they will make the MSP (minimum support price) and PPS (public procurement system) redundant.

A significant aspect of the agricultural sector is the sale of produce. Mandis in this regard are central. During the peak of the pandemic, for example, due to restrictions and the migration of labour, mandis could not operate. Delay in the process resulted in losses to farmers. One major lesson that needs to be learnt from the chain of the workforce and its deployment in the agriculture sector is that to ameliorate the distress of



farmers, MSP has to be backed by a well-managed procurement mechanism.

The outline of the laws and its political positioning hints at a pro-corporate bias. Significant reforms in the agricultural sector are urgently required but the debate around MSP highlights that in India reforms in the sector cannot be based on a laissez-faire approach antagonist to farmers' interest.

However, the government and its allies across sectors have consistently engaged in deflecting criticism. In the exercise of diverting attention from the core issues, the goalpost kept shifting in the entire discussion. Initially, the government responded with indifference and pretended to be oblivious to farmer's concerns. Later, it described the mobilisation as a ploy by opposition parties and tried to infantilise the protests by referring to the farmers as being misled. The display of the repressive approach was evident in the use of water cannons, tear gas shells and lathi charge on the protesting farmers when they were moving towards the national capital region. A narrative that sustained itself by calling protesting farmers foreign-funded, anti-national, Khalistanis etc was started. State agencies started to summon leading figures associated with the protest and branded some of them as "overground workers" of banned organisations. This is nothing but a time-tested politics of intimidation to silence legitimate opposition to the government.

The nature of peasantry is indeed diverse across various regions in India. The peasant question has regained significant currency

even though a narrative of modernity, infrastructure, and urbanism was gaining dominance in the government's argument for development. The nature of the protest has highlighted the difficulty and undesirability of imposing a single common narrative structure on both sides.

The protest sites of the farmers have turned into an alternative utopia where tradition and modernity have converged and introduced a hybridity that cannot be ignored. Farmers' political posturing is based on a modality that comprises a triad of an ethico-political narrative that is based on sewa (service), the assertion of the identity of annadaata (provider) and recasting the narrative of bhoomi (land). Through sewa, the farmers have disrupted the government's narrative that thrives on a binary of a friend and foe such as nationalists versus anti-nationalists. Instead, the farmers' protest has invited and even served the policemen deputed to limit and even repress the protests. Their indiscriminate welcome to one and all has garnered support beyond their constituency. In the Indian culture, the cultivator/farmer is often revered as the annadaata, almost a demi-god figure that serves as god's invisible hand as a provider on earth. This sensibility resonates across cultures, traditions, regions, and communities of the country. The annadaata narrative has added a spiritual dimension to the protests. With it, the esoteric stories of peasants' resolve also became popular amongst diverse masses, many of whom live by social media. Above all, the farmers have reiterated the human relation to land as a

resource which must extend beyond a simplistic notion of economic extraction. In hindsight, the discourse of bhoomi as "nurturer" has short-circuited, and even confronted, the Hindu right-wing's narrative of bhoomi (belonging/political membership) that thrives on a distinction of matru bhoomi and pitru bhoomi and creates exclusionary politics and marginalisation. The protests have succeeded in creating a public consensus against cartelisation, monopoly business and corporate takeover of the country. For the first time, two business houses (Ambani and Adani) have become the focus of a sustained popular campaign that proposes them as central figures in the apparatus of dispossession.

The vicious campaigns by a section of media now popularly known as "godi media" against various democratic mobilisations over the past few years have also been called out. The farmers have shown that popular resistance in favour of real political issues can benefit from the power of social media. In an era where the post-truth paradigm is comfortably suggested as the new norm, the farmers' movement at the borders of the national capital have disrupted this convenient understanding and have shown that facts remain facts no matter how much spin is added to them. The central government's late arrival at the negotiating table has shown that the government lacks political maturity, creativity and imagination to resolve a political crisis. It resorts to the time-tested tactics of either discrediting the protests, threatening and intimidating its leaders and attempts to repression. What the central

government did not fathom was that the farmers would be so clear in their articulation of demands and could also provide sufficient arguments in support of them. While the government is looking for an easy way out by making insignificant concessions to farmers, the farmers have cordoned off government's manoeuvring space by sticking to their sole demand, i.e., repeal of the laws. On 20 January, the central government blinked for the first time suggesting that laws could be put on hold for a year or two.

The farmers' protest has exposed the limitations of the central government. The prime minister's self-congratulatory sermons have had no effect on the popularity and support of the farm laws, nor has it influenced the farmers to change their views. Given the regional disparity across India, the central government should accept the fact that the purview of such laws has to be federal. So instead of centralising power, it should work towards strengthening federalism. State governments should be allowed to decide on the journey they wish to undertake to deal with the agrarian crises in the region. A hard push for uniformity across the country will prove to be counterproductive.

We contend that the ongoing protests have opened up a new space for popular politics. One, it has created pluralist considerations that the government had to face during the protests. A new politics of inclusion/alliances, both by the state and the popular, are apparent. The ongoing farmers' agitation has extended way beyond its immediate remit and has gained a potential of great proportion. Second, closer attention is required to study the nature of this creative political resistance. The farmers have been successful in controlling and sustaining the narrative of sewa, annadaata and bhoomi by connecting it to a discourse of nurturing and humanity. The uniqueness of these protests must be seen as a distinct, emerging, and thriving counter-narrative that emerged in a context of little opposition to the dominant political paradigm in India.

"India Won't Tolerate Insult Of National Flag At Red Fort," Says Centre



Red Fort hoisted a Sikh religious flag on an empty mast. The matter drew attention to the man the farmers have blamed for the violence -- Punjabi actor and activist Deep Sidhu, who in a Facebook post defended the planting of a "Nishan Sahib" or Sikh religious flag at the iconic monument.

Several farmer leaders have accused the actor of tainting their anti-farm law protest. He was allegedly responsible for the farmer's movement towards the

Red Fort, where they had climbed the ramparts and clashed with the police when they were asked to leave.

Mr Javadekar pointed finger at the Congress and its senior leader Rahul Gandhi, who, the minister said, was "instigating" people through his tweets.

"Rahul Gandhi was not merely supporting (the farmers' protest) but was instigating. It happened at the time of CAA. There was talk of Congress rally and on the second day people came on the

road."The same thing happened yesterday. Yesterday's tweets are in front of everyone," he added.

"A Congress tweet claimed the farmer who died in an accident was the victim of police brutality. When questions were raised from all over the country, Rahul ji's statement came that violence is not the solution to any problem," the minister said.

Citing the 10 rounds of negotiations with farmers that happened over the past weeks,

Mr Javadekar said it is the Congress which is not allowing a resolution of the issue.

"The government talked 10 rounds, offered to put the law on hold for one-and-a-half years. Questioned how the rights of farmers could be reduced... The Congress also understands, but it will not allow this compromise," he added.

The Delhi Police, who have made 19 arrests in the 25-odd cases filed, on Wednesday said they are investigating the leaders of

farmer groups in connection with the violence.

The farmers, who received permission to hold the rally at a designated time and route yesterday - had deviated from it, triggering clashes with the police.

The farmers broke barricades at the three borders from where the rally was to start - Singhu, Tikri and Ghaziabad. A group went to the iconic Red Fort, where they entered the Mughal-era structure.

Who Is Deep Sidhu ? Actor Blamed By Farmers For Tractor Rally Violence

1. The Punjabi actor from Muktsar district and became a star with his 2018 film "Jora Das Numbria".

2. He was considered close to Sunny Deol until the Bollywood actor and BJP MP distanced himself and his family from Deep Sidhu in social media posts.

3. When the farmers' protests against three central laws started in Punjab last year, Deep was among the many Punjabi actors and singers who mobilised youth across the state. He started sharing his views on his Facebook page. 4. He is believed to have played a role in diverting the tractor

rally from the agreed route and then led the storming of Red Fort.

5. Afterwards, he reportedly returned to the Singhu border - the epicenter of the two-month protests - and was heckled by farmers who accused him of misleading protesters.

6. Deep Sidhu first took an active role in the protests when a bandh was called on September 25 by farmers' bodies.

7. He and other artistes and activists gave a call for a sit-in protest at the Shambu border point between Delhi and Haryana. The unexpected turnout

overshadowed all other protests. 8. Deep Sidhu then started a permanent sit-in at Shambu, gaining attention. With his rising popularity was viewed by some farmers' unions as a threat to their agenda; they accused him of using his stardom to divert attention from the actual problem.

9. Many farm unions allege he is an agent of the ruling BJP because of his association with Sunny Deol.

10. He is known to quote Martin Luther King and Sikh separatist Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. His speeches are said to be focused on the demand for more rights for states.

Skin-to-skin contact: SC stays Bombay HC order acquitting man under POCSO Act

The Supreme Court on Wednesday stayed the Bombay High Court order which acquitted a man under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act saying "groping a minor's breast without 'skin-to-skin contact' cannot be termed as sexual assault".

A bench of Chief Justice SA Bobde and Justices AS Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian stayed the high court order after Attorney General KK Venugopal mentioned the matter.

The top court also issued notice to Maharashtra government and permitted the AG to file an appeal against the January 19 verdict of the Nagpur bench

of the Bombay High Court. On January 19, the high court had said that groping a minor's breast without "skin-to-skin contact" cannot be termed as sexual assault as defined under the POCSO Act.

It, however, held that since the man groped her without removing her clothes, the offence cannot be termed as sexual assault and, instead, constitutes the offence of outraging a woman's modesty under IPC Section 354.

The high court had modified the order of a sessions court, which had sentenced a 39-year-old man to three years of imprisonment for sexually assaulting a 12-year-old girl



What went wrong on Republic Day?

FIRs, blame-game, infighting mar farmers' protest



It was meant to be the moment in the sun for Indian farmers. After two months of protesting in the freezing winter cold, this was a chance to celebrate their identity in a truly unique manner. The tractor was the farmers' badge of pride, their version of the mighty tanks that would roll down Rajpath on Republic Day. As one of them, furiously waving the tricolour, told us: If jawans can march at Rajpath, why can't we kisans also have our tractor parade? Every jawan is after all also a kisan!" It didn't take long for the reverie to be shaken. By forenoon, it was clear that there were a section of the farmers who had turned a potentially momentous occasion into a recipe for violent confrontation. Breaking police barricades, changing the agreed route, and heading straight towards central Delhi, the farmer-protester was now transformed into an ugly street thug.

It wasn't as if every farmer was part of the mob. There were enough farmers who, dressed in their colourful shirts and striking headgear, were still determined to make this a joyful occasion. Some were being showered with flowers along the route even as

others more menacingly wielded lathis and swords. Whereas some adhered to the great Sikh tradition of offering langar food to those passing by, others were driving their tractors straight at the police pickets.

