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# Air India flight with 318 oxygen concentrators from New York reaches India

**Air India on Monday brought 328 oxygen concentrators to India from the United States. The oxygen concentrators were flown from New York to New Delhi by Air India.**

(Insider Bureau)-Air India on Monday brought 328 oxygen concentrators to India from the United States. The oxygen concentrators were flown from New York to New Delhi by Air India. The Air India flight was loaded at the JFK Airport on Sunday and it reached Delhi on Monday. The arrival of the 328 oxygen concentrators from New York was announced by Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Puri.

Various hospitals across the country continue to grapple with a severe shortage of medical oxygen on Monday even after receiving emergency supplies. On Saturday, 20 people died at Delhi's Jaipur Golden Hospital amid a shortage of oxygen. "All efforts to strengthen India's fight against the pandemic are on. 318 Philips oxygen concentrators on @airindiain flight from JFK airport land at

@DelhiAirport," Puri tweeted on Monday.

On Monday, India recorded the highest daily Covid tally in the world with over 3.52 lakh cases in a single day. India's tally of Covid-19 cases has climbed to 1,73,13,163 while active cases have crossed the 28 lakh-mark.

The death toll increased to 1,95,123 with a record 2,812 new fatalities.



## Man Pleads Guilty To Indian-Origin Man's Murder In UK

(Insider Bureau)-The murder trial of an Indian-origin man found dead in an alleyway in west London last year changed course at a London court on Tuesday when the accused pleaded guilty to the killing.

Manpreet Singh, 21, admitted murder of 37-year-old Baljit Singh on the second day of a trial at Isleworth Crown Court and will be sentenced at the same court on Wednesday, the Metropolitan Police said.

Baljit, who lived in the Hayes area of west London, was pronounced dead at the scene after the Met Police and London Ambulance Service were called to Station Road on April 25, 2020. Officers from the Met Police's Specialist Crime Command (Homicide) opened the murder investigation

soon after.

"Baljit Singh suffered a brutal and sustained assault at the hands of Manpreet Singh - an assault which cost him his life," said Detective Inspector Adam Guttridge from the department.

"From what we know, Baljit would not have been in a position to defend himself given his slight frame and the amount of alcohol that he had consumed that evening. Manpreet snapped in anger and took advantage of the circumstances to carry out this horribly violent attack. His problems with drink and his lifestyle may have played a part in the events that night, but they offer no excuse for taking another man's life in such a vicious way," he said.

The court heard how Manpreet

had only met Baljit in the weeks prior to the attack, after travelling down from Birmingham to London with a mutual acquaintance in seek of work. The pair had briefly lived together but had fallen out just prior to the attack.

Since then, Manpreet, who was struggling with excessive drinking, had been living on the streets with

his friend. In spite of this, on the day of the murder all three met up in the early evening and drank together at a venue on Uxbridge Road in Hayes. Baljit was extremely drunk by the end of the evening and left with Manpreet and their friend. CCTV footage captured the three of them walking together, with Baljit struggling to

stay upright. Just after 2200 hours local time, Manpreet and Baljit entered an alleyway off Station Road where Manpreet launched his deadly assault. Baljit's body was discovered 45 minutes later by a passer-by and the London Ambulance Service were called but nothing could be done to save his life.

## 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.



### 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.



### 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.



### 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.



## "Global Cooperation": Indian-American Doctor On Only Way To Address Covid

(Insider Bureau)-Indian-American physician Vivek Murthy, the 21st Surgeon General of the US on Sunday said that the only way to address a global COVID-19 pandemic is global cooperation and mutual support. Confirming his above statement, Mr Murthy announced that the US has taken steps to support India during its unprecedented second wave of COVID19 infections. "Today, the US announced steps to support #India during its unprecedented wave of #COVID19 infections. It has been painful to watch the suffering and loss that so many have endured. The only way to address a global pandemic is global cooperation and mutual

support," tweeted Mr Murthy. Earlier in the day, the US's National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan spoke on the phone today with National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, expressing deep sympathy for the people of India following the recent spike in COVID-19 cases. Talking about, Jake Sullivan and Ajit Doval meet he said that it was heart-breaking and horrifying toll of COVID-19 in India in recent days and added, "Today's statement outlines concrete steps being taken by the United States to help address the crisis. The uncontrolled spread of COVID-19 anywhere presents a threat to all nations.



CS 316120-A 01/20/2020

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# Gupta Brothers In South Africa Named In UK Economic Sanctions List

**Brothers Ajay, Atul and Rajesh Gupta were sanctioned for their role in a "long-running" South African corruption scandal, alongside Russian tax fraudsters.**

(Insider Bureau)-Three brothers from the influential Gupta family in South Africa have been placed on a new list of 22 people sanctioned by the UK government on Monday for their alleged involvement in some of the world's most serious cases of corruption and to block them channelling money through UK banks or enter the country. Brothers Ajay, Atul and Rajesh Gupta are sanctioned for their role in a "long-running" South African corruption scandal, alongside Russian tax fraudsters, individuals linked to Latin American bribery cases and a Sudanese businessman. They fall under the first wave of

measures under the new Global Anti-Corruption sanctions regime, which gives the UK unprecedented power to stop corrupt actors profiting from the UK economy, imposes asset freezes and travel bans against individuals.

"Corruption has a corrosive effect as it slows development, drains the wealth of poorer nations and keeps their people trapped in poverty. It poisons the well of democracy," said UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab.

"The individuals we have sanctioned today have been involved in some of the most notorious corruption cases around the world. Global Britain

is standing up for democracy, good governance and the rule of law. We are saying to those involved in serious corruption: we will not tolerate you or your dirty money in our country," he said. On the sanction list of 22, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) includes Ajay, Atul and Rajesh Gupta and their associate Salim Essa, for their roles in serious corruption. "They were at the heart of a long-running process of corruption in South Africa which caused significant damage to its economy," it notes.

The businessmen have all previously denied allegations of corruption. The family, originally



from Uttar Pradesh's Saharanpur, is now in self-exile in Dubai as South Africa continues extradition efforts for questioning in their alleged role in state capture involving billions of South African Rands from state-owned institutions. In 2019, the US treasury department imposed sanctions on the three Gupta brothers and Essa for their

involvement in corruption in South Africa. Others on the list include those involved in the diversion of USD 230 million of Russian state property through a fraudulent tax refund scheme uncovered by Russian lawyer Sergei Magnitsky, who died in 2009 having uncovered one of the largest tax frauds in recent Russian history.

## No Time For "Symbolism" As India's Covid Cases Rise: Indian-American Lawmaker



**India is struggling with a second wave of the pandemic with more than 3,00,000 daily new coronavirus cases being reported in the past few days.**

(Insider Bureau)-An Indian-American Democratic lawmaker on Monday welcomed the US government's decision to provide material and healthcare help to India in its fight against a spike in COVID-19 cases, but

said this is "no time for symbolism" or "lip service" and the Joe Biden administration must act now.

India is struggling with a second wave of the pandemic with more than 3,00,000 daily new

coronavirus cases being reported in the past few days, and hospitals in several states are reeling under a shortage of medical oxygen and beds.

"The Biden administration's commitment that it will export raw materials for the Indian manufacturer of the Covishield vaccine is a welcome decision," Indian American Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi said.

"However, this is no time for symbolism, half-measures or lip service. We must act now," he

asserted.

The Biden administration had come under criticism from several quarters, including from members and supporters of the Democratic

Party, for not releasing surplus COVID-19 vaccines to India when the country was experiencing its worst-ever public health crisis.

## "Heartbroken": Satya Nadella, Sundar Pichai Support India's Covid Fight

(Insider Bureau)- Google CEO Sundar Pichai and his Microsoft counterpart Satya Nadella today assured help to India as the country battles a ravaging coronavirus crisis that has left hospitals unbearably full and supplies critically low. Sundar Pichai tweeted that his company will provide a ? 135 crore funding to UNICEF and the non-profit Give India for medical supplies, supporting high-risk communities, and grants to help spread critical information about

the deadly virus. "Devastated to see the worsening Covid crisis in India," the Alphabet chief tweeted.

Satya Nadella said he was "heartbroken" by the current coronavirus situation in India and added that his company will continue to use its resources and technology for relief efforts and support buying oxygen devices. In a tweet, the Indian-American CEO also thanked the United States government that has assured help to India amid the

crisis. "I am heartbroken by the current situation in India. I'm grateful the U.S.

government is mobilizing to help. Microsoft will continue to use its voice, resources, and technology to aid relief efforts, and support the purchase of critical oxygen concentration devices," his tweet read. Several prominent people have expressed solidarity for India as the country battles the deadly second wave of the coronavirus.



**Josh India WebTV**














**Geeta Saxena**  
Show Host (Prime Time News)

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# Endorsement for Judge Rosemarie Montalbano for Brooklyn Surrogate Judge 2021

Judge Montalbano has been a jurist for many years, served as a civil court attorney and principle law clerk before being elected Judge to the Unified Court System. Judge Montalbano has the support of many unions and civic associations NYC Fire Dept., NYS Court Officers Association, La Nueva Esperanza, Central Brooklyn Independent Democrats, United States Court Security Officers and many more organizations including prominent local political and community leaders to name a few.

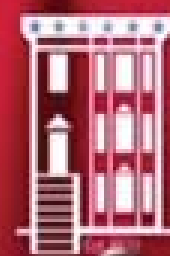
**JUDGE ROSEMARIE  
MONTALBANO  
FOR BROOKLYN  
SURROGATE'S COURT JUDGE**

**#1 in Local  
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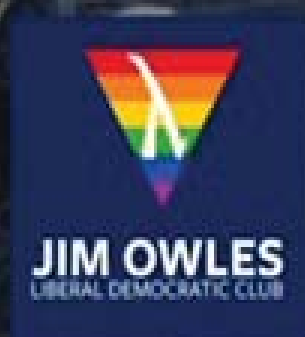


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# Dalai Lama contributes to PM-CARES Fund to strengthen India's fight against Covid-19

**Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama has contributed to the PM-CARES fund to help India in its battle against the Covid-19.**

(News Agencies)- Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama on Tuesday announced to make a contribution to the PM-CARES Fund to strengthen India's fight against the "alarming COVID-19 surge". "I have been following the continuing challenge that the Covid-19 pandemic has been posing across the world, including in India, with concern," he said in a statement.

"At this critical time, during this alarming Covid-19 surge, I have asked the Dalai Lama Trust to make a donation to the PM-CARES Fund as a token of our solidarity with fellow Indian brothers and sisters," he added. "May I take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation for all the efforts that are being made to tackle this devastating pandemic, especially by those courageously working on the

frontline. I pray that the pandemic threat will end soon," the spiritual leader said. With 3,23,144 people testing positive for coronavirus infection in a day, India's total tally of COVID-19 cases has climbed to 1,76,36,307, while the national recovery rate has further dropped to 82.54 per cent, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Tuesday. The Centre had set up



the Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM CARES) Fund in March 2020 with the primary objective to deal with any kind of emergency situation like the one currently posed by the COVID-19 outbreak and provide relief to those affected.

## Air India flight returns from Sydney with just cargo after crew member tests Covid positive



PCR tests on the entire crew, and its results came on Monday, the sources said.

One of the crew members was found positive, the sources added. Therefore, the Australian authorities refused to allow Air India to take passengers on the Sydney-Delhi flight.

As a result, the flight departed on Monday from Sydney with just crew members and cargo, the sources said.

(News Agencies)-An Air India flight returned from Sydney to Delhi on Tuesday with just cargo as Australian authorities refused to let it take passengers after one of its crew members tested positive for COVID-19, sources said.

All crew members underwent RT-PCR tests in Delhi on Saturday before operating the Delhi-Sydney flight, and all of them were found negative, they noted.

Once the arrived in Sydney on Sunday morning, the Australian authorities also conducted RT-

The crew member who tested positive for COVID-19 has been kept in isolation in Sydney only, they added.

Australia on Tuesday banned all flights to and from India till May 15 in view of rising COVID-19 cases in the country.

## Covid-19: Punjab govt orders weekend lockdown, extends night curfew by two hours

(News Agencies)-Amid growing coronavirus cases in the state, the Punjab government on Monday ordered a weekend lockdown and extended the night curfew by two hours.

Amarinder Singh said, "Due to continuous & rapid rise of #Covid19 cases in Punjab, Cabinet today has decided to impose daily lockdown from 6 PM to 5 AM and weekend lockdown

from Friday 6 PM to Monday 5 AM. Urge you all to stay at home & step out only if absolutely necessary. Seek your full cooperation."

"All shops will remain open till 5 pm from Monday till Friday," said



On Monday, Punjab reported 6,318 fresh infections and 98 fatalities, the highest number of deaths in a day this year, pushing the toll to 8,530 in the state. The government has also ordered to shut shops by 5 pm.

In a tweet, Punjab Chief Minister

Punjab Congress chief Sunil Jakhar addressing mediapersons after a cabinet meeting.

He said the night curfew will now be imposed from 6 pm to 5 am in the state daily. Presently, the curfew restrictions remain in place from 8 pm to 5 am.

# SC asks UP government to submit medical records of journalist Siddique Kappan

**The Supreme Court Tuesday asked the Uttar Pradesh government to submit medical records of journalist Siddique Kappan after it was alleged that Kappan was chained to a cot in the hospital.**

(News Agencies)-The Supreme Court Tuesday asked the Uttar Pradesh government to submit medical records of journalist Siddique Kappan who was arrested last year on way to Hathras where a young Dalit woman had died after being allegedly gang-raped.

Kerala Union of Working Journalists (KUWJ) alleged that Kappan has been chained to a cot in the hospital he was admitted to after falling in the bathroom and later testing positive for COVID-19.

The UP government refuted the

allegations that Kappan has been chained to a cot at the hospital and said it would file a short reply on his medical records by tomorrow.

A bench of Chief Justice N V Ramana and Justices Surya Kant and A S Bopanna asked Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the state government, to file the medical records by Wednesday.

At the outset, Mehta said he had preliminary objection to the habeas corpus petition filed by KUWJ as Kappan has been in judicial custody under the judicial

order.

He said the habeas corpus petition was not maintainable in the case where an accused is under judicial custody.

Advocate Wills Mathew, appearing for KUWJ, said that on April 20 he fell in the bathroom and on April 21 he was tested positive for Covid-19.

He added that besides the reliefs being sought, Kappan should also be allowed to talk to his mother via video conference.

The bench, which was facing difficulty in hearing the arguments due to a connectivity



issue, adjourned the matter for Wednesday.

"When we are adjourning the matter for detailed hearing for tomorrow, why are you making arguments now," the bench told Mathew.

It asked Mehta to file medical

records of Kappan by Wednesday to which the solicitor general agreed.

Kappan's wife recently wrote to CJI Ramana seeking his immediate release from the hospital, alleging he is "chained like an animal in a cot" there.



# Chhota Rajan tests Covid-19 positive, admitted to AIIMS

**Rajendra Nikalje, alias Chhota Rajan, has been admitted to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in New Delhi on Monday after testing positive for coronavirus.**

(News Agencies)- Underworld don Rajendra Nikalje alias Chhota Rajan has tested positive for Covid-19 and admitted to the New Delhi-based All India Institute of Medical Services (AIIMS), Tihar jail authorities informed a sessions court here on Monday. Rajan, 61, is lodged in the high-security Tihar prison in New Delhi since his arrest after deportation from Bali, Indonesia, in 2015.

All the criminal cases pending against him in Mumbai were transferred to the CBI and a special court was constituted to try them. On Monday, an assistant jailor of the Tihar jail telephonically informed the sessions court here that they could not produce Rajan via video conference before the judge for hearing in a case as the gangster has tested positive for Covid-19 and admitted to the AIIMS.

Rajan is facing as many as 70 criminal cases pertaining to extortion and murder in Mumbai. In 2018, Rajan was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment in the 2011 murder case of journalist Jyotirmoy Dey. Last week, the special CBI court in Mumbai acquitted Rajan and his aide in connection with the murder of Hanif Kadawala, an accused in the 1993 Mumbai serial bomb blasts case.



## Clarify basis, rationale of differential vaccine pricing: Supreme Court tells Centre

**"The Union of India shall also clarify in its affidavit the basis and rationale adopted in regard to the pricing of vaccines," a Bench of Justices D Y Chandrachud, L Nageswara Rao and S Ravindra Bhat said.**



(News Agencies)-THE Supreme Court Tuesday flagged differential vaccine pricing during a suo motu hearing on issues regarding Covid-19 management, asking for a clarification from the Centre on the issue, even as in an affidavit the government chal-

lenged the "completely false narrative" that it had failed to anticipate the second surge. "The Union of India shall also clarify in its affidavit the basis and rationale adopted in regard to the pricing of vaccines," a Bench of Justices D Y

Chandrachud, L Nageswara Rao and S Ravindra Bhat said. Pointing out that "different manufacturers are quoting different prices", Justice Bhat told Solicitor General Tushar Mehta: "There are powers under the Drugs Control Act and Patents Act. This is a pandemic and a national crisis. If this is not the time to invoke such powers, what is the time?" The Bench also clarified that its hearing of Covid-19 matters would not "supplant or substitute the process of hearings under-

taken by various High Courts to deal with issues related to the pandemic", adding that it cannot be a "mute spectator" during "a national crisis". In its affidavit to the Court Tuesday, the Centre listed the steps taken by it to meet the Covid-19 challenge, enumerating measures to boost oxygen supply on "a war footing" and ensuring drug supplies, and said it was implementing "innovative measures" with the "active and constant supervision and direct involvement of" Prime Minister Narendra Modi

and Home Minister Amit Shah. "... right from the inception till present critical times, the Central Government has taken various steps in the most professional manner to equip the nation with everything required in case of continuance/surge in the pandemic", the affidavit said, flaying the "completely false narrative that after the onset of Covid pandemic, during its peak impact and thereafter the nation did nothing and is caught unaware in the second surge".

## Avalanche kills two Army jawans in Siachen



(News Agencies)-Two Army jawans, who were rescued after an avalanche in Sub Sector Haneef, Siachen, succumbed to their injuries on Sunday, the Indian Army said.

As per available information, the avalanche struck at around 1 pm on Sunday. All other soldiers and porters are stable and out of danger, the Indian Army confirmed.

## Tigress found dead in forest at Maharashtra's Yavatmal, paws chopped off

(News Agencies)-A four-year-old tigress was found dead with two of its paws chopped off in a forest in Yavatmal district of Maharashtra. The carcass of the tigress was spotted on Sunday night in the Mukutban range of Pandharkawda forest, an official said and added that an iron wire was found around the feline's neck.

Deputy Conservator of Forest Raju Bansod said, "The tigress was found dead near a nullah (drain) in the forest. The carcass had injuries caused by a sharp weapon. An iron wire

was found around the feline's neck." Its two front paws were chopped off, he said.



paw in Bhiwandi town of Maharashtra's Thane district. Acting on a tip-off, the police had laid a trap at Thakurpada on the Mumbai-Nashik bypass and nabbed the accused with the skin and paw, an official said. The accused, Prashant Singh (21), Chetan Gauda (23), Aryan Kadam (23) and Aniket Kadam (25), were all identified as residents of Mumbai. An offence under the Wildlife Protection Act was registered against the accused with the Kongaon police.



# Groom arrested for having over 100 people at reception, he says not sure where they came from

**A groom was arrested by the Jalandhar police from his reception party for violating the Covid-19 protocol by having over 100 people at the function.**

(News Agencies)- Agroom was on Saturday night arrested from his wedding party in Punjab's Jalandhar for violating the Covid-19 protocol during the weekend lockdown.