So why would farmer groups, all seemingly driven by the same goal of a repeal in farm laws, react so differently? Why did some groups turn rogue, break all rules, eventually pushing their way into the hallowed Red Fort area? Only a transparent inquiry will reveal the truth, but it is increasingly apparent that to treat farm protestors as a monolithic entity which would act in perfect unison was always a misreading of the ground situation.

The farmers, after all, represent more than 30 small and large unions, different jathas, and come from varied groups across different regions. A call for repealing farm laws may have united them, but their political ideologies stretched across the spectrum. Like with any large movement, this was akin to a Shivji ki baarat, a real disparate gathering of just about anyone who wished to join the bandwagon. What, for example, did a psephologist-turned-activist

neta like Yogendra Yadav have in common with actor, Sunny Deol groupie and a Khalistani sloganeer such as Deep Sidhu? Just where did a dyed-in-the-wool Leftist such as Hannan Mollah fit in with an aggressively ambitious political farm entrepreneur like Rakesh Tikait of the Bharatiya Kisan Union?

To have then expected thousands of tractors to conform to a rigid plan of action was always being unrealistic. Why the Delhi Police, despite their better judgment, allowed the political leadership to overrule their objections to a tractor rally of this magnitude is still a mystery. The Delhi Police, to its credit, acted with professionalism and showed extreme restraint in the face of grave provocation by an unruly mob. But facing the dual task of manning capital security and dealing with an unprecedented tractor rally, an over-stretched police force was out-numbered.

If the police perhaps underestimated the tractor rally, the farm leaders overestimated their ability to rein in such a large and diverse grouping. For two months, the farmers, quite remarkably, kept their peace,

perhaps hoping that the sheer symbolism of their peaceful protest would force an all powerful Centre to relent. They almost succeeded - in the last week, it was apparent that the government was under pressure to concede to most of the farmer demands. Perhaps carried away with their success, farm unions overplayed their hand.

In a sense, farm leaders must accept moral responsibility for the violence that has de facto delegitimised their unique protest. This farm movement was driven by an ethical code until now, a wider public acceptance that the "kisan as anna-datta" (food provider) cannot be taken for granted. But the deeply troubling images of the protesters forcibly entering Red Fort, attacking the police at various places and threatening mediapersons have shaken the romantic illusion of the hardworking farmer as men and women of honour. By breaking the law, the tractor became a weapon of self-destruction.

The Centre, too, needs to course correct. For the longest time, the government has been trapped in hubris, a state of mind which views any street protest as "anti-

national" and a challenge to its dominance. A directionless Opposition, too, has fished in troubled waters while piggybacking on the protests. Had there been greater trust and goodwill on all sides, there would have been less reason to push the agitation to breaking point.

Even now, it is not too late for a resolution if only this is not seen as a prestige issue.

For now, the violence has seriously dented the credibility of a protest movement that seemed genuine and spontaneous while the majesty of the Indian State has also taken a hit. Republic Day 2021 will go down as the day when the inspirational "Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan" slogan lost a bit of its sheen.

Post-script: The death of one farmer on January 26 when a tractor overturned while attempting to ram into a police barricade has made headlines and become a symbol of the anarchic few hours in central Delhi. But what of the 60-odd farmers who have died in the extreme cold during the protests over the last two months? Who will mourn for them?

Angry farmers storm India's Red Fort in challenge to Modi



Tens of thousands of farmers marched, rode horses and drove tractors into India's capital on Tuesday, breaking through police barricades to storm the historic Red Fort - a deeply symbolic act that revealed the scale of their challenge to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government. As the country celebrated Republic Day, the long-running protest turned violent, with farmers waving farm union and religious flags from the ramparts of the fort, where prime ministers annually hoist the national flag on the country's August independence holiday. Riot police fired tear gas and water cannons and set up barricades in an attempt to prevent the protesters from reaching the center of New

Delhi, but the demonstrators broke through in many places. People watched in shock as the takeover of the fort, which was built in the 17th century and served as the palace of Mughal emperors, was shown live on hundreds of news channels. Protesters, some carrying ceremonial swords, ropes and sticks, overwhelmed police. The farmers have been staging largely peaceful protests for nearly two months, demanding the withdrawal of new laws that they say will favor large corporate farms and devastate the earnings of smaller scale farmers. The contentious legislation has exacerbated existing resentment among farmers, who have long been seen as the heart and soul of India but often complain of

being ignored by the government. As their protest has gathered strength, it has rattled the government like never before since they form the most influential voting bloc in India and are also crucial to its economy.

"We want to show Modi our strength," said Satpal Singh, a farmer who drove into the capital on a tractor along with his family of five. "We will not surrender." Leaders of the farmers said more than 10,000 tractors joined the protest, and thousands more people marched on foot or rode on horseback while shouting slogans against Modi. At some places, they were showered with flower petals by residents who recorded the unprecedented protest on their phones. Authorities used tear gas, water cannons and placed large trucks and buses in roads to try to hold back crowd, including rows upon rows of tractors, which shoved aside concrete and steel barricades. Police said one protester died after his tractor overturned, but farmers said he was shot. Several bloodied protesters could be seen in television footage.

Farmers - many of them Sikhs from Punjab and Haryana states - tried to march into New Delhi in November but were stopped by police. Since then, unfazed by the winter cold and frequent rains, they have hunkered down at the edge of the city and threatened to besiege it if the farm laws are not repealed.

The government insists that the agriculture reform laws passed by Parliament in September will benefit farmers and boost production through private investment. But the farmers fear it will leave those who hold small plots behind as big corporations win out.

The government has offered to amend the laws and suspend their implementation for 18 months. But farmers insist they will settle for nothing less than a complete repeal and plan to march on foot to Parliament on Feb. 1.

Farmers are the latest group to upset Modi's image of imperturbable dominance in Indian politics. Since returning to power for a second term, Modi's government has been rocked by several convulsions. The economy has tanked, social

stife has widened, protests have erupted against laws some deem discriminatory and his government has been questioned over its response to the coronavirus pandemic. In 2019, the year that witnessed the first major protests against his administration, a diverse coalition of groups rallied against a contentious new citizenship law that they said discriminated against Muslims. But the latest protests - which began in northern states that are major agricultural producers - have triggered a growing farmer rebellion that is fast spreading to other parts of the country, presenting a serious challenge to Modi's government.

Agriculture supports more than half of the country's 1.4 billion people. But the economic clout of farmers has diminished over the last three decades. Once producing a third of India's gross domestic product, farmers now account for only 15% of the country's \$2.9 trillion economy. More than half of farmers are in debt, with 20,638 killing themselves in 2018 and 2019, according to official records.

Devinder Sharma, an agriculture expert who has spent the last two decades campaigning for income equality for Indian farmers, said they are not only protesting the reforms but also "challenging the entire economic design of the country."

"The anger that you see is compounded anger," Sharma said. "Inequality is growing in India and farmers are becoming poorer. Policy planners have failed to realize this and have sucked the income from the bottom to the top. The farmers are only demanding what is their right." Modi has tried to dismiss the farmers' fears as unfounded and has repeatedly accused opposition parties of agitating them by spreading rumors. The protests overshadowed Republic Day celebrations, in which Modi oversaw a traditional lavish parade along ceremonial Rajpath boulevard displaying the country's military power and cultural diversity. Authorities shut some metro train stations, and mobile internet service was suspended in some parts of the capital, a frequent tactic of the government to thwart protests. The parade was scaled back because of the pandemic.

Farm leaders overestimated their ability to control a large and diverse group, while Delhi Police underestimated the scale of the rally

The ongoing farmers' protest against three agriculture laws which are now on hold according to Supreme Court's latest verdict appeared to have lost its sight in the aftermath of the Republic Day violence as infighting among the unions surfaced. At least 15 village panchayats in Rewari, prompted by the Red Fort breach, asked protesters camping at Delhi-Jaipur National Highway to vacate the road. Here is all you need to know: Where does the protest stand now?

> Farmers' unions have cancelled their proposed Parliament march on February 1. However, the protest will continue and their next plan includes hunger strikes across the country on January 30.

> One faction of Bharatiya

Kisan Union has withdrawn its protest bringing the infighting among the farmers' unions to the fore. The Bhanu faction which is presided by Thakur Bhanu Pratap Singh withdrew its protest on Wednesday vacating the Delhi-Noida Link



Road via Chilla border.

> Rashtriya Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan, too, withdrew its support from the protest. > Traffic, metro and mobile internet services have been back to normal in most of the places in the Capital. Delhi Metro closed the entry gates of Jama Masjid metro station

and both the entry and the exit gates of Red Fort Metro stations.

> The Red Fort is shut from January 27 till January 31, the Archaeological Survey of India has said in an order.

> Mobile internet services in Sonipat, Jhajjar and Palwal have not been restored as the Haryana government has extended the suspension till 5pm on January 28. Action against Red Fort breach

> The Centre has made it clear that perpetrators of Red Fort breach will not be spared. > Delhi Police have registered several FIRs which name farmers Rakesh Tikait, Yogendra Yadav, Medha

Patkar, among others.

> Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Chinmoy Biswal has issued a showcause letter Sanyukt Kisan Morcha, the umbrella body of the protesting unions, and asked leader Darshan Pal to reply within three days naming the perpetrators.

> A Delhi resident has moved a petition in the Delhi high court seeking removal of the protesters in the name of farmers' agitation. A law student in Mumbai has moved the Supreme Court with a similar petition. An advocate has written to the Chief Justice of India urging him to take suo moto cognisance of the Republic Day violence.

> Twitter said it has suspended more than 550 accounts in light of the violence that erupted in parts of Delhi during farmers' Republic Day tractor rally.

India's farmers are still protesting - and things are turning violent

Violence erupted across India's capital city of New Delhi on Tuesday when thousands of farmers protesting the government's agricultural reform bills rode tractors past police barriers and clashed with officers.

Farmers unions had devised a plan for a peaceful march into the capital on Republic Day, which commemorates the signing of India's constitution. The Indian government had approved a plan for the farmers - who have been protesting for months - to enter the city at noon. But the farmers' plans went awry when some protesters began marching toward the capital a few hours ahead of schedule, resulting in a face-off with police, who used tear gas and batons to try to turn them back.

As the farmers abandoned approved routes, fierce battles broke out across the city. One farmer was crushed when his tractor was among the many vehicles overturned in the melee. Reports indicate that at least 19 people involved in the clashes were sent to two New Delhi hospitals. According to police, at least 86 officers were also injured.

In a statement, Eish Singal of the New Delhi police said the



protesters broke the agreements made before the rally. "The farmers began tractor rally before the scheduled time, they also resorted to violence and vandalism."

The farmers, many of whom are Sikhs from India's Punjab and Haryana states, also entered New Delhi's historic Red Fort and raised the Nishan Sahib, a flag of importance to India's Sikh communities.

The Joint Farmers' Front, which represents a number of Indian farmers unions, issued a statement Tuesday condemning the clashes and separating themselves from protesters who engaged in violence. "We condemn and regret the undesirable and unacceptable

events that have taken place today and dissociate ourselves from those indulging in such acts," the statement read.

The statement also said that the unions had made efforts to keep the events peaceful but "some organizations and individuals have violated the route and indulged in condemnable acts." Chief Minister Amarinder Singh, who represents Punjab, where many of the farmers are from, wrote on Twitter that the violence was "unacceptable" and urged "all genuine farmers to vacate Delhi and return to the borders," referring to the areas on the outskirts of Delhi where the farmers have been camped for weeks in protest. Why the farmers are still protesting



Thousands of farmers have been blocking several roads into new Delhi for more than two months demanding the repeal of three laws Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party passed in September as a part of a plan to make India a \$5 trillion economy by 2024. The laws, which some experts say are necessary to modernize India's economy, remove longstanding restrictions on how and where produce is sold. Farmers who used to sell their produce at government-sanctioned markets called mandis are now able to sell wherever they please. But the farmers are worried that the reforms will leave them at the mercy of large corporations that

will buy their crops for low prices, leading to their financial ruin.

In response to the months of protests that have left dozens of farmers dead, the Indian government has offered to suspend the laws for 18 months. However, the farmers unions have refused to end their protest until there is a full retraction of the laws. After an 11th round of talks ended without a resolution on January 22, the farmers decided to increase agitation of Modi's government by riding tractors into the capital city during the Republic Day celebrations. The farmers have planned a march on foot to the parliament building on February 1 as the government determines its budget.

Indian farm protesters battle police to plant flags at historic Red Fort

Thousands of Indian farmers protesting against agricultural reforms on Tuesday overwhelmed police and stormed into the historic Red Fort complex in New Delhi after tearing down barricades and driving tractors through roadblocks. Police fired tear gas in an unsuccessful bid to force the protesters back. One protester was killed, a witness said, and Delhi police said 86 officers had been injured across the city.

Some of those who scaled the walls of Red Fort carried ceremonial swords, scattering police who tried to prevent them from entering. Footage from Reuters partner ANI showed police jumping from the ramparts to escape. Once inside, the protesters hoisted flags.

Angered by laws they say help large, private buyers at the expense of producers, farmers have camped outside the capital for almost two months, posing one

of the biggest challenges to Prime Minister Narendra Modi since he came to power in 2014. "Modi will hear us now, he will have to hear us now," said Sukhdev Singh, 55, a farmer from the northern state of Punjab.

The body of one protester draped in an Indian tricolour lay in the street after the tractor he rode overturned in one clash, said a witness, Vishu Arora.

"He died right there," Arora said.

A Reuters witness

saw several police and protesters with head injuries following clashes at the Red Fort, from whose ramparts Modi delivers an annual speech.

The government ordered internet services in some parts of the capital to be blocked, according to mobile carrier Vodafone Idea, in an attempt to prevent further

unrest.

LOST CONTROL

Tens of thousands of farmers began the day in a convoy of tractors festooned with Indian and union flags along the city's fringes. But hundreds of protesters - some on horseback - broke away from



approved routes, heading for government buildings in the city centre where the annual Republic Day parade of troops and military hardware was taking place.

They commandeered cranes and used ropes to tear down roadblocks, forcing constables in riot gear to give way, Reuters wit-

nesses said. A second group rode tractors to a traffic junction, also breaching barricades after clashes with police.

Police accused those who diverged from the agreed routes of "violence and destruction".

"They have caused great damage to public property and many police personnel have also been injured," a police statement said. Protest organiser Samyukt Kisan Morcha said the groups deviating from set routes did not represent the majority of farmers.

"We also condemn and regret the undesirable and unacceptable events that have taken place today and dissociate ourselves from those indulging in such acts," the group of farm unions said in a statement.

Amarinder Singh, chief minister of Punjab state, where many of the protesters came from, called the clashes "shocking".

"The violence by some elements

is unacceptable," he said in a tweet. "It'll negate goodwill generated by peacefully protesting farmers."

FARMER PRESSURE

Agriculture employs about half of India's population of 1.3 billion, and unrest among an estimated 150 million landowning farmers worries the government.

Nine rounds of talks with farmers' unions have failed to end the protests, as farm leaders rejected the government's offer to delay the laws for 18 months, making a push for repeal instead. "The farm organisations have a very strong hold," said Ambar Kumar Ghosh, an analyst at New Delhi think tank the Observer Research Foundation.

"They have the resources to mobilise support, and to continue the protest for a long time. They have also been very successful in keeping the protest really focused."

India's Republic Day Marked With Massive Protests by Farmers



Tens of thousands of farmers drove a convoy of tractors into the Indian capital as the nation celebrated Republic Day on Tuesday in the backdrop of agricultural protests that have grown into a rebellion and rattled the government.

The capital's roads were swarmed by rows upon rows of tractors bearing flags of India and farm unions. Farmers, wearing distinctive colorful turbans, shouted slogans against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and what they call his "black laws." Thousands more marched on foot while dancing and singing, and at one place they were showered with flower petals by residents, some of whom recorded the unprecedented rally on their phones.

We want to show Modi our strength," said Satpal Singh, a farmer who marched into the

capital on a tractor along with his family of five. "We will not surrender."

Police in riot gear used tear gas and water cannon at two places to push back the protesters who tried to knock down barricades. Authorities also parked large trucks to barricade multiple routes so that farmers don't march to the interiors of the capital.

The farmer leaders said more than 10,000 tractors were to march through the capital for the rally and thousands of volunteers would try to help the police in keeping order.

The protests were set off by new agricultural laws Parliament passed in September. Modi's government insists the laws will benefit farmers and boost production through private investment, but farmers fear cartelization and



commercialization of agriculture will devastate their earnings.

Farmers first tried to march to New Delhi in November but were stopped by police. Since then, unfazed by overnight chilly winter temperatures they have hunkered down with food and fuel supplies and threatened to besiege the capital until the farm laws are repealed.

The government has offered to amend the laws and suspend their implementation for 18 months. But farmers insist they will settle for nothing less than a complete repeal. They plan a march by foot to the Indian Parliament on Feb. 1, when the country's new budget will be presented.

The tractor rally overshadowed the

Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi even as the annual military parade was scaled down because of the coronavirus pandemic.

A thin crowd assembled beside the ceremonial Rajpath boulevard in New Delhi to watch a display of the country's military power and cultural diversity. People wore masks and adhered to social distancing as police and military battalions marched along the parade route. Several states displayed their floats to present their culture and the army showcased its latest equipment during the parade. Republic Day marks the anniversary of the adoption of the country's constitution on Jan. 26, 1950.

Farmers are the latest group to upset Modi's image of imperturbable dominance in Indian politics.

Since returning to power for a second consecutive term, Modi's government has been marked by several convulsions. The economy has tanked, social strife widened, protests have erupted against discriminatory laws and his government has been questioned over its response to the pandemic. In 2019, he brought together a coalition of diverse and disparate sets: minorities and majoritarians, rights activists and journalists, communists and socialists, students and teachers, including the once-dormant Opposition, to form a popular march against a contentious new citizenship law that discriminated against Muslims.

Now, in form of farmers, he is facing a growing rebellion from India's most influential voting

bloc.

Agriculture supports more than half of the country's 1.4 billion people. But the economic clout of farmers has diminished over the last three decades. Once accounting for a third of India's gross domestic product, farmers now account for only 15% of the country's \$2.9 trillion economy. More than half of farmers are in debt, with 20,638 killing themselves in 2018 and 2019, according to official records.

The contentious legislation has exacerbated existing resentment from farmers, who have long been seen as the heart and soul of India but often complain of being ignored by the government.

Modi has tried to allay farmers' fears by mostly dismissing their concerns and has repeatedly accused opposition parties of agitating them by spreading rumors. Some leaders of his party have called the farmers "anti-national," a label often given to those who criticize Modi or his policies.

Devinder Sharma, an agriculture expert who has spent the last two decades campaigning for income equality for Indian farmers, said they were not only protesting the reforms but also "challenging the entire economic design of the country."

"The anger that you see is compounded anger," Sharma said. "Inequality is growing in India and farmers are becoming poorer. Policy planners have failed to realize this and have sucked the income from the bottom to the top. The farmers are only demanding what is their right."

Farmers Protest Turns Violent in Delhi, What Went Wrong?



Tear gas shells, lathi charges, stone pelting and one death, what was supposed to be peaceful show of protest by the farmers on Republic Day, turned into a day of violence, rioting and damage to public property. Which begs the questions, if everything was planned, what went wrong?

In a deviation from pre-designated routes, which were agreed upon in advance by the Delhi Police and farmer leaders, protesting farmers reached Delhi's Indraprastha, ITO and other parts of Central Delhi after breaking barricades at the Ghazipur and Tikri borders early

morning.

The farmers were then subjected to tear gas-shellings and lathi-charges by the Delhi police, even as farmer leader Rakesh Tikait told the media that the rallies are being undertaken "peacefully."

Farmer protestors also reached and entered the Red Fort and waived flags from the ramparts of the fort.

So what exactly happened? How did this tractor rally, which was always meant to be peaceful and travel on designated routes reach the Red Fort? Tune in to The Big Story!



'Majority doesn't allow you to kill people'

Mamata on Centre's handling of farm protests

West Bengal chief minister and TMC leader, in her first interview in a long time, took questions over a range of issues including the farmers' protest, the Republic Day violence in Delhi, the Netaji event controversy in Kolkata, and the coming Bengal election.

In her first interview in a long time, Mamata Banerjee, West Bengal chief minister and TMC leader, spoke to India Today TV Consulting Editor Rajdeep Sardesai.

Mamata Banerjee took questions over a range of issues including the farmers' protest, the Republic Day violence in Delhi, the Netaji event controversy in Kolkata, the state vs Centre tussle -- and the coming Bengal election.

She even called Union home minister Amit Shah 'my Bhaiya'. Here are excerpts from the interview conducted in Kolkata:

Q: Do you think the Republic Day violence in Delhi has discredited the protest and farmers now need to pull out?