The Jalandhar police arrested the groom and his father from the reception party after they found over 100 people at the function being held at a temple in Jalandhar.

While the groom and his father were taken into custody from the reception venue, several guests fled the party after seeing the

cops.

Jalandhar Deputy Commissioner said the arrests were made since the reception party was held in violation of curfew in place in the state on weekends to tackle the spread of Covid-19. He added that no permission had also been taken for a reception party.

As per the orders, not more than 20 people can gather.

An FIR was filed against the groom and his father for organising the party in direct violation of the orders. The two

were booked under Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code, police added.

The groom, however, told police that he was not aware so many people had turned up at the reception party. "I do not know from where so many people came to the wedding," he said. Amid rising Covid-19 cases, the Punjab government had last week announced stricter curbs, including the extension of night curfew by an hour and closure of bars, cinema halls, gyms, spas, coaching centres and



sports complexes in the state till April 30.

The curfew timings were also revised to 8 pm-5 am from 9 pm-5 am.

Gatherings of more than 20 people, including weddings and

cremations, were banned across the state.

Officials said that prior approval of the district administration was needed for all gatherings of more than 10 people, except for cremation.

# Incarceration would bear no fruit: Delhi court grants bail to Deep Sidhu in Red Fort violence case



**Delhi court has granted bail to Deep Sidhu in a case filed by the Archaeological Survey of India alleging damage to the Red Fort.**

(News Agencies)-ADelhi court on Monday granted bail to Deep Sidhu who was arrested in connection with the Red Fort violence on Republic Day.

The court granted bail to Deep

Sidhu in a case registered by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) alleging damage to public property during the farmers' tractor parade violence on Republic Day at Red Fort.

"Applicant's further incarceration in the present case would bear no fruit and therefore would be unjustified, nor would the restoration of applicant's liberty be detrimental to the investigation being conducted by the police authorities," the court observed while granting bail to Deep Sidhu.

The court added, "The accused has already been interrogated in PC for 14 days and has been in custody for about 70 days when

he has been granted regular bail by Ld. ASJ on similar facts. Any further restraint upon his liberty would be neither logical nor legal."

Deep Sidhu was arrested on February 9 and was granted bail by a Delhi court on April 16 in the case.

The Delhi Police's Crime Branch arrested Deep Sidhu again in connection with the case lodged by the ASI after a Delhi court granted bail to the actor-activist

arrested on February 9 in connection with the Red Fort violence. On January 26, thousands of protesting farmers who reached ITO in Delhi from the Ghazipur border clashed with police, the agency claimed in its FIR registered in connection with the Red Fort violence, adding that many of them who were driving tractors reached the Red Fort and entered the monument, where a religious flag was also hoisted.

# WhatsApp group admin can't be held liable for member's post unless common intention shown: Bombay HC

**Holding that an admin of a WhatsApp group can't be held liable for a member's post unless common intention is shown, the Bombay HC said that when a person creates a group, he cannot be expected to presume or to have advance knowledge of criminal acts of a member.**

(News Agencies)-The Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court recently held that a WhatsApp group administrator can't be held vicariously liable for objectionable content posted by a member of the group unless it is shown that there was a "common intention" or "pre-arranged plan".

The division bench of Justice Z A Haq and Justice Amit B Borkar observed this as it quashed an FIR and set aside the proceedings against a Whatsapp administrator in a magistrate court of Gondia.

"Even if the allegations in the FIR are accepted as correct, and

considering the material in the form of the charge sheet on its face value, it does not disclose essential ingredients of offences alleged against the applicant under sections 354-A(1)(iv), 509 and 107 of the Indian Penal Code and Section 67 of the Information Technology Act, 2000," the HC said.

What is the case?

A case was filed against an administrator of a WhatsApp group along with another member in July 2016 for not taking action against a person who used "filthy" and "indecent" language against a woman in the group.

It was alleged that the applicant did not remove the accused from the Whatsapp group or asked him to submit an apology.

What happened in court?

Opposing the quashing of the FIR, the complainant stated that there was sufficient material available against the administrator.

The court during the hearing felt that the "crux of the issue involved is whether an administrator of a WhatsApp group can be held criminally liable for the objectionable post of its member for committing offences".

To adjudicate the issue, the



court considered the functioning of the WhatsApp messaging service. The court noted that the "chat group feature on Whatsapp allows joint participation of members of the chat group. Group administrators, as they are generally called, are the ones who create the group by adding

or deleting the members to the same. Every chat group has one or more group administrators, who control the participation of members of the group by deleting or adding members of the group. A group administrator has limited power to remove a member of the group or add other members of the group.



# PM Modi, home minister directly monitoring oxygen supplies: Govt tells SC

**The Union ministry for home affairs also said that the unprecedented surge in the number of coronavirus cases has also brought about certain limitations in terms of resources.**

(News Agencies)-The Centre on Tuesday told the Supreme Court that the Prime Minister is working towards increasing oxygen supply on a war footing in order to ease the burden on Covid-19 patients on a war-footing and is constantly supervising oxygen supply in the nation. "The Central Government, with active and constant supervision and direct involvement of the Prime Minister and the Home Minister, is augmenting the oxygen supply on a war footing evolving and implementing innovative measures," the Centre said in an affidavit to the Supreme Court. The Centre in its 200-page

affidavit, filed in the suo motu case in distribution of essential services and supplies during the Covid-19 pandemic said that any deviation in plan for any particular state (either under a judicial order or otherwise) without keeping in mind the national availability or ever changing requirements of each state will have "cascading effect on oxygen supply to other States."

The Union ministry for home affairs also said that the unprecedented surge in the number of coronavirus cases has also brought about certain limitations in terms of resources. It added during such times

resources need to be "professionally augmented and utilised."

A bench of Justices DY Chandrachud, L Nageswara Rao and S Ravindra Bhat took the affidavit on record and posted the matter for further hearing on Friday. "It is also pertinent to note that the medical oxygen in any country cannot be unlimited. While the government started all out efforts to augment oxygen resources and procure more and more oxygen from all available sources, these supplies available at any given time in the country are to be distributed to all the states, especially those which are critically burdened with high



number of active COVID cases, in a balanced manner," the government said, according to news agency PTI.

The Union ministry of home affairs also said that it is in the process of commissioning 162 PSA (Pressure Swing Adsorption technology to generate oxygen at local level) plants across the nation a war footing. "It is submitted that 38 plants have

already been installed and another 21 plants will be installed by April 30, 2021. A further 105 plants will be installed by May 31, 2021 and thereafter increasing to 156 plants by June 30, 2021. Besides, 500 more PSA plants are planned to be installed in the hospitals in district headquarters to enhance oxygen generation in smaller cities and towns," Centre said.

## Taiwan expresses concern, holds discussion to provide aid to India amid massive Covid-19 surge



**Taiwan expressed its concern for the country and said that it is looking for ways to provide support at a time of great need.**

(News Agencies)-The global call of support for India is pouring in from all across the world as the country battles against the dangerous second wave of coronavirus disease (Covid-19). On Tuesday, Taiwan

expressed its concern for the country and said that it is looking for ways to provide support at a time of great need. "The government & people of Taiwan are seriously concerned about the #COVID19 situation

in #India. We're closely monitoring developments & holding in-depth discussions aimed at providing requisite support to our Indian friends at a time of great need," the ministry of foreign affairs said in a tweet. The government & people of #Taiwan are seriously concerned about the #COVID19 situation in #India. We're closely monitoring developments & holding in-depth discussions aimed at providing requisite support to our Indian friends at a time of great need.

The United States on Sunday agreed to 'immediately' supply essential raw material to the country to boost the production of Covishield vaccines, besides providing other resources like protective gears and test kits. Late on Monday night, US President Joe Biden further extended America's support to the country on a phone call. Recognising India's assistance to the US when the pandemic hit in the beginning, Biden in a tweet assured emergency

assistance to the country to combat the fatal virus. "Today, I spoke with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and pledged America's full support to provide emergency assistance and resources in the fight against Covid-19. India was there for us, and we will be there for them," Biden said. Vital medical supplies are being rushed to India worldwide as the healthcare infrastructure in the country has reached its capacity with many dying from oxygen shortage in hospitals.

More than 90 oxygen cylinders and 100 ventilators arrived in Delhi from Britain on Tuesday, while France is aiming to send eight oxygen generators along with ventilators and essential medical equipment, President Macron said on Tuesday.

Pakistan, Canada, Iran, Germany are also among countries that have extended as the nation suffers from an extreme shortage of medical supplies, especially of the essential oxygen gas.

India reported 323,144 new Covid-19 infections and over 2,700 fatalities in the last 24 hours, as per the Union health ministry data.

## PM Modi's aunt dies during Covid-19 treatment



(News Agencies)-Prime Minister Narendra Modi's aunt Narmadaben Modi who was undergoing treatment for coronavirus infection died at the civil hospital here on Tuesday, the family said. Narmadaben (80) lived in the New Ranip area of the city with her children.

"Our aunt Narmadaben was admitted to the civil hospital some ten days ago after her condition deteriorated following coronavirus infection," said Prahlad Modi, the prime minister's younger brother.

"She breathed her last at the hospital today," he told PTI.

Her husband Jagjivandas, brother of the prime minister's father Damodardas, had died many years ago, said Prahlad Modi.



# PM Modi chairs high-level Covid review meet, tells officials to 'ensure rapid upgradation of health infrastructure'



**Prime Minister instructed the officials to work closely with the state governments to begin the functioning of the PSA oxygen plants at the earliest.**

(News Agencies)-Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday chaired a high-level meeting with the top officials to review the Covid-19 situation in India. The Prime Minister was briefed about the availability of essential medical supplies like oxygen, medicines, health infrastructure that has reached its capacity due to the massive surge in the number of daily coronavirus disease cases. During the meeting, the Prime Minister instructed the officials to work

closely with the state governments to begin the functioning of the PSA oxygen plants at the earliest. The officials also informed him that the states were encouraged to set up the plants to meet the required demand of the life-saving gas. The Prime Minister was informed by the Empowered Group working on boosting oxygen supply about the measures being taken to step up the allocation of oxygen to the states. It was discussed that the

production of liquid medical oxygen has increased by over 3000 MT from August last year. From 5700 MT per day produced in August 2020, the country is producing 8922 MT presently, as of April 25, according to a statement from the Prime Minister's office. The domestic production of the essential liquid medical oxygen is expected to increase further and cross 9250 MT per day by the end of this month. This comes after the Centre informed the Supreme Court earlier in the day that the Prime Minister is working to increase the oxygen supply in the country on a war footing and is constantly supervising the availability of oxygen. The officials also apprised Modi about the functioning of the

Oxygen Express by the railways as well as the domestic and international sorties undertaken by the Indian Air Force for transportation of oxygen tankers. On Monday, a C-17 aircraft of the IAF airlifted six empty cryogenic oxygen containers from Dubai. The C-17 transport plane was also used for domestic oxygen transportation on Tuesday as it carried two empty tankers from Indore in Madhya Pradesh to Jamnagar in Gujarat for oxygen filling amid the huge demand for the gap due to the spike in Covid-19 cases. The Empowered Group working on medical infrastructure and Covid management briefed the Prime Minister about the efforts undertaken to boost the availability of beds and ICUs in

the nation as people struggle with an acute shortage of hospital beds. PM Modi stressed on the need to ensure that specific guidelines and strategies for Covid management are properly implemented by the states. Another Empowered Group, which is working on communication informed Modi about the efforts undertaken to increase awareness among people on Covid-appropriate behaviour. India is struggling from a seemingly high contagious second wave of Covid-19 that has left its infrastructure in complete disarray. On Tuesday, 323,144 new fresh Covid-19 infections and more than 2,700 deaths in the last 24 hours, the health ministry's data showed.

## EU comes to India's aid amid Covid-19 crisis; member states to help with oxygen, medicines



**While 20,000 litres of oxygen per week will come from Portugal, 9,000 doses of antiviral drug Remdesivir will fly in from Belgium.**

(News Agencies)-As international help continues to pour in for India's fight against the Covid-19 crisis, the European Union on Tuesday said it will deliver oxygen, medicine and essential equipment over the

coming days via its member states under the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. A shipment of urgently needed oxygen, medicine and equipment will be delivered over the coming days by EU Member

States to India," an official EU statement read. The offer of support from the EU Member States would include 700 oxygen concentrators, 1 oxygen generator, 365 ventilators from Ireland; 9,000 doses of antiviral medicines Remdesivir from Belgium; 80 oxygen concentrators and 75 oxygen cylinders from Romania; 58 ventilators from Luxembourg; 5,503 vials of Remdesivir, 20,000 litres of oxygen per week from Portugal, and 120 ventilators from

Sweden. The EU Civil Protection Mechanism is coordinated by the Emergency Response Coordination Centre of the European Commission. "This support has been made in line with the coordinated effort by EU Member States currently underway to pool their resources in responding rapidly to tackle the alarming epidemiological situation in India," the statement read, adding that more support from

other member states of the EU is expected for India in the coming days. Countries like France and Germany are also expected to extend support. Janez Lenarčič, commissioner for crisis management, said the EU is ready to offer the utmost to support India at "this critical time". This comes as India continues to grapple with the rise in Covid-19 cases. A marginal drop in infections was reported in the past 24 hours. As per the official figures from the Union ministry of health and family affairs, the country witnessed 323,144 new cases in the last 24 hours. With this, India's Covid-19 tally stands at a whopping 17,636,307.

## 6-year jail term for Saritha Nair in Kerala solar scam

(News Agencies)-The judicial first class magistrate court in Kozhikode (north Kerala) on Tuesday sentenced the second accused in solar cheating case Saritha S Nair to six years rigorous imprisonment and fined her ₹40,000. Congress leader and former home minister Thiruvanchoor Radhakrishnan welcomed the verdict. "The ruling front has used her to target Congress leaders. It is a slap on its face," he said. The court found Nair guilty of breach of trust, cheating, forging documents and other offences.

The first accused, Biju Radhakrishnan, her second husband, is in quarantine and his sentence will be announced later. The court held that she has to undergo the sentence separately. She had already been convicted in three other cases. This is one of the 30-odd complaints registered against the duo in the solar cheating case in 2013. This case relates to the cheating of a businessman Abdul Majeed in 2012. He had accused both of cheating him of ₹42.70 lakh after promising to install

imported solar panels in his office and house and franchisee rights of their firm. Fearing bad publicity many withdrew their complaints later. Though the trial in the case was completed in 2018, the verdict was postponed. The case dragged after Nair failed to appear before the court citing many reasons. Later, the court issued an arrest warrant and she was held from her house in Thiruvananthapuram last week. The solar scandal, one of the reasons for the fall of the Oommen Chandy regime, surfaced in 2013. Nair and

Radhakrishnan floated a fictitious solar energy company called 'Team Solar' and cheated many by seeking investments with the promise of making them business partners or offering to install solar power units. They flaunted their 'high connections' to attract gullible investors. She used to frequent the CM's office using her connections. Oommen Chandy, the then CM of Kerala, had to sack two of his private secretaries and the state public relations director when their names cropped up in the case.

This is for the sixth consecutive day when more than 300,000 fresh Covid-19 infections have been reported in the country. Several states have been facing a shortage of oxygen supply and ICU beds amid mounting Covid-19 cases. As per the central data, till date, a total of 14,556,209 patients have beaten the deadly contagion while 197,894 have lost their lives to the infection.



# Delhi hospitals swamped, Covid patients being taken to Punjab for treatment

**As Delhi grapples to manage adequate medical oxygen and ICU beds, coronavirus patients are now being admitted to hospitals in Punjab for treatment.**

(News Agencies)-With Delhi reeling under severe shortage of life-saving oxygen and ICU beds, Covid-19 patients are getting admitted to hospitals in Punjab for treatment.

While the number of Covid-19 patients in Punjab is relatively lower than Delhi, a sporadic increase in positivity rate in the ongoing second wave has led to a rise in hospitalisations. Various hospitals have reported scarcity of oxygen as well.

Punjab reported 6,318 fresh infections and 98 Covid-related deaths on Monday. In Delhi, 20,201 new cases and 380 fatalities were registered on Monday.

A Punjab official told India Today TV that the state was better off as there were several well-equipped hospitals. "However, the increase in positivity rate is a

cause of worry," he claimed.

A civil surgeon in Mohali echoed similar concerns.

"We are inundated with calls for ICU beds and oxygen. We do admit patients from Delhi. But not all are capable of making it. We have told them some may have to return to their city. The situation is under control now. However, there has been a steady rise in cases and I cannot predict the future. If people do not follow Covid-appropriate protocols, we may witness trouble," Adarshpal Kaur told India Today TV.

Tales of people coming from Delhi Harsh Sharma and his sister Bhavna Sharma brought their father to a nursing home in Mohali as there are no ICU beds with oxygen available in Delhi. The elderly man was moved from Delhi to Mohali in an ambulance. Harsha and Bhavna tried to admit

their ailing father at Delhi's Rajiv Gandhi Hospital, BL Kapoor and AIIMS, but found no bed.

Speaking about the harrowing experience of finding a bed in Delhi, Harsh, a first year BSc student of University of Delhi, told India Today, "We tried in Delhi but when we couldn't manage, our relatives suggested we bring our father to Punjab. We have shifted him to a small nursing home here. He is on an ICU bed with oxygen. He is doing much better now."

His sister, Bhawna Sharma, said, "The entire system in Delhi seems to have collapsed. My father has symptoms of coronavirus but he tested negative. We got tested again. The reports said my father and brother tested positive. But we could not find a bed for my father."

A senior police officer from Jammu and Kashmir told India Today TV



that he shifted his Covid-19 positive in-laws from Delhi to Chandigarh.

"My in-laws were infected with Covid-19 in Delhi and their health parameters were going down. Looking at the state of affairs in Delhi, we didn't waste any time. We got an ambulance to shift them to a Chandigarh hospital," said the cop.

Stories of Covid relatives in Punjab - Few kilometres from Patiala, a couple stood outside a private hospital, claiming their mother died due to shortage of oxygen. "The private hospitals are charging a lot. There are patients

from Delhi and Punjab. Sometimes they ignore the locals to accommodate Delhi patients as there is shortage of oxygen. However, the hospital at midnight shifted nearly a dozen patients because of which my mother died," said Alok Ritu Sharma, a relative of another Covid-19 patient, complained about unhygienic hospitals, lack of oxygen and staff. "There was no assistant in the Covid ward. We shifted our father to a hospital after our mother died. The hospital was dirty. Virus-infected patients were left alone with other patients from Patiala and Delhi.

## CBI charges ex-Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh for 'dishonest performance of public duty'

(News Agencies)-The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in its FIR against former Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh has charged him with "attempting to obtain undue advantage for improper and dishonest performance of public duty" in the year 2020-21.

In the FIR, Anil Deshmukh has been booked under the Prevention of Corruption Act and section 120 B (criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

The federal probe agency also claims that its enquiry has revealed that Sachin Vaze, suspended assistant police inspector of the Mumbai police, had been reinstated into the police force after being out of the service for more than 15 years by Anil Deshmukh.

"He was entrusted with most of the sensational and important cases of Mumbai City Police and the then home minister was in knowledge of the said fact," said the CBI. On Saturday, the CBI conducted searches at several premises owned by Anil Deshmukh in Mumbai and Nagpur. Incriminating material has been recovered during the

searches, said sources.

Anil Deshmukh, following the raids, told media outlets in Nagpur, "I have fully cooperated with the CBI officials who came to my residence to conduct searches."