A: I don't agree. It's a very popular movement. Is it not the intelligence failure of the central government? Is it not bad handling of the movement? The government should have been more careful. My Punjabi brothers and sisters are very united. Even in other parts of the country. Even in Bengal. See what Uddhav Thackeray, MK Stalin and Arvind Kejriwal are saying. We're all together.

West Bengal chief minister and TMC leader, in her first interview in a long time, took questions over a range of issues including the farmers' protest, the Republic Day violence in Delhi, the Netaji event controversy in Kolkata, and the coming Bengal election.

Q: The government is saying, the Opposition is fishing in troubled waters. The government is saying it has the majority and the farm bills were passed in Parliament

A: Majority does not allow you to kill people. Even Rajiv Gandhi had a huge majority. The farm bills were brought hurriedly. They were passed with voice vote during Covid. I know Parliament better than anybody else. Why are they not withdrawing the bills? What is the harm? I appeal to the government to repeal the laws.

Q: The government is saying no reform will take place like this. Why not give the laws a chance? Is the Opposition using the farmers' protest?

A: There is no leader in the farmers' movement. Farmers themselves are fighting. This is a new phenomenon. We're supporting them from outside. Amit Shah, my Bhaiya, said he had 51 lakh WhatsApp groups, so they can spread anything to discredit the farmers. The media has been purchased by the government.

Modi Ji should call an all-party meeting and withdraw the bills. He can call all the CMs. The PM is not just the leader of BJP, he is the leader of the country. Only he can solve this if he calls all parties. Ministers reaching out to farmers

will not work now.

Q: Should not the Republic Day violence be condemned more?

A: I don't support the violence. I favour a peaceful movement. I have done 26 hunger strikes. I don't believe they have hoisted the flag. The guy who did it, his photo is there with Amit Shah. He is very familiar with BJP.

ON NETAJI EVENT

There was no coordination with the state government. What is Parakram Divas? They did not even ask us about it. There is some dignity in a government programme. But a lot of political slogans were raised. Whenever I go to

attend such programmes, they send BJP people to do this. Yes, they can give slogans on their party platform. But it was a Netaji programme. I sat for the entire programme. Did not leave. I didn't even ask the PM why they did it. Whom did Lord Rama worship? Durga. And I worship Durga. I am also a Hindu. I am ready for a debate on Hinduism.

ON STATE VS CENTRE ROW

The Centre has captured all the state powers. The federal structure has been bulldozed. Every day, they say one nation, one party. But the Centre has stopped my food subsidy. They have taken away the

Essential Commodities Act. Who will give MSP to farmers? Is this country for one man or for all? Let him remain popular. I respect the chair.

ON BENGAL ELECTION

The election should be free, fair and peaceful. I don't want the rioting, murders and violence that BJP does. I have respect for all governors. I don't blame them because they are guided people. A governor is a nominated person, he is not political. A chief minister is an elected person. There must be some coordination.

Courtesy India Today, Consulting Editor Rajdeep Sardesai



A roadmap to reform democracy

Elected institutions must become less majoritarian, while other institutions must give voice to non-majorities and provide balance

The new American President, Joe Biden, has announced his intention to host a summit of democracies in the first year of office. The growing democracy deficit in the world is bothering the world's oldest democracy — the United States (US).

Joseph Story, a renowned American jurist, warned long ago that the "Constitution has been reared for immortality, if the work of man may justly aspire to such a title. It may, nevertheless, perish in an hour by the folly, or corruption, or negligence of its only keepers, the people". Happenings in America in the last couple of years indicate that there are no "American people" anymore. It is a deeply divided society today.

The Democrats want to pass on the blame to Donald Trump's presidency. It cannot be denied that Trump's tenure saw schisms exacerbate in American society. They culminated in the violent incursions at the Capitol Hill by Trump's supporters on January 6, when the Congress was in

session to ratify votes for the presidential election. Trump cannot completely shrug off responsibility for the happenings on that day as his tweet a few days before — "Big protest in DC on January 6th. Be there, will be wild!" — turned out to be a major catalyst for mass mobilisation and violence on the fateful day.

Critics argue that Democrats too carry some blame for the violent incidents across several cities during the Black Lives Matter movement last year. Antifa, which played a role in the movement, is seen to have turned a just cause into a polarising prejudice through violence. Biden did condemn Antifa and violence. Yet, the Democrats cannot escape part of the responsibility for the deep divisions in the American society today. In fact, the unusually high support that Trump got in the election — over 70 million votes — was partly due to people's anger against the double standards of the Democrats too. Biden may first

have to fix his own democracy before embarking on addressing the global democratic deficit. That does not mean the concerns flagged by Biden are misplaced. A new wave of populist movements is challenging the very foundations of democracies, from the oldest democracy in America to the largest democracy in India. The agitation by the farmers against the three agri-reform laws of the Narendra Modi government is a case in question. Dissent is an integral part of democracy. But as Ambedkar warned in his last address to the Constituent Assembly on November 25, 1949, the methods of dissent must be constitutional. "If you wish to maintain democracy not merely in form, but also in fact, the first thing in my judgement we must do is to hold fast to constitutional methods of achieving our social and economic objectives. It means that we must abandon the bloody methods of revolution. It means that we must abandon the method of civil disobedience,



non-cooperation and satyagraha. These methods are nothing but the grammar of anarchy", Ambedkar had warned.

The revolts witnessed in America and India by small groups have the potential to lead to two consequences. One, democratic systems will weaken further. Two, out of that anarchy will rise authoritarians and despots. Either way, the loser will be the democratic world. The time has come for us to revisit the functioning of democratic institutions and effect important reforms to defeat these forces. By their very nature, democracies are majoritarian. The Greek states, where the concept of democracy was born, had practised a brutish version of majoritarianism. The great

philosopher, Socrates, was awarded death sentence in an open court through popular assent, forcing Plato to denounce Greek democracies as kleptocracies.

From there, we have travelled quite a distance. Democracies developed checks and balances in the form of the elected parliaments on the one side and unelected institutions on the other. While elected bodies are meant to be the voice of the majorities, non-elected bodies such as the judiciary, media and other public institutions are expected to be the refuge for the non-majorities.

Not that the majorities are always wrong — the three farm bills of the Modi government are an absolute necessity today. But parliamentary majorities are facing a non-majority backlash. It is here that non-elected institutions such as the judiciary and media have to play a balancing role. The danger is when they also come to be perceived as the voices of the majority and against non-majorities. People will then resort to methods that Ambedkar rejected as unconstitutional.

The reform that democracies need today is two-fold. First, elected institutions need to become less majoritarian and more consensual. Second, there is a need to build a stronger non-elected institutional framework for greater balancing.

Gandhi feared that for a country such as India, democracies could end up as mobocracies. That was why he used to insist upon the concept of Ram Rajya. Gandhi's Ram Rajya was a non-majoritarian democracy, where the minutest minority too has its voice heard. Ambedkar used to insist that without social democracy, political democracy is bound to fail.

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: Champion of freedom who inspired the world

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's life is a story of struggle. It is the story of a young dreamer that tells the saga of consciousness, struggle and success in every eye; one who has the power to rip the ground with his arms; one who talks about making a hole in the sky; one who is anxious to achieve his goals; one who does not accept anything for free; and if he wants freedom, he is ready to spill his blood. Thousands of people sacrificed their lives on Netaji's call. He created an army against the British in no time. Netaji was born in Cuttack in Odisha in 1897, graduated from Kolkata, and proved his mettle by becoming an Indian Civil Services (ICS) officer. But he was not accustomed to a life of comfort and amenities that came with his job. He was a warrior, who had to wage the

freedom struggle. Not only did he embrace the freedom movement wholeheartedly, but also became an inspiration for freedom. With the slogan "Give me blood and I will give you freedom", he started preparing to awaken the country. Such was the charisma of his philosophy and personality that

who ever listened to him was attracted to him. His popularity skyrocketed and he became "Netaji" to the general public.

He was so fond of Bharat Mata that his country tied to the chains of slavery did not let him live peacefully. People beyond India's borders also developed a fascination for him. Heads of states of important countries stood by him and Netaji lit the

fire of the freedom struggle beyond India's shores. He built a force and presented that force before the enemies of the country as the Azad Hind Fauj (Indian National Army). He gave the slogan of "Dilli Chalo" with a new spirit. Thousands of soldiers of his 60,000-strong army sacrificed their lives for the country.

"Success always stands on the pillar of failure." Bose lived with this philosophy and also inspired others. Netaji encountered

failures several times, but he converted those failures to triumph with his struggle. Whether it is municipal politics, the journey from a common Congressman to the Congress president's position, the formation of the Forward Bloc or

the struggle of the Indian National Army, he passed every test with distinction.

Bose accepted the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, but ironically, Gandhiji himself became the cause of him leaving the Congress. But the two leaders always had respect for each other. At the time of India's independence, Clement Attlee was the British Prime Minister. He came to Kolkata in 1956. At that time, his host, governor and former Calcutta high court chief justice PB Chakravarti, tried to find out from him the reason behind the British decision to grant freedom to India. In response, Attlee said that the loyalty of the Indian army and navy to the British state was declining due to the increasing military activities of Bose's Azad Hind Fauj.



Within hours, Indian farm protests turned from carnival to violent clashes



A line of tractors stood ready at dawn on Tuesday to move out of a protest site near New Delhi where thousands of farmers had been camping for the last two months and rallying against farm reforms they say will hurt them and benefit large private firms. Within hours, the huge tractor procession that started in a carnival spirit had smashed through barricades, reached the heart of the city and turned violent. It was an escalation in a standoff with protesters that poses a ma-

jor challenge to the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as it tries to contain the coronavirus pandemic and its economic impact. Several hundred demonstrators breached the outer walls of Delhi's Red Fort - one of its most recognisable landmarks - before raising flags from the ramparts and clashing with police. Among those who reached the fort was Vikramjit Singh, who said farmers had not originally planned to storm the historic complex, a favourite tourist attraction where

prime ministers deliver the annual Independence Day speech. "Nobody had given a call to go to Red Fort," said Singh, a farmer from Punjab's Tarn Taran district. "It all happened suddenly." The events came after protest leaders held lengthy talks with police and promised a massive but peaceful rally along a pre-determined route. Some farm leaders bemoaned the violent turn protests took, saying it undermined their cause. "These incidents have only delayed our fight," said farmer leader Darshan Pal. Delhi Police Commissioner S.N. Shrivastava told reporters on Wednesday that police realised farmers may not follow the agreed route when "aggressive and militant elements" made provocative speeches the night before the tractor rally. He added that 394 policemen were injured in clashes, leaving some in intensive care. His personnel ensured no protester had been killed, he said. "The police has been very re-

strained," he said. Since the violence in the centre of the capital, police have reinforced their presence at major protest camps on the outskirts of the city and the Red Fort. INTO THE CAPITAL A convoy of tractors drove out of the protest site at Singhu, a village outside the capital, at around 8 a.m., several hours ahead of schedule. By noon, hundreds of protesters had dismantled a roadblock of concrete slabs, shipping containers and trucks. After firing a few rounds of tear-gas, more than 100 policemen stood aside as the protesters passed through, according to Reuters reporters at the scene. The crowds moved into Delhi's centre, sometimes losing their way, and thousands of people eventually coalesced around the Red Fort that stands next to the old city. For the first hour or so after the tractors began arriving, the mood was relaxed. A large contingent of policemen waited on the

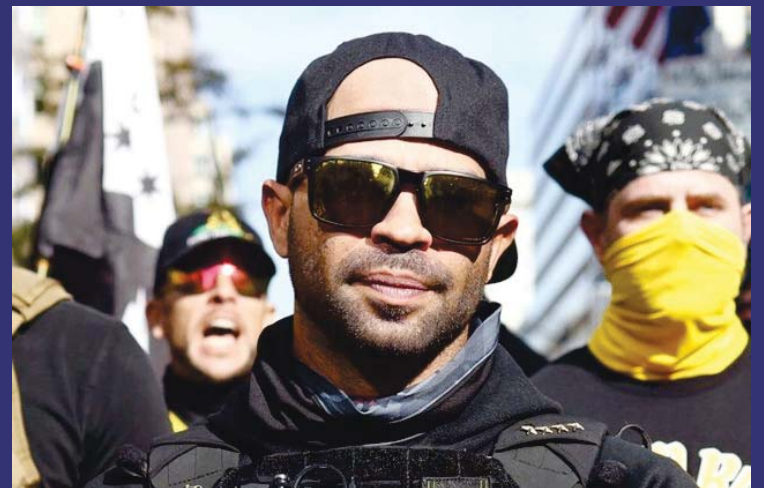
lawns in front of the 17th-century monument, two protesters said, looking on as the crowd steadily grew. Even when protesters broke through two gates and climbed the ramparts, there was no sign of confrontation. In social media posts, heavily outnumbered policemen, some in riot gear, mingled with the crowds on the ramparts. But the situation quickly turned violent. Video footage taken at around 3 p.m. showed protesters attacking policemen with sticks and tipping over a police jeep. One man was holding a sword. It was not clear what triggered the change. The clashes lasted around 30 minutes, during which time protesters drove away most policemen from the area. The crowds gradually dissipated after that. Balbir Singh Rajewal, another protest leader, said the demonstrations had been hijacked by a tiny minority. "99.9% of the protesters were peaceful," he told reporters.

Proud Boys leader was 'prolific' informer for law enforcement

Enrique Tarrio, the leader of the Proud Boys extremist group, has a past as an informer for federal and local law enforcement, repeatedly working undercover for investigators after he was arrested in 2012, according to a former prosecutor and a transcript of a 2014 federal court proceeding obtained by Reuters. In the Miami hearing, a federal prosecutor, a Federal Bureau of Investigation agent and Tarrio's own lawyer described his undercover work and said he had helped authorities prosecute more than a dozen people in various cases involving drugs, gambling and human smuggling. Tarrio, in an interview with Reuters Tuesday, denied working undercover or cooperating in cases against others. "I don't know any of this," he said, when asked about the transcript. "I don't recall any of this." Law-enforcement officials and the court transcript contradict Tarrio's denial. In a statement to Reuters, the former federal prosecutor in Tarrio's case, Vanessa Singh Johannes,

confirmed that "he cooperated with local and federal law enforcement, to aid in the prosecution of those running other, separate criminal enterprises, ranging from running marijuana grow houses in Miami to operating pharmaceutical fraud schemes." Tarrio, 36, is a high-profile figure who organizes and leads the right-wing Proud Boys in their confrontations with those they believe to be Antifa, short for "anti-fascism," an amorphous and often violent leftist movement. The Proud Boys were involved in the deadly insurrection at the Capitol January 6. The records uncovered by Reuters are startling because they show that a leader of a far-right group now under intense scrutiny by law enforcement was previously an active collaborator with criminal investigators. Washington police arrested Tarrio in early January when he arrived in the city two days before the Capitol Hill riot. He was charged with possessing two high-capacity rifle magazines, and burning a Black Lives Matter banner during a December demonstration by supporters of former President Donald Trump. The D.C. Superior

Court ordered him to leave the city pending a court date in June. Though Tarrio did not take part in the Capitol insurrection, at least five Proud Boys members have been charged in the riot. The FBI previously said Tarrio's earlier arrest was an effort to preempt the events of January 6. The transcript from 2014 shines a new light on Tarrio's past connections to law enforcement. During the hearing, the prosecutor and Tarrio's defense attorney asked a judge to reduce the prison sentence of Tarrio and two co-defendants. They had pleaded guilty in a fraud case related to the relabeling and sale of stolen diabetes test kits. The prosecutor said Tarrio's information had led to the prosecution of 13 people on federal charges in two separate cases, and had helped local authorities investigate a gambling ring. Tarrio's then-lawyer Jeffrey Feiler said in court that his client had worked undercover in numerous investigations, one involving the sale of anabolic steroids, another regarding "wholesale prescription narcotics" and a third targeting human smuggling. He said Tarrio helped police uncover three marijuana grow houses, and was a "prolific"



cooperator. In the smuggling case, Tarrio, "at his own risk, in an undercover role met and negotiated to pay \$11,000 to members of that ring to bring in fictitious family members of his from another country," the lawyer said in court. In an interview, Feiler said he did not recall details about the case but added, "The information I provided to the court was based on information provided to me by law enforcement and the prosecutor." An FBI agent at the hearing called Tarrio a "key component" in local police investigations involving marijuana, cocaine and MDMA, or ecstasy. The Miami FBI office declined comment. There is no evidence Tarrio has cooperated

with authorities since then. In interviews with Reuters, however, he said that before rallies in various cities, he would let police departments know of the Proud Boys' plans. It is unclear if this was actually the case. He said he stopped this coordination after December 12 because the D.C. police had cracked down on the group. Tarrio on Tuesday acknowledged that his fraud sentence was reduced, from 30 months to 16 months, but insisted that leniency was provided only because he and his co-defendants helped investigators "clear up" questions about his own case. He said he never helped investigate others.

Farmers' tractor protest: Here's how Indian newspapers looked at the siege of Red Fort



The farmers' tractor rally on Republic Day took a violent turn as a large section of protesters deviated from the determined route. What followed was chaos, clashes and complete anarchy as protesters crossed the Red Fort line. Here is how Indian newspapers looked at the unprecedented siege:

The farmers' tractor rally in New Delhi on Republic Day turned violent after a section of protesters broke through police barricades and entered parts of the national

capital not permitted for their protest. Clashes broke out between protesters and police in many places and several people were injured; vandalism was also reported. The police teams deployed across Delhi fired teargas shells and lathicharged protesters to disperse them. Despite the police action, a section of the protestors stormed the Red Fort to unfurl the Nishan Sahib flag. One protester died and many others were injured including policemen. It may be noted that

the farm leaders who have been leading the agitation against the Centre's farm laws for two months on the outskirts of Delhi distanced themselves from yesterday's violence. Here is how newspapers in India looked at the siege of Red Fort:

The Indian Express

"Farm protesters cross Red Fort Line" was the headline on the front page of the national daily The Indian Express. The newspaper covered yesterday's events extensively, with multiple head-

lines about how the Red Fort was secured after it descended into complete chaos. Another story on the front page said that the farm leaders have condemned the violence, while another story was about how Deep Sidhu, a Punjabi actor, and others seized the stage at Singhu border night before the tractor rally.

"Dark Day For The Republic" was the headline on the front page of national daily Hindustan Times. The lead story was accompanied by pictures of dissenting protest-

ors at Red Fort, ITO and other parts where violence broke out. The front-page story mentioned details about the "deadly charge" of tractors at the ITO besides the clashes between protesters and police at the Red Fort. Another headline on the front page read: "Union leaders make appeal, divert blame after anarchy reigns". Another story was about how the police were caught off guard and that the violators will be punished. Protesting farmers breach Red Fort" was the front-page headline on the Deccan Chronicle newspaper. The main story highlighted how farmers deviated from the determined route of the rally besides mentioning the clashes between police and protesters. It said, "India's 72nd Republic Day was scarred by violence that erupted on the streets of Delhi as a large section of the protesting farmers who were participating in the tractor rally deviated from the route, broke barricades, clashed with the police and stormed the historic Red Fort where they hosted the Sikh flag Nishan Sahib." Another headline on the front page was about how more central forces have been called in after yesterday's unprecedented chaos. "Farmer killed, Red Fort breached" was the front-page headline on The Telegraph newspaper.

The roots of the BJP's unilateralism

It believes that the opposition to its policies is not principled. But it shouldn't underestimate social forces

With farm unions refusing to engage with the committee set up by the Supreme Court to examine farm laws, rejecting the government's offer to suspend laws for 18 months and engage in talks, and holding a parallel tractor rally which turned violent on Republic Day, the standoff between the Centre and farm groups has intensified. Notwithstanding the merits and demerits of the farm laws, there is an emerging consensus that the Centre did not engage in enough consultation with states and farm groups, underestimated the mobilisational capacity of these unions, and adopted a unilateral approach. It was this unilateral approach and the accompanying communication gap that has resulted in the prevailing precarious situation, in which both sides believe that blinking first is a costly strategy. This is part of a recurring pattern, in

which the Narendra Modi government finds itself on a collision course with various interest groups. For instance, trading classes were alienated by demonetisation and the Goods and Services Tax; students protested in many parts of the country after Rohith Vemula died by suicide; Dalit groups mobilised against the dilution of the legislative framework against atrocities; labour unions began a movement against changes in labour laws; and religious minorities stood up against the proposed Citizenship (Amendment) Act and National Register of Citizens. While the government backtracked on some occasions after vehement opposition, it doubled down on its stand at other moments. What explains the increasing number of standoffs of various interest groups with the Centre in recent years? The

government's unilateral approach is the primary reason for growing disquiet. And this unilateralism is a result of the hard-nosed political approach and cold-minded electoral calculations of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) since 2014. The party under the leadership of Modi and Amit Shah has acquired a distinct style of dealing with friends and foes alike — what some would describe as the Modi-Shah doctrine — to negotiate from a position of strength.