In its FIR, the CBI also said that the petition by former Mumbai Police commissioner Param Bir Singh mentioned that Anil Deshmukh and others "exercised undue influence over the transfer and posting of officials".

This, said the CBI, amounts to undue influence over the performance of official duties by the officials.

The CBI is likely to summon Anil Deshmukh to question him in connection with the case.

Param Bir Singh, after his removal from the post of Mumbai Police Commissioner, had written a letter to Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray alleging that Anil Deshmukh had called Sachin Vaze to his Mumbai residence in January 2021. It was during this meeting, claimed Param Bir Singh, that Vaze was asked to extort Rs 100 crore per month from 1,750 bars in Mumbai.

## Thinking of Buying/Selling ?



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# The Economy Is (Almost) Back. It Will Look Different Than It Used To.

The recovery is profoundly unequal across sectors, unbalanced in ways that have big implications for businesses and workers. There have been a lot of strange economic numbers over the last 14 months, as the world has been whipsawed by the pandemic. But one particular line of the first-quarter G.D.P. numbers released Thursday stands out even so. Americans' spending on durable goods - cars and furniture and other goods meant to last a long time - rose at a stunning 41.4 percent annual rate in the first three months of the year. Enjoy your Pelotons and Big Green Eggs, everybody. The central reality of the economy in 2021 is that it's profoundly unequal across sectors, unbalanced in ways that have enormous long-term implications for businesses and workers. The economy is recovering rapidly, and is on track to reach the levels of overall G.D.P. that would have been expected before anyone had heard of Covid-19. But that masks some extreme shifts in composition of what the United States is producing. That matters both for the businesses on the losing end of those shifts and for their workers, who may need to find their way into the growing sectors.

In such a tumultuous time, it helps to look at the G.D.P. numbers not in terms of how they changed compared with last quarter or last year, but with the pre pandemic economy. How does the actual number in the first quarter compare with what that number would have been if it had grown at a steady 2 percent annual rate since the end of 2019, the last quarter unaffected by the pandemic. This approach confirms the basic idea that the economy is not far from that pre pandemic trend line. In the first quarter, overall G.D.P. was only 3.3 percent below where it would have been in that hypothetical pandemic-free world. The United States is on track to surge above that 2019 trend in the second quarter currently underway. But as the extreme spike in first-quarter numbers reflects, there has been a huge reallocation of economic activity toward durable goods. Spending on cars and trucks is 15.1 percent higher than it would have been on the 2019 trajectory; spending on furnishings and durable household equipment is 16.6 percent higher; and spending on recreational goods is a whopping 26 percent higher. Altogether, durable goods spending is running \$348.5 billion higher annually than it would have been in that alternate universe, as Americans have spent their stimulus checks and unused travel money on physical items. The housing sector is experiencing nearly as big a surge. Residential investment was 14.4 percent

above its prepandemic trend, representing \$90 billion a year in extra activity. And that was surely constrained by shortages of homes to sell, and lumber and other materials used to make them. It is poised to soar further in coming months, based on forward-looking data like housing starts. Another bright spot is business investment in information technology. The tech industry has been comparatively unscathed by the crisis. Spending on information processing equipment in the first quarter was 23 percent higher than its prepandemic trend, and investment in software 7.4 percent higher. Then there are the losers. The troubles of service industries, especially related to travel, are well documented. While spending on restaurants, airline tickets, concerts and other recreational activities grew in the first quarter, it was a considerably smaller surge than the one that went to physical items, and not nearly big enough to fill in the deep hole those sectors face. Spending on transportation services remains 23 percent below its prepandemic trend, recreation services 31 percent, and restaurants and hotels 19 percent.

Those three sectors alone represent \$430 billion in "missing" economic activity - largely equivalent, it's worth noting, to the combined shift of economic activity toward durable goods and residential real estate. A corollary shows up in trade data. Services exports are down 26 percent compared with the prepandemic trend, which reflects in significant part the freeze-up in global travel. Less widely understood is a steep pullback in the energy sector. There are two sides of the same coin: Consumer spending on gasoline and other energy goods is down 11 percent from its prepandemic trend line. And business spending on structures is down 19 percent, which reflects a pullback in investment by both the oil extraction industry and the commercial real estate sector. Separately, the pullback in state and local governments, many of which have faced funding crunches, is real. Their spending is 4.3 percent below the prepandemic trend, another \$89 billion in lost activity, though that is likely to return as federal stimulus dollars flow to their coffers and schools reopen. In every recession, shifts take place in the composition of economic activity; the economy rarely looks the same after a wrenching event as it did before. But what is striking about this crisis is the scale and speed of the economy's rewiring. We don't yet know how fully service industries will recover as vaccinations take place, or whether durable goods spending will return to more normal levels as stimulus checks are spent and people reallocate their budgets toward travel.

By Neil Irwin

# Preserving a friendship



support. This led to a ground-up backlash, and rightly-so, against Washington. The good news is that the Joe Biden administration listened to feedback - communicated by its own diplomats, Indian interlocutors, the diaspora, prominent Indian and American think-tanks, sections in the Hill (where even some critics of the current government in Delhi worked to voice India's case), media reports, and social media. This was not just a support package at stake - the entire relationship and perceptions of the

US in India were at stake. And in the last two days, there has been a high-level attention to the issue, culminating in President Biden's phone conversation with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday night. The US has committed to providing emergency assistance, "including oxygen-related supplies, vaccine materials, and therapeutics". It has also announced a plan to share its stock of 60 million AstraZeneca vaccines, of which India will be a beneficiary. The good thing is it did not make it sound like a favour but acknowledged the Indian assistance to the US in its time of need. It is important not to let the blip affect the relationship, and stay focused on what is the core battle - fighting Covid-19 through established protocols, better-resourced health infrastructure, and universal vaccination. Delhi should leverage all the help it can get from the US, hold it to its commitments, preserve the friendship, and use it to alleviate the distress.

At a time of distress, friends matter. And it is disappointing when a friend does not instinctively reach out and help, and, instead, may even add to the distress. As India got hit by the second wave, this is what happened with the United States (US) - when it was seen as blocking the export of raw materials essential to ramp up vaccine production or sitting on unused vaccines or not offering medical resources India needed to fight the pandemic. This may have been due to a range of reasons - America's isolationist foreign policy impulse (which has got reinforced because of the politics of ultra-nationalism), or a ruthless and insensitive decision-making matrix blind to suffering elsewhere, or its slow internal decision-making process, or its own trauma of pandemic leading to hoarding all resources available to fight Covid-19, or India's mixed messaging, or all of the above. The US came across as unreliable, even when antagonistic countries offered



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# Where we went wrong: A sense of hubris turned the predicted second surge into a devastating crisis

*What should be done at this stage is well-known. But effective execution not only requires a decentralised approach and better coordination, but, most importantly, shedding hubris. Can the state rise to the challenge?*

**By Sunny Jose**

The Economic Survey 2020-21 (Vol.1) extols India's approach to containing the first wave of COVID-19 as "humane, evidence-based and informed by Nobel-Prize winning research". It goes on to predict that "the prospect of India facing a strong second wave is receding with the start of the vaccination this year". Whether the no-notice, ill-prepared lockdown was "sagacious and humane" or "brutal and inept" is certainly a matter of academic and policy debate. But what is beyond debate is that the Economic Survey's evidence-based foresight of "receding prospect of a second wave" is downright wrong.

The irrefutable fact is that India faces a strong, rapidly rising second wave. The state is yet to put in place informed,

well-coordinated and decentralised policy measures that can effectively halt the surge with a minimal loss of lives and livelihoods.

How did we lose track and regress towards a crisis? I identify at least three intertwined sources of hubris that converted a foreseeable and manageable problem into a dreadful, devastating crisis. To start with, from television pundits to chest-thumping politicians, everyone took pride in flattening the curve. The immediate fallout was a laxity in COVID-appropriate behaviour in general and mask wearing in particular. By the end of January this year, almost everything was back to the previous normal. This led a fair measure of the population to believe that while vaccination may be necessary later, it is not now, leading to vaccine hesitancy.

The second reason was the euphoria of vaccine nationalism. We were informed that not only India has the capability to vaccinate all its citizens, but also a larger part of the world. Some referred to this vaccine capability as emblematic of India's "rising soft power". Today we are faced with a double whammy of vaccine shortages in some states and having to import multiple vaccines. Many also overlooked the fact that vaccination may not offer a complete protection against an infection in the immediate future. To do so, a critical threshold of vaccination might be required. Also, studies indicate an increased susceptibility to infection after vaccination caused possibly by a lowered immunity and unsafe behaviour. These call for a continuous use of masks.



However, the centrality of mask wearing was neither conveyed clearly and widely, nor was mask-wearing strictly imposed. The third source of hubris came from overestimating the ability of the state. To be sure, the pandemic proved the centrality of the state, which managed the entire process of lockdown without much participation of, or collaboration with civil society. The state, however, has serious limitations in outreach. This assumes significance especially against emerging evidence of the possibility of aerosol transmission of the virus. If this evidence is true and aerosol transmission has already

been happening in India, it has serious implications for the state's capacity to contain the spread. Because this implies that the virus will also spread indoors besides in crowded places and gatherings. This lends urgency to a mass campaign on protective mask-wearing, including indoors. While the state can kick-start a campaign, its ability to ensure its rapid success is severely limited. Herein, the active participation of civil society becomes crucial. What should be done at this stage is well-known. But effective execution not only requires a decentralised approach and better coordination, but, most importantly, shedding hubris. Can the state rise to the challenge?

## Bringing peace to Afghanistan and Myanmar won't be easy



**By C. Raja Mohan**

Efforts to end two major conflicts in India's neighbourhood have become intense. To the east, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has produced a diplomatic opening with Myanmar's military leadership over the weekend. The Tatmadaw, as Myanmar's army is known, took charge of the nation in a coup in early February and has cracked down hard on protestors since.

To the west, a peace summit on Afghanistan, seeking to end decades of conflict there, was

also scheduled to take place in Istanbul over the weekend. It had to be postponed given the Taliban's refusal to join any such peace conference until all foreign forces leave Afghanistan. Although the US and NATO have agreed to leave Afghanistan before September 11, the Taliban has refused to budge.

The Taliban wants to denude Kabul and its international supporters of the last bit of their declining military leverage before the talks begin. Scepticism about the Taliban's willingness for peace has been high ever since the Trump Administration in the US

**While efforts are on to ensure that conflicts in both countries end, the prospects for positive change don't look too bright**

began engaging with it in the summer of 2018.

Political forces in Myanmar worry that the ASEAN initiative will only legitimise the coup and give the military leadership time to consolidate. Similar concerns were expressed when the US and the international community began to negotiate with the Taliban over the heads of the elected government in Kabul.

It is arguably easier to produce peace settlements between states by finding compromises where possible, finessing difficult issues where necessary, glossing over complex problems with diplomatic language that can be interpreted in different ways, and kicking the can down the road on the most complex issues.

Those general techniques are indeed much harder to apply when it comes to civil wars. The stakes for warring parties within a nation are much higher. One

element is to gain dominant control over the state. The fear of the winner taking all is real and power-sharing arrangements are difficult to negotiate and implement.

More often than not, civil wars have their origin in either sharply divergent perceptions about organising and governing the society or in deep ethnic, religious, regional and linguistic cleavages. Unlike states that can negotiate in a cold-blooded manner about interests, near-term and long-term, and find ways of reconciling them, partially or in full, political passions drive civil wars and it is hard to step back and accept solutions that do not meet the original demands. No two civil wars are the same. The context and issues at hand in Afghanistan and Myanmar are indeed different. But both have a long history. The sources

of the Afghan conflict go back to the late 1970s; since then we have seen different phases of the conflict - the rise and fall of a left-wing government, Soviet occupation and the jihad against it, the chaos that followed the Russian retreat, the 9/11 attacks, and the US military intervention that is now drawing to a close. Although the crisis in Myanmar appears recent, the tension between civil-military relations is not new. Back in 1988, the army annulled the huge mandate won by Aung San Suu Kyi and unleashed massive repression. Political reconciliation was found at the turn of the 2010s, but the uneasy coexistence of the last decade has broken down. While all civil wars are different, there are at least three common themes in any effort at peace and reconciliation. The first is about ending violence.



# We should start asking people to stop wearing masks outside, it makes us uncomfortable

By Tucker Carlso

In May of last year, the mayor of Los Angeles, a man called Eric Garcetti, issued this order to America's second-largest city. "Bring your mask with you whenever you leave your home. That will help us get more freedoms." Garcetti isn't much of an orator, to put it mildly, but it was a memorable quote, mostly because of the questions it left unanswered. For example, is it really possible to spread the coronavirus outdoors? That's the first and more obvious. And then more fundamentally, since when is a mayor in charge of doling out America's freedoms? Aren't those freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution that created the country? That's what they've been telling us.

So, it would have been nice to hear the answers to those questions. Unfortunately, at the time, a lot of the country was so terrified of the new pandemic that no one thought to ask those questions. People just obeyed. It was a big change. Other politicians watched it happen. They saw a smarmy nonentity like Eric Garcetti, a guy you wouldn't trust to clean your pool, suddenly assume unprecedented, god-like new powers, simply by asserting them. "Cover your face!" "OK, boss." Not a bad trick. So, naturally, other politicians wanted some of that power too. That's why they're in the business, for power. So they did the same thing that Garcetti did. And once again, no one pushed back.

In San Francisco, the authorities demanded that citizens wear masks while running outside. In the city of Boston, the mayor extended that requirement to all outdoor activities. "You need to be wearing a face-covering when you're out exercising." In a functioning democracy, like we had just a few years ago, demands like these would be impossible to make. A politician might prefer that you wear a mask outdoors, but he couldn't make you do it. At best, he'd have to ask nicely. He'd have to show you the science, and try to convince you to follow his advice, one adult to another. The onus would be on him to make his case, not on you



to obey the command. But over the course of the coronavirus pandemic, the opposite happened, it was inverted. And it happened because large groups of people failed to resist it. It kept happening, becoming more unreasonable and disconnected from science day by day. As of tonight, for example, more than 15 months after we first told you about the spread of this weird new virus in China, the state of Michigan now requires children as young as 2 to wear face masks while in "public spaces and places like camps or daycare centers." This is not a suggestion. It's an order. They all are. A pregnant mother and her 2-year-old were thrown off a Spirit Airlines flight because the 2-year-old was not wearing a mask.

It's the law! Right, we've heard. But why is it the law? There's no scientific justification for any of it. Children are not at meaningful risk from COVID. They never have been. Adults who've been vaccinated or naturally infected - and that's a huge percentage of the American population - aren't either. If you've got high levels of antibodies in your system, you're almost certainly safe. Those who don't have antibodies can get the shot. Every American who wants the vaccine can get one. At this point, there is no scientific justification for any mask mandate, anywhere. It's that simple. The idea that people are being told, being forced, to wear masks outside should shock us. There was never any risk of mass transmission outdoors. We've known that for at least a year. Last spring,

researchers in China traced 318 separate coronavirus outbreaks to find out where they originated, and how. Of those 318 outbreaks, only a single one could plausibly be connected to a person who was outside. All the rest were indoors. Last November, a review of all existing peer-reviewed research on this subject appeared in the Journal of Infectious Diseases. That review found that the odds of contracting the virus outdoors were about 19 times lower than the risk of contracting it inside. In April, researchers in Japan came to the same conclusion.

Finally, last week, the New York Times admitted all this. According to the paper, scientists have discovered, "few if any documented cases of brief outdoor interactions leading to COVID transmission." So people running in the park are safe. They always were safe. And, in fact, the evidence is so overwhelming that even America's leading purveyor of lockdown porn has been forced to concede it.

GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS: Let's talk about masks. I mean, you're seeing more and more talk about it. And I know the CDC is looking at perhaps revising their guidance about wearing masks outdoors at this time. What's your best guidance on that at this point?

ANTHONY FAUCI: You know, I don't want to get ahead of them, George. But I think it's pretty common sense now that outdoor risk is really, really quite low, particularly -- I mean, if you are a vaccinated person, wearing a mask outdoors, I mean, obviously, the risk is minuscule. "It's pretty common sense now that outdoor risk is really, really,

quite low," says Dr. Fauci. Really? So why didn't Dr. Fauci tell us this? Fauci himself clearly knew this was true. You saw him at a baseball game without a mask. He wasn't worried. And for good reason.

Kamala Harris clearly knows the truth as well. She's had the vaccine, two doses of it. So she's not concerned about getting the virus. Yet she wears the mask anyway, and ostentatiously socially distances. Why? Well, it's all a charade, maintained for reasons that have nothing to do with science or public health. That's all very obvious now. The question is, why have we put up with it?

We've known this for a long time. We've known it for certain for almost a year, since that day last June when America's so-called public health community united as one to remind us that corona restrictions don't apply to BLM rioters. They're exempt from the virus. You're not allowed to get married or go to church or see your elderly parents as they die alone. But if you break things on behalf of the Democratic Party's power structure, you can loot the Dollar Store and no one gets sick. That's science. That's not an exaggeration, that's literally what they told us. And the second they told us that, we knew for certain they weren't serious. So, why did we keep playing along? That is a sincere question. We should ponder that question. We acquiesced to the power grab. We let it happen. And because we let it happen, a lot of people got hurt, and many of those people were children.

Schools around the country shut down, and those that remained open forced students to comply with mandates that in the end damaged them, maybe permanently. At a school board meeting recently in Colorado Springs, an elementary school teacher called Stacy Adair showed a photograph of what a kindergartner's face looks like just an hour into the school day. The mask the kindergartner was covered to wear was covered in

dirt around the mouth and nose.

"I don't need to tell you it is very unhealthy for a student to breathe through this mask," Adair told the board. Of course it is. But officials ignored her and then they doubled down. "Masks will be worn whenever and wherever possible," the district announced. Worn by everyone, including kindergartners.

Colorado's governor weighed in. No more complaining, he said. If you keep whining about mask mandates, he warned, we'll close the schools again. So the mandates remain. Most children in Colorado are required to wear masks in schools statewide, even when they play sports.

So, how many kids are being hurt by this? That's a question that no one asked, and we should all be troubled by, a lot. A physician called Dr. Mary Harrow told the Colorado Springs school board that, "the data [are] overwhelming" on this topic.

Masks, she said, can, "cause low oxygen and high carbon dioxide levels, shortness of breath, toxicity, inflammation, increased stress hormones and sugar in the body, and create fear, anxiety, headaches, compromised cognitive performance and other problems." Did you really need a medical degree to know that? People need fresh air, especially children. Deprive them of fresh air, and you hurt them. You knew that, we all knew that, it is obvious. Perhaps because it is so obvious, anyone who says it out loud is at risk of being fired for saying it out loud. Earlier this month, we spoke to a high school track coach in New Hampshire who was fired for it: BRADLEY KEYES, FORMER TRACK AND FIELD COACH, PEMBROKE ACADEMY: My goal is to get these mandates removed. And it's not just track and field. It's tennis. It is baseball. It's every outdoor sport. Masks will be worn at all times: practices and competitions. Tennis, wonderful example. Singles tennis. You go watch practices, everyone is wearing masks. Competitions, they will be wearing masks, even though they're 30 to 60 feet apart on the courts.





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# The Odd Back Story Of Oxygen, Critical For India In Covid Crisis

The desperate scenes playing out in India may foreshadow a dangerous new phase of the pandemic where people die in droves, not of the disease so much as a lack of proper medical care. The situation could get a lot worse thanks to a sudden shortage of medical oxygen in the country. Oxygen is one of most straightforward and proactive ways of treating the disease, which causes hypoxia. When patients begin gasping for air, a steady supply of concentrated oxygen does wonders.

It may seem like an obvious treatment in hindsight, yet it took nearly two centuries to overcome strange theories, outright quackery and trench warfare in the medical community and beyond. Oxygen's history in medicine begins in the 1770s, when the Swedish pharmacist Karl Scheele and the British scientist Joseph Priestly independently isolated oxygen gas. Priestly unfairly received the lion's share of the credit. To make matters worse, Priestly was a believer in phlogiston, an invisible substance allegedly released



during combustion. What we call "oxygen," he called "dephlogisticated air." When he breathed it, his chest felt "peculiarly light and easy for some time afterward." Priestley subsequently bragged in a scientific tract that "only two mice and myself have had the privilege of breathing" the miracle gas. Since the new substance seemed to make candles burn brighter, Priestley speculated that it might be "peculiarly salutary to the lungs in certain morbid cases, when the common air would not be sufficient to carry off the putrid effluvia." Yet he remained wedded to his phlogiston theory, warning that breathing pure oxygen might also

carry dangers - that it might be the equivalent of burning the candle at both ends.

Eager to test the effects of the new substance on patients, Priestley and other engineers and scientists, including James Watt, founded the Pneumatic Institution in Birmingham. Though they made no promises of a cure, they offered to treat a range of maladies - including "obstinate venereal complaints" - with dephlogisticated air. They weren't very successful, but there was an upside. As one medical historian has noted, this unlikely crew managed to invent most of the oxygen-delivery apparatus still in use today, from mouthpieces to corrugated, non-crushable breathing tubes to

methods for mass-producing the gas. The Pneumatic Institution went defunct, but oxygen lived on as a quack remedy. Most of these treatments didn't actually use concentrated oxygen, dispensing nothing more than mixtures of gases not so different from ordinary air, typically a few gulps' worth and nothing more.

But that didn't stop purveyors of these panaceas from making ludicrous claims for their products. Makers of the so-called "Oxygen Treatment," a typical remedy from 1884, sent patients one bottle of "Oxygen" and one bottle of "Oxygen Tonic." This was supposed to treat everything from dyspepsia to arthritis for two full months. By the late nineteenth century, oxygen therapy was synonymous with quackery. In 1890, though, a physician named Dr. Alfred Blodgett had a patient with pneumonia whom he deemed "irrevocably doomed." In the hopes of merely easing her final moments, he hooked her up to an oxygen cannister, turned on the gas - and left it running.

This may have been the first continuous application of oxygen to a patient in history. To

Blodgett's astonishment, the woman stabilized, her breathing becoming regular. He published his results, arguing that oxygen could save lives. "Many cases will be found in which the period of greatest danger may be safely tided over which would otherwise unquestionably be lost," he wrote. And yet this was just the very beginning of oxygen's resurrection. After Blodgett's article, other researchers tried administering oxygen, but not via the lungs. They pumped it under the skin, up the urethra and into the stomach. Most bizarre of all was the idea of an oxygen enema, which came courtesy of corn-flake promoter Dr. J. H. Kellogg, who also gained fame for popularizing medical treatments of questionable value. It took a Scottish doctor named John Scott Haldane to cut through this nonsense and do the research necessary to show that breathing oxygen would be best - and that it had to be continuous and at high enough concentrations to have the desired effect. In 1917, he published his landmark paper, "The Therapeutic Administration of Oxygen."

## In Covid crisis, India's rich must open their coffers; all citizens must step up

*India's haves must open their coffers in direct action to help the have-nots. The new vaccination policy offers an opportunity for every individual to assist those less privileged by paying for their dosages, thus relieving pressure on the state resources needed for millions more.*

**By Raghu Raman**

The mindspace of every citizen is seized with the pandemic in their professional and personal remits. Bureaucrats, administrators and political leaders are occupied coordinating resources and few have the bandwidth to focus on the socio-economic onslaught that is yet to come. But this fog of chaos must not obscure the strategic dangers looming over the horizon.

There has always been a stark imbalance between the law and order situation in India and government's wherewithal to address the same. This pandemic will wreck the already fragile equilibrium between order and disorder. It is only a matter of time before

desperation drives the have-nots to express their anger and frustration unlawfully. Already, petty theft and crimes are escalating. Reports of looting lifesaving resources by citizens signal signs of a breakdown. The problem will be exacerbated because of depletion of police forces and their distraction from regular policing and administrative activities. Once this imbalance begins, the slippery slope can end in civil unrest quickly.

The relationship between order and disorder in a society is delicate. Governance is based on covenants promising solace to law-abiding citizens and retribution to law breakers. No government can govern without this pact because even the strongest has less than 10



million armed forces and police personnel to address national security and law and order for 1.3 billion people. Also, our security forces, like our health, hygiene and other frontline workers are not an inexhaustible or an untiring resource. Consider the security personnel, for example. India has about 1.5 million personnel in its armed forces who are already under heavy commitment in our western and eastern fronts. Additional troops have been pinned down in Kashmir since the abrogation of Article 370. The situation of Central Armed Police Forces

(CAPFs) is probably worse. They have been shunted around the country chasing one assignment after another with no respite, leave or downtime. And because of the exposure in their work, state police personnel have been ravaged with a disproportionate percentage of COVID cases. The efficacy of these organisations will further diminish when their (already understaffed and overworked) strategic and operational leaders start succumbing. There is simply no capacity to spare if the security or the law and order situation starts to

deteriorate. Bereaved, afraid and frustrated citizens transform into angry mobs mercurially. Millions of citizens have been pushed into poverty adding to abject inequity. Even as the middle class is struggling for air and medicines, millions of poor are compelled to migrate yet again because they face starvation in addition to COVID. As James Baldwin pointed out, the most dangerous creation of any society are people who have nothing more to lose. No covenant of governance can hold if the majority feel crushed by inequitable treatment, they will hit back.



# Nearly 70 million Americans have criminal records. We must give them a second chance

An enduring belief in the American dream has powered decades of innovation, inspired generations of entrepreneurs and driven the economic growth of our nation.

But that dream is fraying for the nearly one in three US adults -- or 70 million Americans -- who have a criminal record. For many of these individuals, a criminal record poses a significant barrier to employment, even when the record includes only a misdemeanor arrest or conviction. Regardless of their qualifications, these individuals struggle to participate in the American workforce and contribute to their families and society. And there's an opportunity cost for employers as well, who are unable to benefit from the talents of tens of millions of qualified candidates.

Many second chance candidates who have fulfilled their justice system obligation are ready to pursue a career. However, research published by University of Michigan shows that minor felony records have large negative effects on employer callbacks in response to job applications. It's not surprising that formerly incarcerated people experienced a 27% unemployment rate in 2018,

the highest rate in our nation's history.

When people are given a fair opportunity to participate in the workforce, our economy and society are stronger. That is why we're proud to serve as co-chairs of the Second Chance Business Coalition. Our goal is to encourage the nation's largest employers to give more people with criminal backgrounds a second chance at the dignity of a good job and a better life for themselves and their families.

The Coalition will work to lower barriers to employment for people with a criminal record by promoting the benefits of second chance employment and providing major employers with a set of tools, relationships and expertise to enable them to successfully hire and provide career advancement to people with criminal records. Our work is off to a strong start. Companies across a range of industries, including complex and highly-regulated sectors, have established programs that give these job seekers a chance at meaningful employment -- from banning the box, which removes questions about criminal records from job applications, to developing intentional hiring strategies.

There's a compelling business case for companies to embrace second chance employment practices -- and nearly 30 of our country's largest employers have already joined the coalition. Here's why:

Second chance employees perform well

According to the Society for Human Resource Management, 82% of managers report that the value second chance employees bring to their organization is as high as, or higher than, that of workers without records. And 66% of managers at companies that have hired people with criminal backgrounds rated these employees' quality of work as comparable to those without criminal records.

Research shows that second chance hires have lower turnover rates, which benefits both companies and workers by providing them with opportunities to grow their careers. What's more, many companies that have changed their culture to ensure second chance employees can succeed are finding that their entire workforce is more engaged.

Second chances improve workforce inclusivity

As companies seek to make



their workforces more inclusive, many are taking a more sophisticated approach to risk assessment when hiring. Second chance employment is one tool employers can use to advance this work. In the end, a criminal offense should be just one factor in assessing the overall potential of a job candidate.

Qualified candidates who are excluded due to their criminal record are disproportionately people of color. For example, Black adults are nearly six times more likely to be incarcerated than their white counterparts, and Latino adults are more than three times more likely.

Second chance employment strengthens communities

More inclusive hiring is also a powerful way to break the cycle

of poverty in many American communities. Having a fair opportunity for employment helps individuals and families strengthen their financial health and give back to their communities. These improvements translate to a better local economy, which boosts the business climate for all companies. Second chance employment takes a commitment to remove historic barriers to employment and a recognition of the benefits these employees offer. For companies that take this step, inclusive hiring practices create both positive change and give them a competitive edge. The Second Chance Business Coalition is a powerful effort to fortify the American dream and give many in our society a second chance they otherwise might never have.

## Holding the line against Russia in Ukraine



Russia's menacing troop build-up near Ukraine's border and in our Crimean region in recent days is the latest reminder to our allies of the ongoing campaign of coercion, intimidation and escalation to which Ukrainians have unfortunately become accustomed. Overtly and covertly, directly and through proxies, Russian aggression is a truly existential concern to our country. If Russia's latest move was a test,

our allies in the US and Europe did not blink. Recent consultations between President Joe Biden and President Volodymyr Zelensky and across our national security establishments, as well as a united front among Ukraine's partners in Europe, sent a clear message to the Kremlin. This may have been the first provocation of the Biden presidency, but it won't be the last. To deter Russia's hostile actions and strengthen our nation's

democratic security and stability, it will be necessary to deepen Ukraine's role in the Euro-Atlantic alliance, and broaden the investment by the US and Europe in Ukraine's future.

Russian forces invaded our country more than seven years ago -- an illegal act that the international community has yet to succeed in reversing. Our people continue to endure the occupation of Crimea and the Donbass region of eastern Ukraine, as well as a tightening of Russian control in the nearby Sea of Azov and Black Sea, to which Russia is now restricting access. More than 14,000 Ukrainians have been killed defending our nation against Russia's attacks, which have escalated dramatically in recent weeks with more than two dozen Ukrainian soldiers killed.

Make no mistake: Russian

aggression threatens not only Ukraine but also other democracies in our region. America's steadfast commitment -- through military, economic and humanitarian assistance -- has been critical to our ability to hold the line. Were it not for widespread, bipartisan support from the United States we and our neighbors would be in a far worse situation. Unfortunately, these military assaults are not the only war we are fighting. We are also trying to turn the tide against corruption, an enduring challenge from the Soviet era, as we work to reform government institutions and improve our investment climate. President Zelensky created the "Servant of the People" party to deliver change that Ukrainians have demanded, but which for too long has failed to materialize. He represents a new generation of leaders, like

myself, elected for the first time. We know why we were voted into office and what our constituents expect us to deliver; for all of us, failure is not an option. In the fight against corruption, our friends in the US are encouraging action, but our citizens are even keener to see results, because this scourge directly impacts their lives and livelihoods. Progress will not occur as quickly as we want, but it is happening. In our parliament, we have signed into law important land reform legislation and approved measures to prevent the return of nationalized banks to their former owners. Recently, the office of Ukraine's prosecutor general, Iryna Venediktova, announced criminal charges in a \$5.5 billion fraud case involving the former senior managers of Privatbank, the country's largest bank.



# This Covid Disaster Could Have Been Prevented



The Economic Times of Thursday April 22 gives figures of the rise of the second wave of Covid in India. According to it, daily cases were below 10,000 on January 25. February saw the first uptick but this was ignored by everyone. In fact, the BJP, in a meeting of its office-bearers held on February 21, showered fulsome praise on Prime Minister Modi for conquering Covid. The resolution said "The party unequivocally hails its leadership for introducing India to the world as a proud and victorious nation in the fight against COVID-19". But Covid was not impressed, and by March 10, daily new cases hit 20,000; by March 24, the figure had risen to 50,000; by April 4 to 100,000; by April 14 to 200,000; and by April 21, it hit the 300,000 mark.

The country is facing a health emergency the like of which we have never seen before. The government of India is helpless, unable to put together the strategy needed to deal with the uncontrolled spread of the pandemic. People like me, who are hardly in a position to help, are receiving calls from friends and acquaintances to help secure admission in hospitals, get a bed, oxygen cylinder, medicines and the attention of doctors and nurses. Cremation and burial grounds are overcrowded with the dead who are being denied dignity even in death. It appears as

if nothing is working and the whole system has collapsed. The Delhi High Court has castigated the government of India in the severest terms for this mismanagement and has said citizens' fundamental right to life, guaranteed by the constitution, stands seriously compromised. The government of India was forewarned. It had enough time to make arrangements to tackle the situation. It had the example of other countries before it, specially of Brazil, but for the two most important leaders of the government and the ruling party,

namely the Prime Minister and the Home Minister, winning the West Bengal election was a matter of life and death, not the fast-spreading pandemic. So they kept travelling to West Bengal like daily passengers, addressing massive rallies, gloating over the large crowds, challenging 'Didi, Oh Didi' like a street urchin would have done, ignoring the writing on the wall. It was a criminal act of utter negligence by leadership which believes that it can get away with anything because public memory is short, and Modi is still hugely popular without even

a semblance of challenge. So, we are where we are.

The most worrisome thing at present is that nobody in the government takes any responsibility for anything. But it does not stop there. With the help of the 'Godi Media', the blame is easily transferred to someone else. The 'daily durbar' which the TV channels hold every evening is I am told fully controlled by the government. It is the government which suggests which topic should be taken up for discussion, which persons should be invited to participate, and what should be the

conclusion of the debate. The anchors who pretend to rule the roost are actually little mice scurrying hither and thither on the orders of the government. And the number of such anchors is increasing because they also must survive. Those who refused to toe the line have been shown the door. They include some of the famous names of yesteryears. We have meekly accepted the situation because most of us are scared of CBI, income tax raids, ED, NIA etc. The government knows we are alone and helpless and is enjoying the situation.

On earlier occasions, the courts did not cover themselves with glory when it came to pointing out the mistakes of the government. But this time, they are showing some strength; if they do not, they will lose whatever dignity they have left. The non-'Godi Media' is doing a good job and pointing out flaws and weaknesses. But there is still a tendency to shift the blame to someone else - because how can Modi be blamed for anything at all? He is infallible.

The parliament has been shown its place by the government. Forget special sessions to discuss an important issue, even normal sessions are not called in time, and the length of the session is curtailed at will. The Opposition is vastly reduced in strength and is often overwhelmed by the sheer numbers by the ruling hordes.

## "Proud That Science Is Back In White House": Kamala Harris On World Earth Day

On the occasion of World Earth Day, US Vice President Kamala Harris said that she is proud that science is back in the White House.

Ms Harris said her mother, who was a scientist, raised her to appreciate the power of science. "My mother was a scientist and raised me to appreciate the power of science. On this #EarthDay, I am proud that science is back in the White House," Ms Harris wrote in a tweet on Thursday.

"No nation or region is immune to climate change. So as a global community, it is imperative



that we act quickly and together to confront this crisis," she added.

Earlier in the day, US President

Joe Biden announced that the United States would cut its greenhouse gas emissions by half by 2030 as part of the

country's efforts to combat climate change.

Biden also urged world leaders to significantly accelerate their own plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or risk a disastrous collective failure to stop catastrophic climate change. Every year on April 22, Earth Day marks the anniversary of the birth of the modern environmental movement since 1970.

The fight for a clean environment continues with increasing urgency, as the ravages of climate change become more and more apparent every day.



# The dip and the divide that made the fight against the coronavirus purposeless

**The divisive Bengal election campaign and the Kumbh Mela saw people in large numbers ignore Covid-19 protocols. They revealed much about the nation's misplaced priorities.**



India's premature declaration of victory against the coronavirus has proven to be counterproductive. The second wave of the pandemic has caught us unawares. The last one year of COVID-19 experience and learning has had no impact on our pandemic preparedness. Neither has our much celebrated "world's largest vaccination programme" been effective. The Prime Minister has nothing new to say in his address to the nation. The people are leaderless.

What was our leadership doing in these times of institutional collapse? The Prime Minister and home minister were preoccupied with West Bengal elections, flaunting the crowds as their achievement. People have been carefree and in large numbers attended the Maha Kumbh Mela (the ruling BJP now refers to Ardh Kumbhs also as Maha Kumbh). The BJP has been promoting the myth that faith in religion is supreme.

The disrespect of experts and medical sciences becomes a hallmark of society when religious events like Kumbh Mela are held without respecting Covid-19 protocols. Bollywood director Ram Gopal Varma remarked on these changing mindsets when he said that it took six weeks to vaccinate 17 lakh people in Mumbai, but 35 lakhs took a dip in Ganga in just one day and wondered if we care more about next birth than this one? We all know that coronavirus has exposed the existing weaknesses of our systems. The West Bengal election campaign

and Maha Kumbh Mela have become two striking symbols of what is wrong with us as a society. The coronavirus has conveyed in Bengal that we have become a once-in-five-years election-only democracy and in Haridwar, it highlighted how India has become a religion-driven polity. Elections and religion are two things that make us feel so euphoric that we are willing to ignore thousands choking to death. Modi is a champion of elections and his party is a champion of religion. But both can

do little when thousands gasp for breath as the pandemic rages. Our Prime Minister is desperately trying to win Bengal rather than govern the country. The BJP has promised free Covid vaccines for West Bengal as if Modi is an aspiring chief minister of the state rather than the PM of the whole country. He is resorting to a common tactic used by traders. First, you raise the price and then deceive people by offering concessions. He and his party are doing what they are good at - attack opponents, divide society

communally, run a technology-aided propaganda machinery spreading falsehood, advertise the PM at the expense of crores of rupees, keep on vacuously promising development to the poor and the middle-class, wean over leaders of the opposition parties before or after elections and so on. We now know all these as standard operating procedures. The elections are made into cheap entertainment games that people like to watch, rather than making people think about the present and future of the country.

West Bengal saw the worst communal violence ahead of Partition, but its politics never derailed on communal lines after that. In fact, in 1971 West Bengal gave refuge to close to a crore people who fled East Pakistan facing political persecution. The BJP, which talks of uniting the country, has successfully divided Bengali society on religious and caste lines as never before. The founders of our democracy would have never imagined that our elections will become a tool to choke democracy and alienate the last person on the social ladder. But we live in times when elections have become as sacred as Maha Kumbh. Who will dare to touch them? The Maha Kumbh of Bengal elections continues. The coronavirus becomes

inconsequential for right-wing partisans. Then there is the Election Commission, which decided to hold the state election in eight phases spread over a month.

The narrative of modern India has been to shape a "forward-looking" society by breaking free of regressive traps. This journey has been a struggle for creating a progressive India against all odds. But a religious party comes to power by promising development and things start to slide backwards. Now we are made to believe that modernity and religion can combine together to create a political force for economic development. It does not matter if the CM of Uttar Pradesh wears a saffron gown, he can still be a modern ambassador of development. But when such leadership happens to rule with ideas that are rooted in outdated religious beliefs, the state starts to resemble a monastery.

Something is terribly wrong when images of thousands in water and lakhs without masks in the midst of a pandemic stop scaring us as a society. All this crafted propaganda can't get us hospitals, beds, medicines and ventilators. Superficial power aspirants have been humbled by the collapse of the systems. India waits for a fresh leadership.