One part of this unilateralism comes from the political socialisation of the BJP's new leadership. The key difference between the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-LK Advani era and the Modi-Shah moment in Indian politics is that the top BJP leaders in the past were creatures of the Central Hall of the Parliament. They could reach out across the aisle. The new



BJP leadership is not deeply embedded in the Central Hall culture, and there is an acute trust deficit between the government and the Opposition. The BJP in the Modi-Shah era is also missing interlocutors. After the demise of Arun Jaitley and Sushma Swaraj, there are hardly any leaders, except Rajnath Singh and Nitin Gadkari, who can play the role of conciliators. There are a handful of Opposition leaders who could warm up to Modi and Shah. All

of this has compounded the BJP's inability to hear the other side. But the root cause of its unilateralism is more likely shaped by political events and experiences of the BJP leadership in power. My conversations with several BJP leaders and sympathisers suggest that the Modi-Shah doctrine, for right or wrong reasons, is rooted in the belief that opposition to their regime is not based on principled positions.

Yes Bank Co-founder Rana Kapoor Arrested In Alleged ? 4,300 Crore Fraud

In the latest case, sources said, Rana Kapoor was placed under arrest in jail as per provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

The Enforcement Directorate has arrested Yes Bank co-promoter Rana Kapoor in a fresh money laundering case linked to an alleged ? 4,300 crore fraud at the PMC Bank in Maharashtra, official sources said on Wednesday.

Kapoor, 63, was already in judicial custody after he was arrested by the central probe agency in March last year in connection with alleged financial irregularities and purported kick backs paid to him and his family members in lieu of certain loans provided by the Yes Bank to a number of high-profile borrowers. In the latest case, sources said,

Kapoor was placed under arrest in jail as per provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

He was later produced before a special PMLA court that sent him to ED custody till January 30 in the second money laundering case filed against him, they said.

The latest case pertains to the alleged loan fraud in the PMC Bank where the ED raided the premises of the Viva Group promoted by Maharashtra MLA and Bahujan Vikas Agadhi (BVA) party chief Hitendra Thakur in the Vasai-Virar areas of Palghar district and Mumbai

last week.

The central agency filed a criminal case of money laundering in October, 2019 to probe alleged loan fraud in the Punjab and Maharashtra Co-operative (PMC) Bank, against Housing Development Infrastructure Ltd (HDIL), its promoters Rakesh Kumar Wadhawan, his son Sarang Wadhawan, the bank's former chairman Waryam Singh and ex-managing director Joy Thomas. It took cognisance of a Mumbai Police economic offences wing FIR that charged them with causing "wrongful loss, prima facie to the tune of ? 4,355 crore



to PMC Bank and corresponding gains to themselves". The ED is probing the role of the Viva Group, Kapoor and the Wadhawans for allegedly "siphoning off" a ? 200 crore loan sanctioned by the Yes Bank to a company called Mack Star Marketing Pvt Ltd. "This loan was siphoned by the Wadhawans by showing it for

fictitious purpose," it had said in a statement issued last week.

"It was found that Wadhawans illegally and fraudulently transferred two commercial properties of Mack Star in Kaledonia building, Andheri East (Mumbai) valued at ? 34.36 crore to Viva Holding, a company of Viva Group," the ED had claimed.

Why are Chinese car makers setting up shop in Pakistan?



A Pakistan-Chinese automotive joint venture recently sold out six months' production of its first compact sedan car within five days of market launch, a success that investors and analysts believe could pave the way for Pakistan to become an export base for Chinese right-hand-drive vehicles.

The stock-clearing sale of 15,000 Chang'an Alsvin passenger vehicles is the latest in a series of headlines about joint ventures between privately held Pakistani conglomerates and Chinese state-owned automotive enterprises.

The Alsvin is assembled at a US\$136 million plant near the port city of Karachi owned by Master Chang'an Motors (MCM), established in 2017 as a 70:30 joint venture between the local Master Group and leading Chinese carmaker Chang'an Automobile. In addition to the 30,000 units a year of the Alsvin,

it began producing two pick-ups and a multi-purpose vehicle in 2018.

Shanghai-based SAIC Motor, owner of the British car brand MG, this month broke ground at the site of a US\$100 million plant

near Karachi which is expected to begin production of three small-engined sports utility vehicles, or SUVs, next year.

KA Hanteng Motor, a joint venture with China's Hanteng Automobile, is building a US\$50 million plant in Pakistan and is expected to start making 15,000 SUVs and passenger cars this year. Al-Hajj FAW, a Karachi-based joint venture formed in 2012, ramped up production of hatchbacks last year to 20,000 vehicles. When the Master Group proposed the joint venture to Chang'an Automobile in 2016, it did so with the ambition of leveraging the estimated US\$60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to gain access to other Asian markets targeted for investment under the

Belt and Road Initiative, MCM's chief executive Danial Malik said. The CPEC is the single largest programme under Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative to integrate China's economy with developing countries.

Under the first five-year phase of the CPEC, Chinese state-owned enterprises have built power plants generating 5,320 megawatts of electricity and 1,544km of motorways. Other projects under construction will add another 2,844 megawatts of power generation capacity and 1,456km of motorway, completing Pakistan's north-south network. The motorways, once completed, will greatly reduce transit times for Chinese cargoes entering Pakistan either at the sole overland border

crossing with the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, or through the Chinese-operated port of Gwadar on the Arabian Sea. "We came into Pakistan with a joint venture with Chang'an and this was under the umbrella of CPEC 2.0," Malik said, referring to the second five-year phase of the programme under which Pakistan is developing special economic zones to attract Chinese manufacturers. "Since China is a left-hand-drive market, Chang'an was looking to develop a right-hand-drive manufacturing base and that is what we pitched Pakistan as - and as a country that we could then eventually export vehicles from China to other right-hand-drive markets" like populous Bangladesh and nearby Sri Lanka, he said.

GameStop, other retail darlings dented after Reddit group briefly shuts doors

A slugfest between Wall Street and Main Street took an unexpected turn late on Wednesday after moderators of a stock trading forum that has helped fuel massive rallies in the shares of GameStop temporarily closed its doors. Shares of GameStop and other companies tumbled in extended trading after Wallstreetbets, a discussion forum popular with retail traders on the Reddit website, briefly turned invitation-only. They pared those losses around an hour later, when the forum opened back up. "We have grown to the

kind of size we only dreamed of in the time it takes to get a bad night's sleep. We've got so many comments and submissions that we can't possibly even read them all, let alone act on them as moderators," read a message from the group's moderators after Wallstreetbets reopened. Shares of GameStop, AMC Entertainment, Koss Corp and BlackBerry all dropped at least 20% moments after the shuttering of the forum, highlighting the role it has played in fueling stock rallies that many say have been driven primarily by retail

investors. Earlier in the day, amateur traders chalked one up versus Wall Street as hedge funds suffered heavy losses on short positions in GameStop, and regulators and financial professionals called for more scrutiny of trading fueled by anonymous social media posts. In the latest skirmish in a week-long battle between Wall Street and Main Street, funds sold long positions in stocks to pay for losses shorting GameStop, contributing to a slide of more than 2% in Wall Street's main indexes. [N]. "We

are moving to a world where ordinary folk have the same access as professionals and can come to the same conclusion or maybe the opposite," technology investor Chamath Palihapitiya told CNBC. "The solution is more transparency on the institutional side, not less access for retail."

The market turmoil caught the attention of the White House, with press secretary Jen Psaki saying President Joe Biden's economic team - including Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on her first full day on the job - was "monitoring the situation."

The White Tiger movie review:

Priyanka Chopra gives best performance in years, Adarsh Gourav roars in new Netflix film

The White Tiger movie review: Adarsh Gourav delivers a star-making performance in Ramin Bahrani's angry answer to Slumdog Millionaire, co-starring Priyanka Chopra Jonas and Rajkummar Rao.

The White Tiger

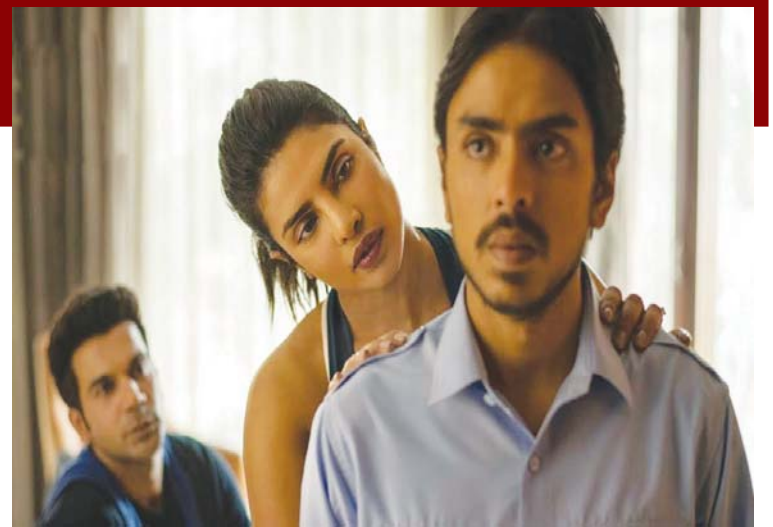
Director - Ramin Bahrani

Cast - Adarsh Gourav, Priyanka Chopra Jonas, Rajkummar Rao

A child is run over in the opening moments of The White Tiger. A drunk couple drives their Pajero down Sardar Patel Marg in the darkness as Punjabi MC blares on the radio. And I thought to myself, "Is this the most Delhi movie ever?" It could be. Unlike Mumbai, Delhi's cinematic potential remains untapped. Possibly because Mumbai is the city of dreams, its image as a 'mayanagri' is more in line with cinema's inherent hopefulness. In Mumbai, the rich can never hide behind their privilege - poverty is always a stone's throw away, and perpetually within sight. This duality was captured magnificently in recent films such as Gully Boy and Serious Men. But in Delhi, a city of ghettos, it is possible for the privileged to live on their ivory towers and still remain oblivious about the world

below, swept as it is underneath a carpet of trees and smog. Chaiwallahs can become millionaires in Mumbai, that's what the movies have taught us. In Delhi, they get run over on the streets. Based on Aravind Adiga's Booker Prize-winning novel, The White Tiger is a cynical movie -- an angry antithesis to the crowd-pleasing Slumdog Millionaire. That it has been directed by a foreigner, Ramin Bahrani, is somewhat fitting. Although the situation is changing, with Serious Men and Sir, two other films about servitude that released in the same year, mainstream Indian filmmakers generally lack the cultural perspective to tackle relevant themes such as casteism and the oppression of minorities in their own backyard. But also, the book is literally dedicated to Bahrani - he was friends with Adiga in college. Imagine my surprise when I learned that he'd be shooting a film in Faridabad.