## Covid-19 exposed populist leaders like Modi and Trump

Among its deadly properties, Covid-19 appears perfectly engineered to destroy the houses of sand built by populist leaders. Back in January, Narendra Modi poured scorn on experts and scientists who warned his country faced a "tsunami" of infection. Now the Indian Prime Minister is being harshly criticized for premature triumphalism amid a terrible surge that has people dying in the streets.

Modi is only the latest populist crusader to come unstuck. Former US President Donald Trump's denialism appears to have cost tens of thousands of lives. Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro fueled a disaster by rejecting Covid-19 countermeasures in favor of crank cures. UK PM Boris Johnson paid



a heavy personal and political price for ignoring the threat of the pandemic early on, though he has since become more cautious. Covid-19 doesn't have political preferences. Even some leaders praised for their scientific approach have seen their standing consumed by the virus. German Chancellor Angela Merkel's final

months in power for instance are being tarnished by a wave of infections worsened by Europe's slow vaccine rollout. But the pandemic is guaranteed to expose leaders who undermine truth, create alternative realities, ostracize experts and scientists and refuse to take precautions to keep the

public safe. Earlier this month for instance, Modi boasted of huge rally crowds ahead of elections in West Bengal. His hubris in the face of the virus recalls Trump's refusal to give up rallies last year at which he boasted the virus was being driven out -- even as his crowds contributed to a building wave of lethal infections that winter.

Having their negligence exposed may not deter the truth-twisting populist leaders inspired by Trump (who is already spoiling for a comeback). Populism will find fertile soil in the economic and social detritus left in the pandemic's wake. But when leaders prioritize their political image over public health, millions of people suffer.



# Why e-commerce firms should be allowed to deliver 'non-essential goods'



(News Agencies)-Last year, when most businesses were hit by the arrival of Covid-19 and the national lockdown, one sector that beat the trend was e-commerce. Unicommerce, an online-retail focused technology platform, says that in June 2020, just weeks after the national lockdown was announced, e-commerce sales grew 17 per cent in India. This trend was seen across the world. Experts say e-commerce growth soared from about 4.5 per cent to nearly 20

per cent during the lockdowns, with many consumers buying all their essential items-food, medicines, household supplies and others-online. Moreover, as the Indian economy opened up post June, the resumption of sales of non-essential goods coincided with huge pent-up demand, allowing e-commerce firms to continue to record major growth.

But as Covid 2.0 sweeps across India, there are two changes in the business environment that worry e-commerce firms, especially

those dealing in consumer products. One is the dip in buyer sentiment as infections rise-a year and more into the pandemic, after months of job losses, salary cuts, business disruptions and rising medical costs, it is only too obvious why a new surge in Covid cases might lead to buyers postponing major purchases. Another is the new movement restrictions. For example, the Maharashtra state government has imposed broad movement bans to slow the spread of Covid-19, such as only permitting the sale of 'essential goods' during the new lockdown (until May 1). This has hit the e-commerce sector hard on the sales and logistics fronts, impacting both revenue models and supply chains. Recent media reports say that the DPIIT (Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade) has requested a government-appointed panel to step in and resolve these issues. Last year,

an 'empowered group' was set up to streamline similar issues in logistics and supply chains that had cropped up during the pandemic.

This year, states have been given the freedom to decide on their own containment policies to restrict the spread of the coronavirus. In Maharashtra, the state government is watching how effective the new curbs are in controlling new cases, following which it will take a decision on whether or not it should ease movement norms-such as permitting the delivery of non-essential goods. Meanwhile, the Delhi government, as part of its week-long curfew, has also banned the delivery of non-essential goods through e-commerce from the evening of April 19 to the morning of April 26. And though state governments might want to open up e-commerce deliveries for non-essential goods, they are likely

to face resistance from brick-and-mortar shopkeepers who will then also demand the right to resume business. However, there are different safety consequences-e-commerce delivery puts the responsibility for managing medical risk on distribution centres and agents, while opening public markets puts the responsibility the general public. Many consider the first to be a safer option. Another problem is the category of goods that are classified as 'essential'. While certain products-food, groceries, medical products-are immediately understandable as necessary, others are not, no matter how crucial they may prove in everyday life. Take for instance, mobile phones or computers. At a time when millions of people are restricted to working from the confines their homes, being able to replace, repair or purchase computers and phones becomes an essential need.

## Address by Prime Minister at the Leaders' Summit on Climate 2021

Namaskar!

I would like to thank President Biden for taking this initiative. Humanity is battling a global pandemic right now. And, this event is a timely reminder that the grave threat of Climate Change has not disappeared. In fact, Climate Change is a lived reality for millions around the world. Their lives and livelihoods are already facing its adverse consequences.

Friends,  
For humanity to combat Climate Change, concrete action is

needed. We need such action at a high speed, on a large scale, and with a global scope. We, in India, are doing our part. Our ambitious renewable energy target of 450 Gigawatts by 2030 shows our commitment.

Despite our development challenges, we have taken many bold steps on clean energy, energy efficiency, afforestation and bio-diversity. That is why we are among the few countries whose NDCs are 2-degree-Celsius compatible.

We have also encouraged global

initiatives like International Solar Alliance, LeadIT, and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure.

Friends,  
As a climate-responsible developing country, India welcomes partners to create templates of sustainable development in India. These can also help other developing countries, who need affordable access to green finance and clean technologies.

That is why, President Biden and I are launching the "India-US

climate and clean energy Agenda 2030 partnership". Together, we will help mobilise investments, demonstrate clean technologies, and enable green collaborations.

Friends,  
Today, as we discuss global climate action, I want to leave one thought with you. India's per capita carbon footprint is 60% lower than the global average. It is because our lifestyle is still rooted in sustainable traditional practices.

So today, I want to emphasise

the importance of lifestyle change in climate action. Sustainable lifestyles and a guiding philosophy of "Back to Basics" must be an important pillar of our economic strategy for the post-Covid era.

Friends,  
I recall the words of the great Indian monk Swami Vivekananda. He called on us to "Arise, awake and stop not until the goal is reached". Let us make this a Decade of Action against climate change.

## Apple is the only company worth \$2 trillion. That's probably about to change

(News Agencies)-Apple is the only American company to reach a \$2 trillion market value. But it could soon have a lot more company in that elite club. Microsoft (MSFT) is worth just under \$2 trillion. Amazon (AMZN) has a market capitalization of \$1.7 trillion, and Google owner Alphabet (GOOGL) is worth about \$1.5 trillion. Tech stocks have come roaring back in recent weeks, helping to push these Nasdaq stalwarts and others to near record highs. In fact, tech's Magnificent Seven - the five FAANG stocks of Facebook (FB), Amazon, Apple (AAPL), Netflix (NFLX) and Alphabet, plus Microsoft and Tesla (TSLA) - are

now collectively worth about \$9.3 trillion. That's a quarter of the S&P 500's total market value of \$37.5 trillion. FAANG stocks brush off Netflix woes- Despite disappointing subscriber growth for Netflix when it reported earnings last week, experts think the tech rebound is likely to continue. That's because big tech companies are expected to post solid earnings for the foreseeable future. Tesla will release its latest results Monday after the market close, while Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Alphabet and Microsoft report later this week. The earnings expectations for the S&P 500 are through the roof for this year as investors expect this

great recovery, and tech is a big part of that," said Daniel Morgan, senior portfolio manager with Synovus Trust Company. "These companies are just so dominant." Morgan said that as long as the top tech firms keep generating strong earnings growth, then all of them, including the older, more mature companies in the group like Apple and Microsoft, should remain Wall Street darlings. Morgan pointed out that while some of the tech leaders of the 1990s, such as IBM (IBM), Oracle (ORCL) and Cisco (CSCO), eventually began to post slower levels of earnings and sales growth, that doesn't appear to be happening with the current



Nasdaq leaders. JPMorgan analyst Doug Anmuth expects Amazon to hit the \$2 trillion mark in due course. Anmuth said in a recent report that Amazon is his

"favorite" of the FAANG stocks heading into first quarter earnings and that the stock could climb another 30% in the next 12 months.





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# Amarinder Singh challenges Navjot Singh Sidhu to contest polls against him from Patiala

(News Agencies)-Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Tuesday challenged his party colleague and Amritsar MLA Navjot Singh Sidhu to contest polls against him from Patiala.

The longstanding rivalry between the two Congress leaders has been aggravated by Sidhu's fresh charge against the chief minister over the Punjab and Haryana High Court's decision to quash a probe report into the 2015 police firing in Faridkot's Kotkapura. Cops had opened fire at people protesting against the desecration of the Guru Granth Sahib.

The Amritsar MLA has accused the CM of evading responsibility in the case. In a series of tweets on Monday, Navjot Singh Sidhu alleged that the Punjab government did not have the intent to punish the guilty.

"We have a choice, either to accept Hon. High Court's Judgement or appeal against it in the Hon. Supreme Court ... But the problem all along has been the same - INTENT & DELIBERATE DELAY, It is not about forming another SIT but what have the SITs

achieved in the past 6 years ? (sic)," Navjot Singh Sidhu said. Irked by his volley of charges, Punjab CM Amarinder Singh on Tuesday challenged Navjot Singh Sidhu to contest polls against him.

"Try and contest polls against me from Patiala. Your deposit will be seized. You will face the same fate as General JJ Singh," Amarinder Singh said, referring to the former army chief who contested the 2017 assembly polls against him on a Shiromani Akali Dal ticket and lost. The Punjab CM's statement comes at a time when Navjot Singh Sidhu has been engaged in various political activities in Patiala.

In response to Amarinder Singh's challenge, Navjot Singh Sidhu said, "Please do not make random statements. Tell us why there has been no justice for the insult to Guru Sahab."

**PUNJAB GOVT SETS UP FRESH SIT TO PROBE KOTKAPURA FIRING**

The Punjab Council of Ministers on Monday decided to set up a new SIT to probe the alleged firing

by police on people protesting against the desecration of religious scriptures in Kotkapura in 2015.

The ruling Congress has been facing pressure over the delay in taking the cases to their logical conclusion. Two people were killed at Behbal Kalan in alleged police firing.

The high court on April 9 had quashed a report by the Punjab Police SIT into Kotkapura police firing. The HC also directed the state government to set up a new SIT to investigate the case without the then IPS officer Kunwar Vijay Pratap Singh, who resigned soon after the court order. In his judgment, Justice Rajbir Sehrawat had ruled that the investigation into the 2015 Kotkapura police firing incident conducted by IPS officer Kunwar Vijay Pratap Singh was not free from "blemish" and his "personal malice and malafide functioning by totally usurping the powers of SIT was demonstrated on record". The judge also said that the investigation suffered from "malice, irrationality and



absurdity" and added that the former IG was a person who indulged in "misuse of his official position to further his designs". The court had further ruled that Kunwar Vijay had gone to the extent of "manufacturing the statements of witnesses to suit his designs".

**STRAIN IN AMARINDER SINGH-NAVJOT SINGH SIDHU TIES**

The tensions between Amarinder Singh and Sidhu came out in the open in May 2019 when the CM blamed the former cricketer for the "inept handling" of the Local Government Department, claiming it had resulted in the "poor performance" of the Congress in urban areas in the

Lok Sabha polls.

Sidhu was later stripped of this portfolio in a cabinet reshuffle, after which he resigned.

However, according to news agency PTI, the Congress leadership has been trying to re-induct Sidhu into the Amarinder Singh cabinet. Harish Rawat, who is in-charge of Punjab affairs at the All-India Congress Committee (AICC), has been pushing for an important position for Sidhu. Last month, Sidhu also met Congress president Sonia Gandhi in Delhi. A month ago, Amarinder Singh and Navjot Singh Sidhu also met over tea, to discuss the possible re-induction of the Amritsar MLA into the state cabinet.

## NYC: STOP THE SPREAD OF CORONAVIRUS!

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



### PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS

- Wash your hands with soap and water often.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or sleeve when sneezing or coughing.
- 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.



### REDUCE OVERCROWDING

- Consider telecommuting.
- Stagger work hours, starting earlier or later.
- Walk or bike to work, if possible.
- If the train is too packed, wait for the next one.

Text COVID to 692-692 for real-time updates or visit [nyc.gov/coronavirus](https://nyc.gov/coronavirus).

Call 311 to report harassment or discrimination.

\*Messages and data rates may apply. Check your wireless provider plan for details.

**NYC**  
Health

Bill de Blasio  
Mayor  
Oxiris Barbot, MD  
Commissioner



# Pakistanis express solidarity with India over its COVID crisis



days, India recorded the world's highest number of new coronavirus cases, with over 349,000 cases reported on Sunday. India has confirmed more than 16.9 million cases to date and more than 192,000 deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University.

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan expressed "solidarity with the people of India" in a tweet on Saturday.

"Our prayers for a speedy recovery go to all those suffering from the pandemic in our neighbourhood and the world. We must fight this global challenge

confronting humanity together," he said.

Former Pakistani cricket star Shoaib Akhtar said his prayers were with the Indian people and said "we are in it together." He added that he hoped the Indian government was "able to handle the crisis better". Indian climate and environmental activist Licypriya Kangujam told Al Jazeera: "I really appreciate the kind gesture of the Pakistani people for standing with the people of India during this difficult time for the country.

"We may be divided by the border but we breathe the same air."

According to Bilal Lakhani, a Pakistani writer and columnist at The Express Tribune, the hashtag #PakistanstandswithIndia "represents the best of Pakistan and ... the triumph of our collective humanity".

"Pakistan and India, often considered arch-enemies at the state level, have genuine people-to-people relationships and a shared culture that goes back centuries," Lakhani told Al Jazeera. Pakistan offers supplies

The Pakistani ministry of foreign affairs offered to send medical aid to India on Saturday.

(News Agencies)-The hashtag #PakistanstandswithIndia has been trending on social media in Pakistan over the last two days as Pakistanis expressed solidarity with their Indian neighbours currently in the midst of a devastating COVID-19 surge. Celebrities, activists, government officials and citizens across Pakistan posted messages wishing Indians well and offering prayers.

The daily number of infections and death toll in the world's second-most populous nation reached new highs in recent days as the Indian government faced oxygen

and bed shortages across the country including in the capital New Delhi. For three consecutive

## Pakistan deploys army in 16 cities to enforce COVID-19 precautions

(News Agencies)-Pakistani troops have been deployed in 16 major cities to assist civilian authorities in enforcing measures meant to curb the spread of the coronavirus, including the wearing of masks in public and the closing of non-essential businesses after 6pm.

"Starting at 6am this morning, troops have been sent to aid the

civilian administration in each district," military spokesperson Major General Babar Iftikhar said on Monday. The announcement came as the country recorded its highest daily death toll in recent days since the start of the pandemic, and officials said the health care system was nearing its breaking point. Iftikhar said 570 people were on ventilators in the country and 4,300 in critical

condition. In some cities more than 90% of ventilators were occupied, and industrial production of oxygen could soon be diverted for health purposes. "Ensuring adherence to precautionary measures (for the pandemic) and maintaining law and order will still be the responsibility of civilian authorities," Iftikhar said. "The Pakistani army will aid other law

enforcement agencies as emergency responders to stop the spread of the virus." Pakistan has recorded 17,187 deaths and 800,452 cases so far, and is in the midst of a third wave. The federal government has opted not to impose nationwide lockdowns seen in some other countries, saying such measures could endanger the lives of many who rely on daily wages.

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







# WHEN YOU PROTECT YOURSELF, YOU PROTECT ME.

I know you depend on me, just as I depend on you to keep me safe—by wearing a mask, keeping 6 feet apart, and getting vaccinated when it's your turn. With new forms of the virus that may spread more easily, it is that much more important for all of us to continue doing our part to slow the spread of COVID. As I wait my turn for the vaccine, I can still make sure everyone gets what they need as safely as possible.

Learn more at [cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus)



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Khazane Ki Talaash (In Search of Treasure). I discuss these books with my friends," he says.

Chirag visits five towns each week accompanied by his handler and Ismail Yaqoob, a volunteer and teacher. One day, when Yaqoob went to work in his school instead of the village, he got a call on his mobile from one of the children.

"He asked me why I had not come along with the camel. They were waiting for books," says Yaqoob. "Children are so interested in reading and in their studies, but sadly the state does not invest in education."

Jawad Ali, 10, who has ambitions to be a teacher, has also started borrowing books from the camel library. He says: "I am learning new things from these books and reading stories, understanding photo stories. But I want to read more books. The books are written in my native language - Balochi - but in English and Urdu as well. We want more books - and libraries and schools, too."

[illegible]

# ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਉਡਾਰੀ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਖਰਚੇ 27000 ਕਰੋੜ

ਏਸ਼ੀਆ: ਸਭਰ ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਇਸ ਸਾਲ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਦੇ ਭੇਜੇ ਸਮੇਂ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ੀਆਂ ਵਿੱਚੋਂ ਪਹਿਲੇ ਸਥਾਨ 'ਤੇ ਪੰਜਾਬੀਆਂ ਨੇ ਆਪਣੇ ਆਪ ਨੂੰ ਦਿਖਾਇਆ ਹੈ। ਇਸ ਸਾਲ 27,000 ਕਰੋੜ ਰੁਪਏ ਖਰਚੇ ਨਾਲ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ੀ ਯਾਤਰਾਵਾਂ ਲਈ ਨਿਰੀ ਨੀਤੀ ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਆਇਆ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਭਾਵਿਤਾ ਹੈ।

ਇਸ ਸਾਲ 1.25 ਲੱਖ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ੀਆਂ ਭੇਜੇ ਜਾਣਗੇ ਜਾਂਗੇ। 2.5 ਦਸ਼ਕ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ੀਆਂ ਭੇਜੇ ਜਾਣਗੇ। ਇਸ ਸਾਲ 27,000 ਕਰੋੜ ਰੁਪਏ ਖਰਚੇ ਨਾਲ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ੀ ਯਾਤਰਾਵਾਂ ਲਈ ਨਿਰੀ ਨੀਤੀ ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਆਇਆ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਭਾਵਿਤਾ ਹੈ।

ਇਸ ਦੇ ਬਾਅਦ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ੀ ਯਾਤਰਾਵਾਂ ਲਈ ਨਿਰੀ ਨੀਤੀ ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਆਇਆ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਭਾਵਿਤਾ ਹੈ। ਇਸ ਸਾਲ 27,000 ਕਰੋੜ ਰੁਪਏ ਖਰਚੇ ਨਾਲ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ੀ ਯਾਤਰਾਵਾਂ ਲਈ ਨਿਰੀ ਨੀਤੀ ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਆਇਆ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਭਾਵਿਤਾ ਹੈ।



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## ਸੱਜਣ ਗੁਮਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਸਿੱਧਾਂ ਕੋਲੋਂ ਬਚਾ-ਬਚਾ ਕੇ ਰੱਖੇਗਾ ਜੇਲ੍ਹ ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਾਸਨ

ਨਵੀਂ ਦਿੱਲੀ: ਸਿੱਖ ਨਾਜ਼ਕਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਸੋਧੀ ਗੁਮਾਰੀ ਨਿਯਮਿਤ ਵਾਲੇ ਯਾਤਰਾਵਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਸੁਰੱਖਿਅਤ ਰੱਖਣ ਲਈ ਸੱਜਣ ਗੁਮਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਸਿੱਧਾਂ ਕੋਲੋਂ ਬਚਾ-ਬਚਾ ਕੇ ਰੱਖੇਗਾ ਜੇਲ੍ਹ ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਾਸਨ।

ਸੱਜਣ ਗੁਮਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਸਿੱਧਾਂ ਕੋਲੋਂ ਬਚਾ-ਬਚਾ ਕੇ ਰੱਖੇਗਾ ਜੇਲ੍ਹ ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਾਸਨ। ਇਸ ਸਾਲ 27,000 ਕਰੋੜ ਰੁਪਏ ਖਰਚੇ ਨਾਲ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ੀ ਯਾਤਰਾਵਾਂ ਲਈ ਨਿਰੀ ਨੀਤੀ ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਆਇਆ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਭਾਵਿਤਾ ਹੈ।

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

ਵਿਸ਼ਵ: ਅਮਰੀਕੀ ਫੌਜ ਨੇ ਬੰਬ ਦਾ ਟਵੀਟ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਮੰਗੀ ਮੁਆਫੀ। ਇਸ ਸਾਲ 27,000 ਕਰੋੜ ਰੁਪਏ ਖਰਚੇ ਨਾਲ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ੀ ਯਾਤਰਾਵਾਂ ਲਈ ਨਿਰੀ ਨੀਤੀ ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਆਇਆ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਭਾਵਿਤਾ ਹੈ।

## ਭਾਰਤ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨੇ ਖਾਨਿਸ਼ਾਹਨ ਲਿਬਰਲ ਫੌਜ ਤੋਂ ਪਾਕਿਸਤਾਨੀ ਲਾਹੀ

ਨਵੀਂ ਦਿੱਲੀ: ਭਾਰਤ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨੇ ਖਾਨਿਸ਼ਾਹਨ ਲਿਬਰਲ ਫੌਜ ਤੋਂ ਪਾਕਿਸਤਾਨੀ ਲਾਹੀ। ਇਸ ਸਾਲ 27,000 ਕਰੋੜ ਰੁਪਏ ਖਰਚੇ ਨਾਲ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ੀ ਯਾਤਰਾਵਾਂ ਲਈ ਨਿਰੀ ਨੀਤੀ ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਆਇਆ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਭਾਵਿਤਾ ਹੈ।

## ਭਾਰਤ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨੇ ਖਾਨਿਸ਼ਾਹਨ ਲਿਬਰਲ ਫੌਜ ਤੋਂ ਪਾਕਿਸਤਾਨੀ ਲਾਹੀ

ਨਵੀਂ ਦਿੱਲੀ: ਭਾਰਤ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨੇ ਖਾਨਿਸ਼ਾਹਨ ਲਿਬਰਲ ਫੌਜ ਤੋਂ ਪਾਕਿਸਤਾਨੀ ਲਾਹੀ। ਇਸ ਸਾਲ 27,000 ਕਰੋੜ ਰੁਪਏ ਖਰਚੇ ਨਾਲ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ੀ ਯਾਤਰਾਵਾਂ ਲਈ ਨਿਰੀ ਨੀਤੀ ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਆਇਆ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਭਾਵਿਤਾ ਹੈ।

### Property & Casualty

(See Full Page Advt. on Page 31)

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## Pakistan: Muslim man poses as Sikh to give hateful statements against France, European Sikh leaders angry

(News Agencies)- Pakistan's anti-France propaganda has reached a new low. Recently on social media, a Muslim man disguised as a Sikh gave calls to the Sikh community to join hands with the Islamists and behead the French who dared to publish the "blasphemous" caricature against Prophet Mohammed.

As per a Times of India report, in a recently uploaded video message on social media, a blue turban-clad person sporting a beard introduced himself as 'sardar ji' while greeting the audience with both Asalamu Alaykum and Sat Sri Akaal.

The fake 'Sardar ji' even incited Sikhs to behave like 'Hitler' against the French people and support Islamists jihadis in their stand against France. In this video, the man invited the Sikh to join hands with Islamist jihadis to teach French a lesson. Narrating a bizarre incident of his visit to

malls where he saw labels of 'boycott' attached to French products, he instigated the viewers by saying, "This is not the way to boycott, we should throw their products on the streets."

He then urged the communities to adopt Hitler's modus operandi



against the French people for blasphemy. To further provoke, he gave the slogan of "Gustakh e rasool ki eik hi saza, sar tan say juda" which loosely translates to 'the only punishment for blasphemy of the Prophet is beheading.' Intelligence sources have revealed that the man who goes by the name Qasam Dogar is on the payrolls of Pakistan's pro-Khalistani leader Gopal Singh

Chawla.

Furthering Qasam Dogar's call, Satwant Singh the president of PSGPC told the Times Of India over a phone call from Lahore that he condemns anyone who tries to insult the Prophet and also revealed that Qasam was not a Sikh. As per the TOI report, a source has informed, "There is a possibility of ISI creating likes of Chawla to further its anti-India propaganda, it was even rumoured that the late president of Pakistan Sikh Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee Sham Singh was a Muslim." Flabbergasted by the Muslim man's statement against the French people in disguise of a Sikh man, the European Sikh leadership approached Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan and urged him to take strict action against such hate mongers who cause deliberate damage to the economic and religious interest of the Sikh community.

## Indian 'double-mutant' Covid variant not reported in Pakistan

(News Agencies)-The National Health Ministry has confirmed on Monday that the Pakistan has not yet reported a new "Indian strain" of the coronavirus - a "double-mutant" variant - considered to be responsible for a recent spike in infections in India.

Syed Sajid Shah, a spokesperson for the ministry, told reporters on Monday that the country is still "safe" from the Indian variant. Cases of the UK variant of the virus, however, are being reported, he added.

Pakistan has already banned land and air travel from India, citing concerns about the spread of the latest coronavirus variant. The two South Asian nuclear rivals have been grappling with a devastating Covid-19 wave, while the situation in Pakistan has been considered relatively better compared to India, where hospitals are reportedly running out of beds and oxygen supplies. Pakistan has also offered Covid-19 support to India in a gesture

of solidarity.

"As a gesture of solidarity with the people of India in the wake of the current wave of Covid-19, Pakistan has offered to provide relief support to India including ventilators, Bi PAP, digital X-ray machines, PPEs (Personal protective equipments) and related items," a statement from the Foreign Office said. On Monday, India set a new record globally by registering over 350,000 cases in a single day.

A day earlier, New Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced that the lockdown will be extended for another week. He said the current oxygen demand is 700 tons, but they are only receiving 330 to 335 tons per day.

Pakistan reported nearly 5,000 infections and 70 deaths from Covid-19 on Monday, while health authorities warned of a situation similar to that in India if the cases continued to rise at the current rate in the coming weeks.

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# BLM co-founder's group spent \$26,000 at luxury Malibu resort



(News Agencies)-A Los Angeles-based jail reform organization chaired by Black Lives Matter co-founder Patrisse Cullors spent \$26,000 on "meetings" at a luxury resort in Malibu, California, in 2019, records show.

Reform LA Jails spent \$10,179 on items listed as

"meetings and appearances" at the Calamigos Guest Ranch and Beach Club in Malibu and an additional \$15,593 at the resort's Malibu Conference Center between July and September of 2019, according to campaign finance records.

Rooms at the resort, which sits on a 250-acre ranch in

Malibu wine country along the coastline, start at around \$600 per night.

A consulting firm owned by Asha Bandele made the payments on behalf of Reform LA Jails, according to the records, which were first reported by the Daily Caller News Foundation. Bandele co-authored Cullors' biography titled, "When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir." California's Fair Political Practices Commission states that campaign funds must be used for "political, legislative or governmental" purposes. Details of the \$26,000 spent on "meetings and appearances" at the resort and conference center remain unclear.

Organizers created Reform LA Jails to support a 2020 LA ballot initiative called Measure R to give the L.A. County Sheriff's civilian oversight commission subpoena power "to effectively and independently investigate misconduct and to develop a plan to reduce jail populations and to redirect the cost savings into alternatives to incarceration," according to the group's website.

LA County jails in 2019 recorded an average of 300 inmates processed every day, totaling about 109,500 inmates per year. Voters in 2020 voted overwhelmingly in favor of Measure R, which Reform LA Jails argues will help end mass incarceration by reducing the county's prison population.

"Mass incarceration is the civil rights issue of our time," the organization's website states. "Our criminal justice system profoundly discriminates against people of color and unfairly punishes the poor and low-income members of our communities."

Cullors has described herself and BLM co-founder Alicia Garza as "trained Marxists."

The new report comes after it was revealed that Cullors is moving another nonprofit, Dignity and Power Now, to operate in other states as it avoids filing required financial documents in California, according to state records. Dignity and Power Now is currently delinquent in California, where it is incorporated.

## Real ID deadline extended to 2023 due to ongoing pandemic: DHS



(News Agencies)-U.S. travelers won't need a Real ID for another two years.

On Tuesday, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas announced that the agency has extended the Real ID

enforcement date because of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Now, the DHS will begin requiring travelers to have Real IDs for domestic air travel on May 3, 2023, according to an announcement. Previously, the enforcement date was Oct. 1,

2021.

According to the announcement, many states' DMVs are operating at limited capacity because of the coronavirus pandemic, making it difficult for states to issue Real IDs and driver's licenses. "Protecting the health, safety, and security of our communities is our top priority," Mayorkas said in a statement. "As our country continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, extending the Real ID full enforcement deadline will give states needed time to reopen their driver's licensing operations and ensure their residents can obtain a Real ID-compliant license or identification card."

Congress passed the Real ID Act in 2005 as a way to tighten security measures for obtaining an identification card or license after 9/11, according to the DHS website. The act creates "minimum security standards for state-issued driver's licenses and identification cards," the website says.

Real IDs have a gold star in the top right corner and after May 3, 2023, adults who are traveling by plane domestically will be required to show a Real ID in order to go through security. Residents of all 50 states -- as well as Washington, D.C., and four U.S. territories -- are issuing Real IDs, the DHS said in its announcement.

However, because of the coronavirus pandemic, many states are pushing back deadlines requiring residents to renew their expired licenses. Because of those measures, Real ID licenses and identification cards make up only 43% of state-issued IDs, so the extended May 2023 deadline will help make up for that.

"DHS and various states also need time to implement requirements mandated by the Real ID Modernization Act, including changes that will streamline processing by allowing the electronic submission of certain documents," the agency said in its announcement.

## Alaska Airlines bans state lawmaker for her 'continued refusal to comply' with mask mandate

(News Agencies)-An Alaska state lawmaker who had called flight attendants "mask bullies" and clashed with airline employees on video over mask rules is now banned from Alaska Airlines for her "continued refusal to comply" with the mask policy, the airline said in a statement.

The restriction on Republican state Sen. Lora Reinbold will make her job more difficult: Alaska Airlines operates the only regular flights between her home north of Anchorage and the state capital in Juneau.

The ban meant Reinbold on Sunday had to drive more than 14 hours, including a portion of

the trip through Canada, and take a ferry to reach Juneau on Monday, where a bill she opposes that would extend Gov. Mike Dunleavy's emergency powers during the coronavirus pandemic is scheduled for action.

She wrote on Facebook Sunday night that she had gone to "new heights" to serve Alaska. "I am keenly aware of the monopoly in air transport to Juneau that needs reviewed! ... Nothing could get in the way to be in the Capitol to fight to executive branch infringement on the legislature & defending your rights by trying to stop HB76 which is on the Senate floor

tomorrow!" Reinbold wrote.

Alaska Airlines suspended Reinbold from flying after "her continued refusal to comply" with the mask policy, the company said in a statement Sunday.

The airline told CNN in a statement that they have notified Reinbold of their decision.

"This suspension is effective immediately pending further review," Alaska Airlines spokesman Tim Thompson said in the statement. "Federal law requires all guests to wear a mask over their nose and mouth at all times during travel, including throughout the flight,



during boarding and deplaning, and while traveling through an airport."

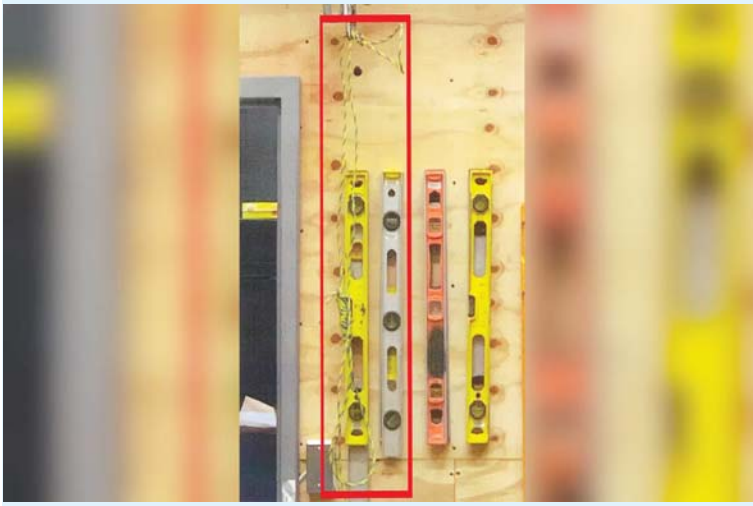
Reinbold said she was "reasonable with all Alaska Airlines employees" in a statement posted to her

Facebook page, and felt the airline should have kept the issue confidential until further review.

"I inquired about mask exemption with uptight employees at the counter," Reinbold said in the statement.



## A Black electrician found a noose hanging in his workspace in New York's Long Island, attorney says



(News Agencies)-Police in the New York suburb of Long Island are investigating a report of a noose found hanging in a storeroom at a local business, a Suffolk County police

spokesperson confirmed to CNN on Monday.

Kyrin Taylor, a 23-year-old electrician who had been working as an apprentice since December at Cooper Power & Lighting Corp., came to work on April 20 to find a noose hanging in his workspace in Farmingdale, his lawyer told CNN on Monday.

"Seeing this took my breath away and I really did not know what to do or what to think," said Taylor, who is Black, in a statement.

His lawyer, Frederick Brewington, said his client called the police because he feared for

his safety. He also contacted his union, IBEW Local 25, to inform it of the situation. Taylor and Brewington both claim that Taylor's boss scolded Taylor for calling the police. The boss has not returned CNN's email and phone requests for comment. Taylor also said in his statement that this was not the first time he had been the target of harassment by his co-workers. "I am the only African-American working for [Cooper Power and Lighting] and this was not the first time I was treated with disrespect," he said. "I have been targeted by this act of pure hate

and I just don't know what to think. When will people stop thinking it is alright to terrorize Black people?" Brewington said that the union helped Taylor find a new place to work and Taylor's first day at his new employer was Monday.

The attorney said his client remains heavily impacted by what happened and has sought out counseling to deal with the trauma of the incident.

"He's highly upset," Brewington said of Taylor. "He said to me that besides being disgusted, I am afraid. And I said, 'You can't live in fear, but being afraid is not unhealthy.'

## NYPD makes arrest in assault of 61-year-old Asian man

(News Agencies)-A man has been arrested in connection with the case of a 61-year-old Asian man who was attacked last week in New York, police said. Yao Pan Ma was collecting cans when he was approached from behind on an East Harlem corner Friday, struck in the back and, after he fell to the ground, kicked in the head multiple times, according to police and a verified GoFundMe account.

Jarrold Powell, 49, was detained early Tuesday morning in connection with the attack and the NYPD recommends that he faces attempted murder, and two hate crime assault charges. Police had initially recommended Powell be charged with two

counts of felony assault. It's unclear whether Powell has retained an attorney.

A spokesperson for the Manhattan District Attorney's office said it could not confirm any charges in the case, pending an arraignment.

City leaders, activists and Ma's family members gathered Tuesday to condemn the attack and urge the DA's office to prosecute Powell "to the fullest extent of the law."

"This is the act of one depraved individual," said Karlin Chan, a community activist speaking on behalf of the victim's wife, Baozhen Chen.

Jennifer Wu, an attorney representing Ma's family, said her

firm was confident law enforcement would conduct a "thorough review" of the incident.

"We are heartbroken by the attack against Mr. Ma, and the surge of attacks against the Asian-American community," Wu said.

Last week's incident, which comes amid a surge in hate crimes against Asian Americans in New York City and across the nation, was captured on surveillance video. The NYPD has deployed a number of undercover Asian officers on the streets in an attempt to stem the violence. Earlier this month, one of the officers arrested a woman yelling

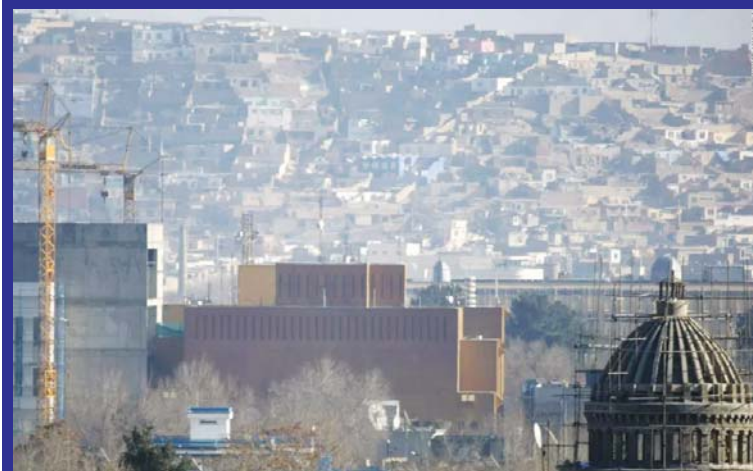


anti-Asian slurs at a Chinatown nail salon, according to city officials. The NYPD has said its investigating more than 60 possible hate crimes against Asian Americans this year, and 42 incidents through the end of March have been

classified as hate crimes.

Last week, the Senate voted 92-6 to advance a bill that would assign a Justice Department official to expedite reviews of potential Covid-19-related hate crimes and establish an online database.

## US orders drawdown of government employees from Afghanistan embassy



(News Agencies)-The State Department on Tuesday ordered the departure of government employees from the US Embassy in Kabul "whose functions can be performed elsewhere" as the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan gets underway.

US Special Representative for

Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad told senators in a Tuesday hearing that some diplomats who "are not necessary to be there" and "can do their job from elsewhere" will be withdrawn from the embassy. "It will not affect operation or the capabilities of the embassy. We are very much committed to that,"

Khalilzad told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

A State Department spokesman told CNN that "by minimizing the number of employees in Afghanistan whose functions can be performed elsewhere, personnel who are urgently needed to address issues related to the drawdown of US forces and to continue the vital work we are doing in support of Afghanistan and its people will be able to remain in place."

President Joe Biden announced earlier this month that the United States would begin to withdraw all remaining forces from Afghanistan by May 1, bringing an end to nearly two decades of military involvement in the country.

The State Department spokesperson said the ordered

departure affects "a relatively small number of employees," noting, "we do not anticipate any changes to our operations and capabilities resulting from this action."

When asked how the US would continue diplomatic efforts in Afghanistan without the protection of US and NATO forces, Khalilzad said the Biden administration will "take the necessary measures to protect that embassy." Sen. Robert Menendez, the New Jersey Democrat who chairs the Foreign Relations Committee, asked whether the number of diplomats was being reduced because of violence in Kabul. Khalilzad said that such a decision on staffing by the chief of mission would take into account the chief's needs "and the overall circumstances in

the country." Pressed by Menendez if the increased violence in Kabul would be one of those factors taken into account, Khalilzad admitted, "That must have been one of them." The State Department said it does not discuss personnel numbers or operational details for security reasons. "The Ordered Departure at the US Embassy in Kabul ensures that American diplomacy and support for Afghanistan will be sustainable, robust, and effective," they said. "This includes our active support of the Afghan peace process and our continued diplomatic, economic, and humanitarian support of the future the Afghan people want, including the gains made by Afghan women."