This isn't the first time that the filmmaker has shown a fascination for these ideas, either. Through a filmography that prompted the iconic film critic Roger Ebert to hail him as the 'new great American director', Bahrani has always championed the voiceless. He continues this crusade, which began in his best film - Man Push Cart - in The White Tiger, when he hands a megaphone and a knife to a character who has been bound and gagged his entire life. Born in Bihar and bred to do the bidding of others, Balram Halwai's story is set into motion when his visibly ailing father dies because of systemic corruption. And so, in the first of many instances that will remind you of Parasite, Balram decides to latch onto the wealthiest person in sight, and seek employment as his driver in Delhi. In doing so, he embarks on a journey of upward mobility that ends just as violently as director Bong Joon-



ho's Oscar-winning masterpiece. It's a perverted twist on the Disney movie trope, but The White Tiger is, after all, no less a fantasy than Aladdin or The Lion King. American kids grow up believing they can be president. But in India, aspirations, like so many of its people, are modest. The struggle for most Indians isn't to climb the social ladder, but to maintain their position on it. Through a poisonous cocktail of fear and religion, we are indoctrinated early in life to accept our stations, constantly reminded that there is always

going to be someone above us, waiting to pounce, and someone below, prepared to be pounced at. Balram makes a similar analogy in the film, when he compares 99.9% of India's population to roosters trapped in a coop. They can smell the blood, he says, they know what fate has in store for them. But not one of them tries to escape. To him, everyone's an animal of some sort. A corrupt politician is 'the Stork', his eldest son is 'the Mongoose'. And he's the rooster who dares to break out.

Tandav row: All the controversies that have plagued Saif Ali Khan's Amazon show

As the Supreme Court refused to grant protection to the makers of Tandav, here are all the controversies that have plagued the Amazon Prime Video political drama, created by Ali Abbas Zafar and starring Saif Ali Khan.



The pressure continues to mount for the makers of Tandav, who were not given relief over criminal cases lodged against them in multiple states. The Supreme Court on Wednesday refused to grant the makers' request for interim protection. Multiple FIRs against the series' director, producer, writer, actors and Amazon India Originals' head Aparna Purohit, have been filed in six states. The makers of the web series are facing criminal cases for hurting religious sentiments and insulting religion punishable under sections 153A and 295 of the Indian Penal Code. The

bench observed, "Your right to freedom of speech is not absolute. You cannot play the role of a character that hurts the sentiments of a community." Tandav, a nine-episode political drama on Amazon Prime Video, is created by Ali Abbas Zafar and stars Saif Ali Khan, Dimple Kapadia, Sunil Grover, Mohd Zeeshan Ayyub, Gauhar Khan, and others. It was released on January 15. Here's a rundown of all that has transpired in the case: The contentious scene At the heart of the controversy is a scene in the first episode of the series. In it, actor Mohd Zeeshan

Ayyub plays Lord Shiva in a stage play, and says, "Azaadi, what the...?" In the same scene, the narrator on stage tells Lord Shiva that he needs to do something to improve his popularity on social media as Lord Ram's popularity is gaining. Shiva asks whether he should come up with a new display picture. The complaints Bharatiya Janata Party MP Manoj Kotak wrote to Information and Broadcasting minister Prakash Javadekar seeking a ban on the series for allegedly ridiculing Hindu deities. "Different organisations and individuals have complained that Hindu Gods and Goddesses have been ridiculed in Tandav web series. Comments have been passed about them," Kotak said. MLA Ram Kadam in Maharashtra had tweeted

demanding the removal of the part allegedly mocking Lord Shiva and an apology from actor Mohammed Zeeshan Ayyub. "Tandava will be boycotted until necessary changes are made. #BanTandavNow," he had tweeted. "Just as there is a system of censors for reviewing films and serials, a similar arrangement should be made to review series on the OTT platform. Writing to @PrakashJavdekar ji," he also tweeted in Hindi. BJP leader Kapil Mishra alleged that Tandav is "anti-Dalit and full of communal hatred against Hindus". He also requested people in the same tweet to write to Prakash Javadekar appealing for a ban on the web series. Former UP chief minister, Mayawati, wrote in a tweet that in the interest of 'peace and harmony' the objectionable scene should be removed from

the series. The fallout

Police personnel were spotted stationed outside Saif and Kareena Kapoor's home in Mumbai. The I&B ministry sought an explanation from Amazon Prime after the controversy broke out. "The ministry has called executives of the video streaming service and decided to seek an explanation from them over the matter," an official said. Officials from Amazon Prime Video told news agency PTI that the platform "won't be responding" to media queries on the matter. An FIR was registered against Aparna Purohit, creator Ali, producer Himanshu Krishna Mehra, writer Gaurav Solanki and others at the Hazratganj police station of Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow deputy commissioner of police (Central) Somen Barma said.



30 Years of Akshay Kumar - Hero, Romeo, Joker & A Heart of Gold

To maintain a successful 30-year career is an achievement many of us dream of. However, doing it in one of the biggest, most competitive, and challenging industries in the world is an incredible feat that has rarely been matched. Since making his Bollywood debut in the 1991 romantic action film Saugandh, international megastar Akshay Kumar has gone on to become one of the biggest names to ever grace the silver screen.

His ability to innovate, adapt and change in Bollywood is testament to his success which has seen him break box office records and win the hearts of millions from around the world. With 30 years now under his belt and many more to come, there is no better time than to remember why Akshay Kumar has become such a regular fixture on our screens for three decades, and is an undisputed megastar!

The action star

Akshay Kumar's versatility is just one of the many successful traits the actor possesses. As a result, this has seen him experiment with many different roles, which has seen him become the most marketable commodity in Bollywood today. It is the action genre which is arguably where he cemented himself in Indian cinema. His charisma, energy and looks made him the perfect fit to be the ultimate action hero that Bollywood was desperately looking for. Khiladi (1992), Jaani Dushman: Ek Anokhi Kahaani (2002), Baby (2015), and Tashan (2008), are just some of the films in which Akshay Kumar has shown his heroic side and are still some of the most popular films enjoyed by many today.

The romantic heartthrob

When he was cast for Namastey London (2007) many fans and critics were sceptical

over his ability to feature in a romantic film. However, for Vipul Shah, this was no problem with him having full faith in Akshay Kumar to be a success in the role. When he gave the role to Akshay Kumar amidst the criticism, Shah said, "I went with my gut feeling, which was that here is an actor who is completely honest about his work, and whatever people talk about image and all, that is incorrect. I believed that Akshay was the best choice for the film and that worked. He delivered." Namastey London went on to become a huge success and earned Akshay Kumar a Filmfare Award for Best Actor nomination. This role saw Akshay Kumar go from strength to strength and really spotlight that the star is able to take on just about any role out there!

The comedy legend

Not only has Akshay Kumar been able to beat up the bad guys and win your heart, he has also been able to leave you in stitches. Whether it is playing the role of jinxed loser Aarush in the Housefull franchise (2010 - present), the servant and driver, Nitin Bankar, in De Dana Dan (2009), and the role of Raju in the cult comedy franchise Hera Pheri there is no doubt that Akshay Kumar is not afraid to show a different side to him in his movies. Akshay Kumar is also known to have a knack for blending horror and comedy, such as what he did with the super hit, Bhool Bhulaiya (2007) which focuses on a haunted ancestral palace and has gone on to become one of his most popular movies to date. Where so many of the world's biggest names would be afraid to try different genres, Akshay Kumar dived straight in and embraced such roles as this and shows exactly why so many directors love working with him.

His passion for addressing social issues

For many, choosing roles which place social issues at the front of the agenda is scary territory. However, this is not the case for Akshay Kumar, who has starred in many unique blockbusters which openly tackle taboos and issues both in India and across the world. In 2017, he was given the lead role in Shree Narayan Singh's Toilet: Ek Prem Katha (2017) which raised awareness on India's sanitation issues, openly tackling the problem which affects millions across the country and was well received by critics. In 2018, Akshay Kumar also took on the more daring role of Laxmi Kant Chauhan in the film Padman which focused on the stigma surrounding periods and the importance of providing affordable and safe sanitary pads for women. This went on to gross \$ 29 million

worldwide and spotlighted the issues around the topic. Akshay Kumar was praised for his role and his desire to openly tackle periods and menstruation and has gone to bring about many

A symbol of hope

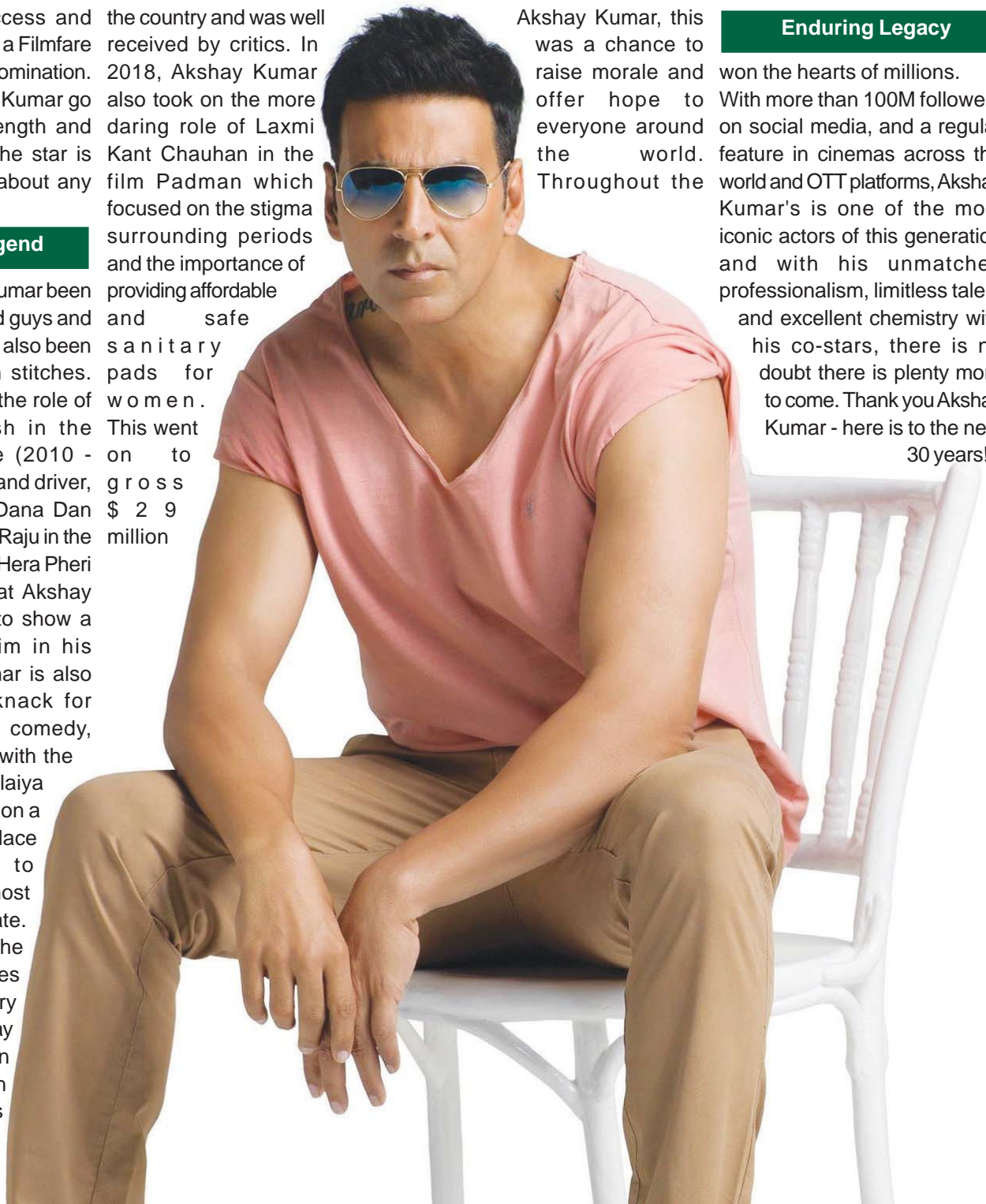
positive changes as a result. The coronavirus pandemic has no doubt been one of the most difficult times we have ever faced. With lockdowns introduced across the globe and economies brought to a halt, the cloud of uncertainty will no doubt take a while to fade. However, for