# Is Pakistan's Leadership Turning It Into A Pariah?

It has recently launched a DHA in Multan. There are reports in the media that it has chopped hundreds of thousands of mango trees in Multan to pave way for the housing colony. It has denied such reports. But the fact can't be denied that the country that was once exporting wheat now imports it - and that too from India, its eternal enemy!

Yesterday, the army chopped the institutions - unconstitutionally. The judiciary was its most favourite target. Today, the democratically elected governments are doing the same but constitutionally. The best example is removal of Dr Tariq Banuri. He was the Chairman of Higher Education Commission (HEC) that regulates all the universities - private or government - in Pakistan.

The tenure of HEC Chairman is four years. He/she can't be fired without strong reasons/procedures. The government of Pakistan Tehrik Insaf (PTI) got rid of him on March 26 - through an overnight coup - a presidential ordinance. There was no written explanation. The ordinance is an evidence of mala fide intentions. Days later, it was amended, and the tenure of HEC Chairman was reduced to two years. The HEC was



deprived of its autonomous status. It has been put under the Ministry of Education. The HEC Chairman enjoyed the status of a federal minister. Now, he will be reporting to the education minister who could be an absolute illiterate, semi-literate, or just a degree holder from a religious seminary.

During General Musharraf's regime, a former chief of Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) - Lt Gen. Javed Ashraf Qazi - was the education minister who was hellbent to teach school children 40 siparay (chapters) of the Quran. There are only 30

siparay in Quran! Imagine a scholar like Dr Banuri reporting to such an ignoramus.

The HEC was the brainchild of Musharraf. He wanted a brigade of PhDs in every nook and corner of the country. The Internet came in handy. Businessmen were allowed to set up private universities. As a result, every Tom, Dick and Harry was a PhD scholar. The universities charged heavy fees to give students the PhD degree, sans the knowledge. The renowned Pakistani nuclear physicist Dr Pervez Hoodbhoy claims a Pakistani PhD in

mathematics can't solve the papers of O-Levels. Dr Banuri wanted to give the Pakistani PhD degree a semblance of respect and credibility. He opposed the idea of setting up universities under the public-private partnership that aimed to occupy the vast lands of government universities. Such an attempt was made by the slain Benazir Bhutto. She wanted to convert a huge piece of Quaid-e-Azam University's land into a housing society to reward her party workers when she became country's prime minister. The bid was foiled by

Dr Hoodbhoy through court. The man behind public-private partnership was Dr Attaur Rehman, the former HEC Chairman. Dr Rehman runs three research institutions that receive an annual grant of Rs 3 billion from HEC. Dr Banuri questioned him about his institutions' performance and output. Dr Banuri was verbally pressurized by the Prime Minister Imran Khan to release the grant, and told that it was not in the national interest to reveal the progress of Dr Rehman's institutions. Perhaps Dr Rahman was enriching uranium for Iran! Dr Banuri refused to budge from his position. This was the main reason behind his removal. He has challenged the ordinance in a court. The latter had directed the government not to appoint his replacement till its final judgement on the ordinance. Dr Banuri is a scholar of international repute. PTI is dealing with him through threats and incentives. The incentive is the payment of his salary if he stops pursuing the pending case in the court. People like Dr Banuri don't endanger life and career for meager salaries. He wanted to do good to the country and the society and leave behind a legacy. His removal and the act of crippling the HEC will further tarnish country's dubious image around the world.

## Tycoon Sanjeev Gupta's Father Leaves UK As Group Battles For Survival

filings made over the past few weeks at Companies House, the business registry. He owns Simec Group, the branch of the business empire which deals in renewable energy, shipping and mining, and was founded by the magnate as an export-and-import house in India. It's not clear where Parduman Gupta is currently, but a spokesman for Companies House said that a company director must list their country of residence, and that this "should correspond with their usual residential address." A spokesman for GFG Alliance, a loose grouping of companies owned by the father and son, declined to comment. Sanjeev Gupta has also been absent for

several months from the U.K., where GFG owns numerous steel and aluminum plants and employs around 5,000 people. He said on recent podcasts for GFG employees that he left the U.K. for Dubai before Christmas, and hasn't returned since.

"Dubai is the perfect location for me and my family to operate out of for now," Gupta said on a April 16 podcast, citing the city's time zone.

But he said that he was keen to be on the move again. "As soon as Covid travel restrictions in the U.K. and Australia and Europe are lifted I will definitely be trying to get in front of the customers and employees around the world." "Very Opaque"

GFG last month asked the U.K. government for a 170 million-pound (\$235 million) bailout, but the request was rebuffed. Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng told a parliamentary committee last week that it would be "very irresponsible" to give taxpayers' money to the group, describing it as "very, very opaque" and having "liabilities that nobody seems to have got to the bottom of." GFG has borrowed about \$5 billion from Greensill, and is desperately seeking fresh financing, which Sanjeev Gupta is coordinating from Dubai. Some progress has been made. Three lenders are in talks to refinance one of his Australian steel mills, while a private equity



firm has positioned itself to buy two of the group's aluminum plants. Still, other parts of the business are facing difficulties. Three French units were put into voluntary administration last week, while other parts of GFG in France and Belgium have

sought protection from their creditors. Gupta said on the April 16 podcast that some of his U.K. assets were "struggling at the moment with the lack of funding." He called on GFG employees to be "brave," but warned of "some difficult decisions" to come.



# 'America is rising anew': Biden lays out ambitious, expensive plan to emerge from pandemic

"In our first 100 days together, we have acted to restore the people's faith in our democracy to deliver," Biden said.

Biden has courted bipartisan support from congressional Republicans, but has also shown a willingness to push ahead with solely Democratic votes if need be as part of a gamble, with the House and Senate majorities on the line next year, that flies in the face of Washington orthodoxy.

Wednesday night's speech, which is not technically considered a State of the Union address, was a departure from the typical pomp associated with the event due to pandemic-related restrictions. Biden spoke before just a fraction of the congressional representatives, government dignitaries and guests who typically attend such an address, due to the restrictions imposed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, which has killed roughly 575,000 Americans to date.

"While the setting tonight is familiar, this gathering is just a little bit different, and it's a reminder of the extraordinary times we're in," he said.

Only about 200 tickets were parceled out, and even mainstays like most of the Supreme Court and the president's Cabinet were not in attendance. (As such, it obviated the need for an off-site "designated survivor" in the event of a disaster at the event.)

The clapping, standing ovations and - most notably - jeering were somewhat subdued, an inevitable consequence of the limited in-person audience. And the event stood in stark contrast to President Donald Trump's final State of the Union address in February 2020, which was remembered for Trump's not shaking Speaker Nancy Pelosi's hand and the Democratic leader performatively ripping up a printed copy of his speech.

That event took place at a time when few - in America and on Capitol Hill - understood the true gravity of the threat posed by Covid-19, and Washington's attention was on Trump's first impeachment trial.

The public health crisis has defined Biden's first 100 days in office and will continue to be a concern for the foreseeable future, though the White House has begun to look over the

horizon as it contemplates the next leg of the president's term. More than 200 million vaccines have been administered since Biden took office, twice the number he and his team set at the outset of their arrival for the administration's first 100 days.

However, tens of millions of people across the country still have yet to receive a dose, and many Americans either remain ineligible - as all but the oldest children are - or are among those averse to taking the vaccine. The Biden administration is also grappling with the growing issue of how and when to share the nation's vaccine supply with other countries, a decision that global health experts say will be crucial to bringing the pandemic to a close and warding off the risk of additional viral variants. The issue has become one of the first major fissures within the White House, in part because of ongoing snafus that have bedeviled the single-shot vaccine developed by Johnson & Johnson. And while Biden has largely steered clear of major pitfalls early in his term, his administration continues to grapple with an influx of migrants arriving along the country's border with Mexico, a situation that is taxing valuable energy and attention at several agencies.

In his speech Biden also focused on adversaries China and Russia and called out their leaders - Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin, respectively - by naming them multiple times and linking his domestic policy agenda to the United States' ability to counter them.

"We're in competition with China and other countries to win the 21st century," Biden said. "That's why I proposed the American Jobs Plan, a once-in-a-generation investment in America itself."

Biden's approval rating to date has steadily hovered a notch above 50 percent in public surveys, besting Trump's numbers in his first months, though lower than those of Biden's Democratic predecessor, President Barack Obama, at the beginning of his eight years in office.

Biden had attended dozens of these joint addresses, first as a senator and then as vice president, but Wednesday's speech was the first time he was at the lectern emblazoned with the presidential seal he long

envisioned himself behind. "It's good to be almost home," he said after walking down the aisle and fist-bumping the scattered members of Congress lining the way to greet him. It was also the first time that a president giving a joint address to Congress has shared the dais with two women: Vice President Kamala Harris and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. "Madam Speaker. Madam Vice President. No president has ever said those words from this podium. No president has ever said those words, and it's about time," he said. After Wednesday night, the focus will again shift back to Congress as it mulls what, if anything, in Biden's sweeping infrastructure and social welfare proposals will make it into law. Republicans have already balked at several of the items in

Biden's Jobs Plan, and a band of prospective dealmakers has offered an alternative that totals about one-third of Biden's more than \$2 trillion infrastructure package. The American Families Plan also includes hundreds of billions for things likely to raise conservative hackles, such as free universal preschool, Obamacare premium subsidies and an extension of the enhanced child tax credit enacted as part of this year's coronavirus relief package. All of it will be paid for by raising taxes on high earners and capital gains, as well as bolstering tax enforcement. The Biden administration has been stepping up outreach to GOP members of Congress in hopes of garnering some support for the efforts. White House press secretary Jen Psaki said on

Wednesday that the president was planning to invite some Republicans to the White House next week to discuss his proposals. The White House made similar entreaties earlier this year during negotiations over the \$1.9 trillion relief package, which ultimately passed under budget reconciliation rules along partisan lines. But Biden's designs also face headwinds from members of his own party for what was left out - big-ticket health care reforms such as drug-pricing controls or expansions of programs like Medicare and Medicaid. Doing so allows Biden to sidestep surefire opposition from the powerful pharmaceutical and health insurance industries, but risks infuriating progressives who remain key to his agenda,

## What really happens to the plastic you throw out

ultimately, breaking the cycle of plastic pollution.

We have long upheld the mantra of the "three Rs": reduce, reuse, and recycle. And with all those blue bins around, it may seem like every bottle or plastic packaging we throw into them gets recycled and turned into something new. But that is very far from reality.

In the 70 odd years since we began the mass production of plastic, over 8 billion metric tons have been manufactured and over 6 billion metric tons of plastic waste have been produced, according to a 2017 article in the journal *Science Advances*. According to 2018 data from the Environmental Protection Agency, only 9% of the plastic we throw into those blue bins actually gets recycled.

When it comes to plastics, instead of the "three Rs," the reality is closer to the "three Bs" -- burned, buried, and borne out to sea. The overwhelming majority of our plastic ends up in our landfills and natural environments or incinerated to become carbon pollution in our air.

In America alone, more than 32 million tons of plastic get buried in landfills or burned in an incinerator each year, according to 2018 data from the EPA. This process drives climate chaos and releases toxic pollution that

harms the surrounding communities -- which are disproportionately Black, brown, and low-income. We cannot tackle the issue of climate change, or environmental justice, without breaking our plastic addiction. Plastic pollution is more than the ugliness of single-use plastics that wash up on our beaches -- it is a human health crisis. Plastics are poisoning our bodies, from the air we breathe, to the water we drink, to the food we grow and eat. On average, we each consume a credit-card-sized amount of microplastics every week -- every week! -- carrying toxic chemicals such as carcinogens and endocrine-disruptors believed to be changing humans' reproductive biology. Plastic pollution is a social justice crisis as well: like so many of the challenges we face today, it's the most vulnerable, least affluent communities who are paying -- and will continue to pay -- the highest price for our neglect. But ultimately, it doesn't matter how much money we have or what color our skin is, nobody wants their children to ingest dangerous chemicals through microplastics. So, we have to act now, with boldness and decisiveness, to take on this crisis.

The Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act would transform America's approach to plastics

and put us on the transformative path we need to fully address this challenge. It requires big corporations to take responsibility for the pollution that their plastic creates by shifting the burden of cleanup to producers rather than consumers, through the design and financing of waste and recycling programs.

It bans certain non-recyclable, single-use plastic products and creates a national beverage container program (better known as "bottle bill") to provide refunds when people turn in empty bottles. It includes a temporary pause on the construction of new plastic and petrochemical production facilities to ensure enhanced protections are in place to safeguard fence-line and front line communities from direct and cumulative impacts of pollution from these facilities.

Surely, a nation with the skills and creativity to invent a million uses for plastic also has the creativity to find a solution to this crisis and to design better alternatives. The Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act is how we're going to spark that ingenuity and wean ourselves from our addiction to plastics. With President Joe Biden in the White House and pro-environment, pro-racial justice leaders in charge of both houses of Congress, we have a unique window for action.





# Will Biden cancel student loan debt?

## As college costs spiral, here's what he's considering

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration entered the White House with an eye toward relieving the strain of student loan debt, particularly amid the added financial burden of the coronavirus pandemic.

On Day One in office, President Joe Biden signed an executive order extending a pause in student federal loan payments enacted by the previous administration as part of COVID-19 relief. Liberal activists and lawmakers urged the president to go further and cancel student loan debt, but he has said firmly that he does not believe he has the authority to do so by executive order.

That changed Thursday, when White House chief of staff Ron Klain said Biden asked his education secretary to explore the president's authority to cancel student loan debt, a sign he is open to moving left on the issue. What's next on the infrastructure plan: How does Biden plan to get it through Congress? Critics of student loan debt forgiveness, including conservatives and some liberals, argue that it would unfairly benefit higher-income earners with college educations and that individuals who took out loans have a responsibility to pay them back, regardless of circumstance.

### Biden's push for student loan changes

Though Biden has been hesitant to bypass Congress on canceling student loan debt, he has said since the days of his campaign that the government needs to help those with "debilitating" student debt. "I understand the impact of debt," he said at a CNN town hall in February. Biden said student loans should have 0% interest — a move he enacted alongside the repayment freeze through September. He expanded student loan forgiveness for public-sector workers and canceled debt for students defrauded by for-profit schools.

He's hesitant to cancel loan debt for those who went to top-tier schools. The federal government should not forgive debt for students who went to elite schools such as "Harvard and Yale and Penn," Biden said.

### Trump and Biden froze federal student loans: Should borrowers pay or pause before they thaw?

Thursday, Klain said Biden asked Education Secretary Miguel Cardona to craft a memo on the president's executive authority to cancel student loan debt.

"He'll look at that legal authority, he'll look

at the policy issues around that and he'll make a decision," Klain said in an interview with Politico Playbook.

Enacting student loan forgiveness through Congress might be difficult in an evenly split Senate.

### College costs are on a steep rise

College costs have steadily risen in recent decades, making the price tag of a higher education all but unaffordable without the assistance of student loans for many. Students have been told that prosperous lives depend on a higher education. First-year students responding to a UCLA nationwide survey placed a higher importance on making more money and obtaining a better job as reasons for going to college in 2019 than students in the past 45 years. But the high cost of college has increased the debt that graduates have to climb out of as they start their careers.

U.S. News and World Report's analysis of its ranked national universities shows that in the past 20 years, average tuition at private colleges rose by 144%; at public universities for out-of-state students by 165%; and at public universities for in-state students by 212%.

Data collected by the College Board shows that, after adjusting for inflation, over the past two decades, average tuition and fees at public four-year institutions have increased by more than \$5,000 and at private colleges and universities by more than \$13,000 annually.

This school year, the College Board found that the average first-time, full-time student at a public, four-year college has to pay \$14,850 in tuition, fees and boarding after grant aid. The average student at a private institution must cover \$29,110 after grant aid. This does not include additional costs such as books, supplies and transportation.

Americans hold about \$1.7 trillion in student loan debt, according to Federal Reserve data. The average 2019 graduate of private or public colleges holds an average of \$28,950 in debt, according to

the Institute for College Access and Success. "The more college costs soar, the more degrees become a measure [of] privilege than competence. Our country would be better off if we made public colleges tuition-free & cancelled student loan debt," Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., tweeted.

The White House is comparing President Joe Biden's infrastructure proposal to the construction of interstate highways and the Space Race.

### Liberals want Biden to forgive \$50,000 in student loan debt.

Citing mounting debt for generations of college graduates, Democrats asked Biden to commit to \$50,000 in federal student loan forgiveness per borrower, putting pressure on him to bypass Congress through the use of executive action.

Student loan debt reached an all-time high in 2020 of more than \$1.7 trillion. The average graduate reached a record in loan debt of more than \$30,000 in 2019 for the first time since U.S. News and World Report tracked data, which is more than \$6,000 higher in debt on average than a graduate held 10 years prior. Previous presidents, including Barack Obama and Donald Trump, provided student debt relief. Biden said student debt forgiveness would need to be justified against other policy priorities.

"Is that is going to be forgiven, rather than use that money to provide money for early education for young children who come from disadvantaged circumstances?" Biden asked at the CNN town hall.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck

Schumer, D-N.Y., and Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., have said they believe the president has the authority to cancel \$50,000 in loans, and they urged him to do so immediately.

"Studies show that student debt cancellation can substantially increase Black and Latinx household wealth and help close the racial wealth gap, provide immediate relief to millions who are struggling during this pandemic and recession, and give a boost to our struggling economy through a consumer-driven economic stimulus that can result in greater home-buying rates and housing stability, higher college completion rates, and greater small business formation," the pair said in a statement last fall.

"Even before the coronavirus pandemic plunged our economy into chaos, student loan borrowers were already in crisis," Warren said. Ocasio-Cortez pushed back against Biden's point that student debt forgiveness might come at the cost of other education programs. "Nowhere does it say we must trade off early childhood education for student loan forgiveness. We can have both," she said. "Many won't fully feel \$10k in forgiveness until after a Biden presidency is over, when they've spent 10 years paying off the other \$20k+," Ocasio-Cortez tweeted. "Dems should be championing policy that people can feel ASAP. We need to go big."

(By Jeanine Santucci, Courtesy USA TODAY)





# How student debt became a \$1.6 trillion crisis



Some 44 million Americans collectively hold over \$1.6 trillion in student debt. And these numbers are growing. At the same time, advancements in technology, especially automation, are making it harder to earn a living wage without some type of advanced degree. Today, college graduates earn 80% more than those with just a high school diploma, on average. College is more expensive - and important - than ever before. And that dichotomy puts students in a difficult situation: do they risk going into debt they can't pay back or miss out on the benefits of a college degree?

Experts have long labeled this dynamic a "crisis." But then, another kind of crisis hit: the coronavirus pandemic. And then, an economic crisis followed.

In February, the United States officially entered an economic recession and between mid-march and June, over 42.6 million Americans filed for unemployment.

During the 2008 recession, many opted to go back to school and gain new skills. However, since then, the cost of a four-year college degree increased by 25% and student debt increased by 107% and many are less sure if college will be the solution to riding out a recession this time around.

CNBC Make It spoke with students, borrowers, historians and experts to learn how student debt became a crisis, how the pandemic will impact borrowers and who is to blame for putting students in an impossible position.

## The history of student debt

Today, more than 20 million students are enrolled in American colleges, but "the foundations of the modern higher education system really started a long time ago - more than 100 years ago," says David Deming, professor of public policy at the Harvard

Kennedy School and the Harvard Graduate School of Education. "The real formative period for U.S. higher education was more or less 1890 to 1940, when college started to be something that wasn't just a vocation for people going to school to get a religious education or for the few and the wealthy."