Akshay Kumar, this was a chance to raise morale and offer hope to everyone around the world. Throughout the

pandemic, the actor has been instrumental in helping those who need it the most. This has included donating an incredible Rs 25 crore (£2.5M) to PM Narendra Modi's coronavirus relief fund, providing Mumbai police with 1,200 smart wrist bands which detect covid symptoms, hosting a virtual music concert and taking the time to applaud the efforts of key service providers working on the frontline. It is these extensive efforts, which helped show that there is a light at the end of the tunnel and certainly

Enduring Legacy

won the hearts of millions. With more than 100M followers on social media, and a regular feature in cinemas across the world and OTT platforms, Akshay Kumar's is one of the most iconic actors of this generation and with his unmatched professionalism, limitless talent and excellent chemistry with his co-stars, there is no doubt there is plenty more to come. Thank you Akshay Kumar - here is to the next 30 years!



International singing sensation Billie Eilish, who released her debut album *When We Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?* in 2019, has opened up on how she faced mental health issues during the time. In her latest interview with *Vanity Fair*, the Bad Guy singer expressed how "parts of it were great" but she was not "in a great mental place"; she also evaluated her emotions and decided to begin talking to a therapist. The singer was 16 when she recorded the album. And now, she is "more settled," reports the outlet. Talking about her music, the 19-year-old said it "feels exactly

Billie Eilish reveals she wasn't 'in great mental place' while recording Grammy-winning debut album



how I want it to. There isn't one song, or one part of one song, that I wish was this or that I wish it was that." Besides RJ Cutler, the director of the documentary *Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry*, filmed between 2018 and early 2020, said in the interview, "Billie is a member of the unique moment in history... It's such a fascinating time of life, where you were both child and adult; one

foot in childhood, one foot in adulthood. And especially for somebody who's going through what Billie was going through and who was such a remarkable talent." On the *Therefore I Am* singer's huge fan following, father Patrick O'Connell further said, "She's (Billie) direct and unaffected. It's disarming and visible to anyone who sees it, but I think it's so appealing and magnetic to her fans."

connect with the audiences and tell the story. Now, people expect results in one month. I was not upset with the show ending, but taken aback. I wish it was better handled. Not just the actors but people behind the camera, many daily workers, they should have been informed, so they could line up other jobs. Even, I was refusing other projects, because

Hiten Tejwani on TV show ending abruptly: My reputation won't be harmed

Television is unpredictable and every actor who works on the medium knows that but this month, Hiten Tejwani had a bitter realisation. His TV show, *Gupta Brothers*, was yanked off air in less than three months of launch. "In my career of 20 years, I have seen many shows going off air but earlier, shows at least got a year prove themselves, make a

I was shooting a daily, so one knows you don't have time to spare," he says. Tejwani rues the fact the contracts are skewed in favour of employer, and giving notice to cast and crew would have helped. "I don't know what was the contract between the channel and the producer. When actors want to quit, they have to give a notice period of three



months, so the story can be changed and a replacement can be found. It is fair but it should be the other way round too. This was too abrupt," states the Gangaa actor. Trying to understand the decision, he explains the show was getting good ratings and was number two on the channel and that they should have got at least six months of air time.

Demi Rose sizzles as she flaunts some serious underboob in a tiny top and silk skirt while posing in Ibiza

She put on a very racy display as she left little to the imagination and posed naked in a field in a series of sizzling Instagram snaps on Thursday. And Demi Rose send temperatures soaring once again just hours later, as she posed in a barely-there wrap-style top in front of a stunning backdrop in Ibiza.

The social media star, 25, showcased plenty of underboob in the tiny garment, which she teamed with a pretty tie-dye skirt from *PrettyLittleThing*.

The ensemble highlighted Demi's svelte waist and more than

ample assets, while posing with her hands in her curly raven tresses. The influencer highlighted her naturally pretty features with soft touches of make-up in a neutral pallet with a slick of nude lip gloss. Demi drew attention away from her jaw-dropping physique and to her stunning surroundings, as she shared a caption about the magnetic field behind her.

She wrote: 'Es Vedra, behind me is the third most magnetic field on Earth, after the North Pole and Bermuda triangle. Some say that there is a goddess called Tanit who is protector of women

and still watches over Ibiza. Tanit is a warrior goddess of dance, fertility, creation and destruction and that her place of residence is the west coast, in particular the area around Atlantis and the mystical Es Vedra. Earlier in the day, Demi was at it again as she took to Instagram to share a collection of new sizzling snaps. In the photos, Demi put on a very racy display as she left little to the imagination and posed naked in a field.



When Shah Rukh Khan secretly pinched Kajol during a romantic scene in *Baazigar*

Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol, one of the most iconic on-screen couples, began their cinematic journey with Abbas-Mustan's *Baazigar*. During an earlier appearance on *Koffee With Karan*, they shared an anecdote about how they got a romantic scene in the film right, after multiple failed attempts.

Kajol was supposed to gasp dramatically but she just could not get the shot right. Finally, choreographer Saroj Khan advised Shah Rukh to surreptitiously pinch her, so that she would give a similar reaction and it could be captured on camera. "It was a sensual part of the song. Both of us were very new. It was



like, 'Mera dil tha akela, maine khel aisa khela' or whatever, and she was supposed to go *gasps dramatically*. She would not be able to do it because it is very dishonest and unreal. Neither of us react like this in real life," Shah Rukh told host Karan Johar. Kajol said, "It was really over-the-top and I just could not get it. The timing or something or the other would go wrong."

Shah Rukh added, "It's something we don't do normally and she would never do a shot which she doesn't do normally. Saroj ji came and told me quietly, 'Tum usko aisa kuch pinch-vinch kar do (Pinch her during the shot).'"



'Climate day means jobs day'

Biden sells his green vision as an economic boost as he signs orders to ban drilling on all federal land, abolish fossil fuel subsidies and make America a zero emissions country by 2050

(SAI Bureau)-: President Joe Biden tied his climate initiatives to job growth on Wednesday, touting the economic growth behind his measures to increase conservation as the oil and gas industry complained about lost employment. 'Today is climate day at the White House, which means today is jobs day at the White House,' Biden said in the State



Dining Room before he signed his latest round of executive orders. 'It's a future of enormous hope and opportunity.'

His plan includes a number of policy changes including ending drilling on federal land, doubling wind energy,

and eliminate fossil fuel subsidies - all after he canceled the controversial billion-dollar Keystone XL pipeline. Social justice initiatives also play a large role in his climate proposal, which he called a national security issue.

When I think of climate change, when I think of the answers to it - I think of jobs,' the president said, promising a 'whole of government' approach to environmental problems. 'Climate change will be the center of our national security and foreign policy.'

Biden argued his administration's plan will result in 1 million jobs in the American auto industry and more than a quarter million jobs to clean up after the oil and gas industry as part of his \$2 trillion program to slow global warming.

(Contd on page 30)

"India Won't Tolerate Insult Of National Flag At Red Fort," Says Centre



(SAI Bureau)- The government on Wednesday denounced the unprecedented violence at the farmers' tractor rally on Republic Day, saying, "it can't be condemned enough". In its first official reaction since the widespread clashes, the government also promised action against those responsible. "Action should be against all of those who instigated others. India won't tolerate the manner in which the Tricolour was insulted at the Red Fort," said Union minister Prakash Javadekar, apparently citing the incident where protesters who managed to get inside the

(Contd on page 31)

Who Is Deep Sidhu ? Actor Blamed By Farmers For Tractor Rally Violence



(SAI Bureau)-A Punjabi actor who gained prominence because of his role in film star-turned-BJP MP Sunny Deol's 2019 Lok Sabha campaign has become hugely controversial after clashes on Republic Day during a farmers' tractor rally in Delhi. Deep Sidhu has been blamed by several farmer leaders for tainting their protests against farm laws with the breach of Red Fort. The actor-activist was allegedly at the centre of the Red Fort storming by farmers armed with sticks and on tractors. In a Facebook post, Deep Sidhu has defended the planting of a "Nishan Sahib" or Sikh religious flag at the iconic monument.

Here are 10 facts about actor Deep Sidhu:

(Contd on page 31)

Lessons in popular resistance

(SAI Bureau)- Over the past three months, the farmers of the country have shown excellent resolve and organisation against the unilateral moves of the central government. In Punjab, the ongoing agitation had begun in November 2020. Tractor rallies across the state were held and widely publicised. The central government at that time had not anticipated that it could pose a serious challenge to its credibility and prove difficult to resolve the disagreement. It was only when the farmers assembled at the borders of Delhi and demonstrated their might and determination that the government took any serious notice of the issue. On Tuesday, the protests entered Delhi and occupied the Red Fort area. Now that one looks back at the farmer's mobilisation over the past



three months, the fault lines in the government's approach become clear. It is evident that the government introduced the legislation without garnering sufficient goodwill in its favour. It was confident that given COVID-19 related restrictions, a popular resistance will not take place.

(Contd on page 30)