In 1919, an estimated 598,000 students were enrolled in American colleges. While historically Black colleges and universities and historically women's colleges have existed since the 1830s, the majority of American college students remained wealthy white men for decades.

In 1944, the G.I. Bill was signed, giving millions of veterans, mostly white men, the chance to go to college for free.

In the 1954 Supreme Court ruling of Brown v. Board of Education, the court unanimously decided to strike down the "separate but equal" doctrine created by Plessy v. Ferguson, making school segregation illegal and paving the way for more Black students to earn a college degree.

In 1958, the Cold War brought fears the U.S. was technologically falling behind, prompting congress to pass the National Defense Education Act, which offered students scholarships and loans to go to college.

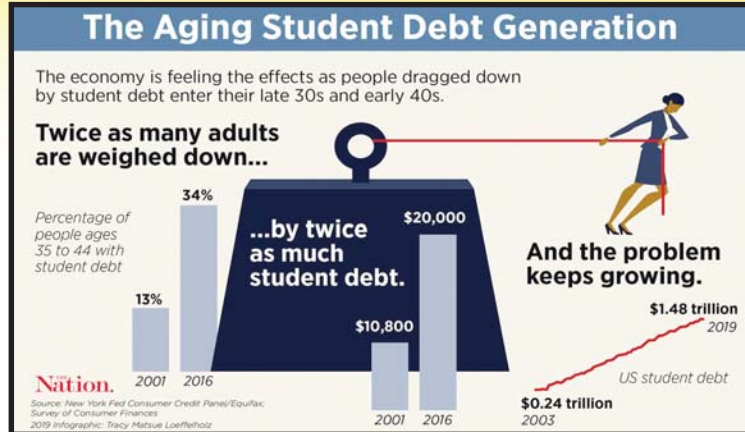
Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty led to the Higher Education Act of 1965. Grants were now given to students based on their income which dramatically expanded the opportunity to receive a college education to students other than white men -adding to other legislative gains achieved by the Civil Rights Movement.

At the time, education costs were low and college enrollment grew; so did the U.S. economy. Then, during the Reagan Era and the Tax Revolt of the 1980s,

states passed tax and expenditure limitations, restrictions that state governments create to limit the amount they can tax or spend. "And that meant that state budgets came under threat," explains Deming. "And so states that used to basically highly subsidize a college education for many people started to cut back in various ways, either by raising tuition or by spending less." Reagan cut higher education funding and student aid, and

college costs boomed as a result. The College Board estimates that during the 1980-1981 school year, on average, it cost students the modern equivalent of \$17,410 to attend a private college and \$7,900 to attend a public college - including tuition, fees, room and board. By 1990, those costs increased to \$26,050 and \$9,800, respectively. As costs grew, lawmakers scrambled for new solutions to expand access and cut costs for the government. "In the early 2000s, the Bush

administration made it a lot easier for online education to grow," says Deming. "And that affected a lot of large for-profit institutions that expanded their enrollment by several orders of magnitude in the mid-2000s." From 2000 to 2010, enrollment in private for-profit institutions increased by 329%. Then in December 2007, the Great Recession hit. Federal and state governments made deep cuts to higher education funding. "Many states made massive cuts to funding at public universities. This caused many of these schools to raise tuition in order to recoup the lost revenue. As the labor market weakened, more and more workers looked to higher education as a lifeline. Public and private college enrollments spiked and many were forced to turn students away. For-profit colleges welcomed those students with open arms," says Deming.



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# What Will It Take to Solve the Student Loan Crisis?



Every day, there are news stories about the college tuition crisis. But what is the crisis we are seeking to solve? Is it the staggering amount of student debt? The rapidly rising cost of higher education? The interest being collected on student loans? The high default rate on student loans? Or all of the above?

The central problem for many is the accumulated student loan debt. At nearly \$1.6 trillion, student loan debt exceeds accumulated car loans and even credit card debt. By almost any definition, this is a crisis: It is certainly a crisis for those with student loan debts whose repayment schedules span decades, with large monthly payments. It is also a crisis for lenders experiencing significant default rates and, perhaps, a crisis for the federal government, as it guarantees these student loans. Many argue that it is also a crisis for our nation's economy; servicing this debt has a chilling effect on the sale of houses, cars, appliances, and furniture, as well as spending for vacations and luxury items.

But student debt is only one part of a much larger crisis. This debt, regrettably, is on a trajectory to grow much larger in the future. Economists project an accumulated student loan debt of \$2 trillion by 2021, and, at a growth rate of 7% a year, as much as \$3 trillion or more by the end of the next decade.

The fallout from the student loan crisis goes far beyond the debtors' finances. In addition to the ordinary financial pressures and obligations that come with young adulthood, studies show that many of those struggling to repay these mountainous student loans are also experiencing serious mental health problems, caused in large part by the crushing weight of these loans.

The history, size, and complexity of the student loan crisis, combined with the interlocking, interdependent higher education networks - universities, lending institutions, and government agencies - defy simplistic reforms and have largely immunized the student loan industry from having to make significant changes.

These institutions and agencies have erected a financing superstructure that meets the immediate needs of students and universities for cash, but dramatically fails the test for long-term cost effectiveness and economic sustainability.

The immediate task is to find relief for those former students who sought or were counseled into large, multi-year loans that have now come due. This diverse body of student debtors has individually complex situations that virtually guarantee that there would be no "one size fits all" solution. The current proposal for transferring the totality of this \$1.6 trillion debt to the taxpayers does not pass the fairness test, although there are those building a case for a taxpayer bailout, especially in light of the fact that the U.S. government has already bailed out several large lending institutions.

Realistic solutions that recognize the diverse personal situations and economic conditions of the student debtors are possible, however. A good starting point would be a bipartisan Congressional Commission on student loan remediation. A Congressional Commission could identify and propose reasonable, broadly acceptable, long-term strategies that Congress could support and enact. One example is the current debate over allowing companies to contribute to their employees' student loan payments in a way that is tax-advantaged for the employer and employee.

The larger problem - and the root source of the student loan crisis - is the high cost of attending college and obtaining a degree. With tuition, room, board, books, and mandatory fees all increasing annually, the rising cost of attending college has been exceeding the rate of inflation for decades that, without huge loans, puts a college degree beyond the reach of most families. Parents, politicians, and even patrons of higher education want to know why and, more importantly, what can be done to reduce the cost of college or even slow the rate of annual increases.

The roots of rising college and university costs are not difficult to identify. For the nation's 1,600-plus public institutions, the chief culprit has been major reductions in state support; public investment in higher education has been in retreat in the states since about 1980, according to the American Council on Education. State funding and subsidies were cut by more than \$7 billion between 2008 and 2018. What many call the "privatization of public higher education" has shifted most of the states' share of instructional costs to students and their families, with disruptive results for both students and institutions.

Other culprits that add to students' costs in private and public universities are the rapidly increasing number of million-dollar-plus salaries for presidents and many senior administrators. Multi-million dollar salaries for coaches and salaries for assistant coaches that are

double and triple the salaries of faculty members are increasingly common and seemingly "acceptable."

Growth in the size of administration - what some call "administrative bloat" - has also added substantially to the high costs for students. Robert Reich, former U.S. Secretary of Labor, describes university administrations as "too large and redundant." Duplicative and redundant specialized high-cost degree programs dot campuses across every state. One of many examples is the number of public university law schools. My own state, Ohio, has six public university law schools in addition to three based in private universities. Costly state higher education systems' offices, many employing several hundred non-academic, non-teaching staff, add substantially to student costs. Some states like Texas and California have several systems offices adding even more to the bottom line for students as well as taxpayers. Opportunities for reducing costs through greater use of advanced teaching and learning technologies are being quietly and strategically avoided, something I've observed over the past few decades as new technologies have become available. Scholarly articles on faculty resistance to on-line teaching can be found in nearly every disciplines' publications. Likewise, opportunities for cost-cutting collaboration with other institutions are often rejected in favor of campus independence

and autonomy. High-cost, non-academic campus amenities such as free movie theaters, climbing walls, swimming pools in residence halls, bowling alleys, hot tubs and more, designed to attract student enrollments, add even more to the price tag, with the costs passed on to students and their families. Mandatory fees for a host of activities and services add significantly to the bottom line even when students haven't requested, do not want, or do not use these added "benefits."

We are long overdue for genuine, transformative reform. The good news is that we have the tools in our toolbox; the nation's higher education system can be reformed. The critical part of solving the problem is knowing where to look for solutions - for far too long, we've been looking in all the wrong places. But one thing has become increasingly clear: solutions to the high cost of higher education and the student loan crisis will not come from the higher education establishment. Our colleges and universities, their presidents, boards of trustees, state higher education systems, and the dozen or more higher education associations in Washington, D.C., have serious conflicts of interest on this issue and will not be the source of cost-cutting reforms.

One source for leading a reform movement that we have not seriously considered is the students themselves. Students hold the power to force change in our colleges and universities. In sufficient numbers, students could bring real pressure on the higher education establishment to cut costs, even by simply delaying enrollment for a year or two - a time when these students could work, save, travel, and volunteer. Deprived of student tuition and fee revenues, most institutions would have no choice but to eliminate costly redundant programs, cut administrative costs, and reduce spending across the board. Interestingly, there is some evidence that opting out is beginning to occur. A 2019 study shows that as many as one in five prospective college students are choosing a different path, one based on competency rather than a college degree.



# What is Driving The \$1.5 Trillion Student Debt Crisis

College is expensive. Since the 1999-2000 academic year, the net price of tuition, fees, room, and board at a public four-year college has increased 68%. The amount borrowed to go to college each year has doubled in the same time. Today, the cumulative federal student loan debt is over \$1.54 trillion, more than double the amount in 2010. Much of the focus around student debt is around rising tuition, and for good reason. As states disinvested in higher education, tuition increased across the country. Published tuition at public four-year colleges rose by 36% from 2008 to 2018. In many states, tuition rose even more. Today, per student funding from states is 8.7% less than it was before the Great Recession, which should be a warning sign given the current economic situation.

That's why many have proposed making public colleges tuition-free. But that alone won't address student debt going forward because tuition isn't the only driver of student debt. The total cost of college also includes living expenses, like textbooks and room and board-regardless if students live on camps or not. Living costs actually are more expensive than the sticker price of tuition. In fact, tuition and fees only make up 48% of the total cost of college at a public, four-year college. At public, two-year colleges, it's an even smaller share at 29%, with living costs almost making up two-thirds of the cost to attend. And that's just the sticker price. Tuition itself is sometimes reduced with institutional scholarships, before federal aid is applied.

So, covering tuition alone won't eliminate the need for many students to borrow. Many of the existing "free college" proposals would continue the Pell Grant program and allow low-income students to use the grant to cover living costs, which would help low-income students. But the Pell Grant hasn't kept up with the rising cost of college. The maximum grant only covers half of the living costs for students at a four-year public college.

Not to mention, only about 22% of undergraduates receive the Pell Grant, and not all of the ones who do receive the full amount. The average grant received is



about 32% less than the maximum amount. Several advocates have proposed doubling the Pell Grant, as has Democratic Presidential nominee Joe Biden, which would help more people cover the cost. However, many would still likely have to find a way to cover living expenses.

There's also another factor that plays a significant role in the rising student debt: graduate school. Last year, the number of loans dispersed for graduate school accounted for 16% of all federal student loans issued. While they were a small number of the loans issued, they actually accounted for 41% of all federal loan dollars dispersed. That's because of the amount graduate students borrow. Often graduate school programs are more expensive, or students receive less in scholarship money, and they also borrow for living expenses. While many often talk about borrowers with six-figure student debt, that's not undergraduates. According to federal data, the average debt for a bachelor's degree graduate in the 2015-2016 academic year was just under \$27,000. That's partially because they are cheaper, but also because there are strict federal limits on undergraduate borrowing. But it's actually not many graduate students. The same federal data show that there is only one degree level where the median borrower exceeds six-figures. That is professional doctorates-think law, medical, or dental schools.

On top of all of this, another driver of the rise in student loan debt is that the sheer number of people going to college-and therefore borrowing to do so-has also increased. Undergraduate enrollment has increased by more than 3.5 million students since 2000. And more people are going to graduate school too. From 2000 to 2018, graduate school enrollment increased 41%.

The rise in cumulative debt looks astounding, but it's also important to consider all pieces of context that contribute to the increase. If people truly want to eliminate student debt, it will mean finding a way to cover graduate school tuition, as well as living expenses. And no plan exists to ensure that all students can enroll in Harvard free of charge.

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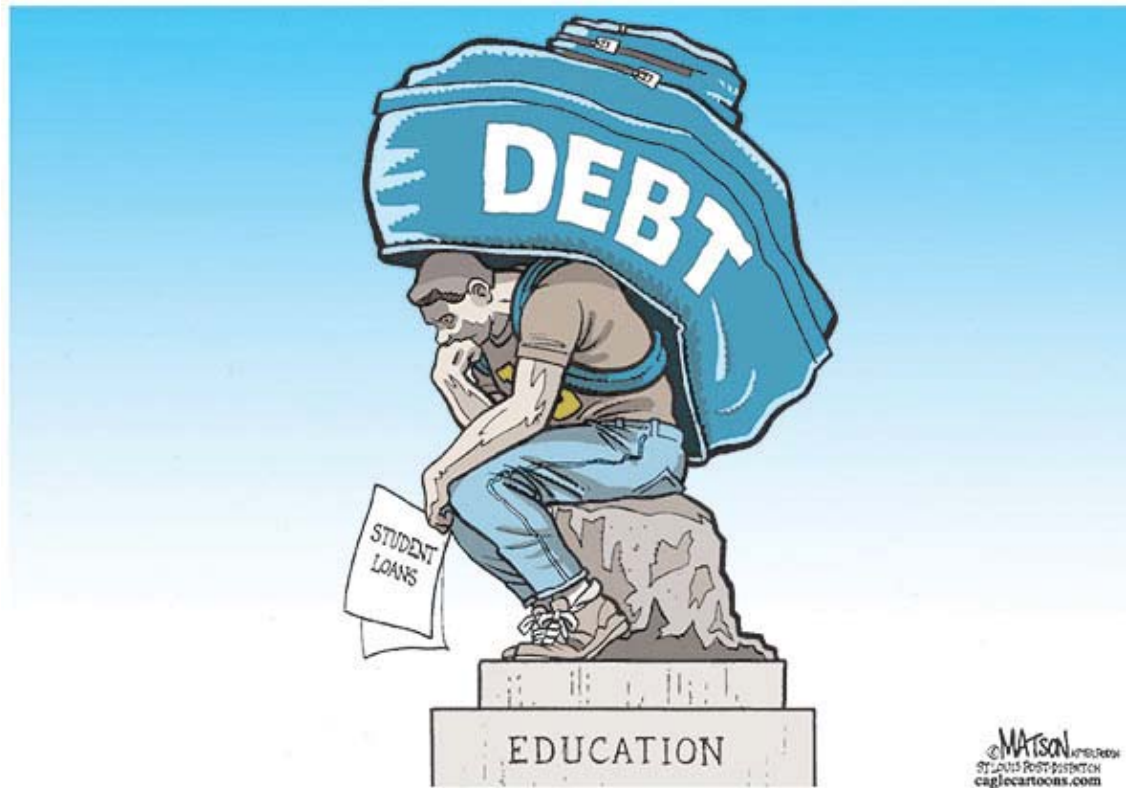
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# Student Loan Debt Crisis Breakdown



Student loan debt has reached astronomical levels in the U.S., with 43 million Americans carrying an estimated \$1.5 trillion in federal loan student debt and \$119 billion in private student loans.<sup>1</sup> The class of 2018 left school with an average of \$28,950 in student loans.<sup>2</sup> The financial burden of student loan debt proves heavier to bear for some borrowers than others. What's Behind the Student Loan Debt Crisis? There are several factors that have contributed to the student loan debt crisis in the U.S., beginning with rising tuition prices. For the 2020-2021 academic year, the average cost of tuition, fees, and room and board at a public four-year university totaled \$43,280 for out-of-state students. The cost climbed to \$54,880 for students at private four-year universities.<sup>3</sup> 529 college savings plans can help with paying college expenses but only 37% of families use them, according to Sallie Mae's 2020 How America Pays for College Report.<sup>4</sup> Instead, many families borrow to pay for college, including loans taken out by both students and parents. Borrowed money covered 21% of college costs for 2020.<sup>5</sup> The lure of loan forgiveness may also be seen as a contributing factor. The federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness program offers student loan forgiveness for grads who pursue a career in public

service. That's a tempting prospect, which may lead students to lean on loans more heavily, with the expectation that they'll be forgiven later. But, the program isn't permanent and could be altered or canceled, making it risky for borrowers to count on loan forgiveness. The student loan debt crisis is compounded by the number of borrowers falling delinquent on their loans. As of the fourth quarter of 2019, 11.1% of student loan borrowers were 90 days or more delinquent or in default on their loans.<sup>7</sup> This suggests that a substantial number of borrowers are struggling to keep up with their loan payments. Certain Borrowers More Affected By the Debt Crisis Student loan debt can take a toll

financially, particularly if it keeps borrowers from pursuing other financial goals, or delinquency affects your credit rating. But, not every borrower feels the impact of student loan debt to the same degree.

The gender pay gap often prevents women from making the same progress in paying off their loans as men. As of 2019, women working full-time earn approximately 82% of what men are paid.<sup>9</sup>

A lower income means less money to apply to student loan debt. Within the first four years after graduation, for instance, men paid off an average of 38% of their outstanding debt, according to AAUW, while women paid off 31%.<sup>10</sup>

That slower debt payoff can make it more difficult for women to get ahead financially. Consider retirement savings. According to the 18th Annual Transamerica Retirement Survey, twice as many men versus women are very confident about their ability to retire with a comfortable lifestyle.<sup>11</sup> Women have a median of \$2,000 saved for emergencies, compared to \$8,000 for men. Working men have an estimated median of \$76,000 saved for retirement

default on their loans.<sup>14</sup>

According to the AAUW research, Black women take on more student loan debt on average than any other group. Black and Hispanic women also struggled more than other groups with a slower debt repayment rate. Thirty-four percent of women overall and 57% of Black women who were repaying their student loans reported being unable to meet their essential expenses within the past year.<sup>10</sup>

The Broader Economic Impact Student loan debt can affect more than just individual borrowers; it also has the potential to have a wider economic impact. The housing market, for example, has made a strong recovery since the 2008 financial crisis but according to one study, student loan debt delays homeownership for borrowers by an estimated seven years.<sup>15</sup> That can cause supply and demand to swing out of balance if more homes go up for sale, but fewer buyers are shopping. That in turn, could lead to lower housing prices.

Student loan borrowers may also be more reluctant to use other types of credit, such as credit cards or car loans, meaning less interest and fee revenue for lenders and banks. When fewer people buy cars or homes, use credit cards or spend in general, which directly affects businesses and can slow down economic growth.

While not necessarily an upside, more students attending a college means a better-educated workforce, which can potentially lead to lower unemployment and higher tax revenues. But, the negative student loan debt crisis can't be ignored.

In the meantime, there's no clear solution to the student loan debt crisis. Finding ways to control rising higher education costs seems like an obvious step but implementing rules and regulations designed to do that is easier said than done. For students, the only recourse, for now, can be to educate themselves as much as possible about the costs of a college degree and the financial implications of taking on student loan debt before they borrow.



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Certain Borrowers More Affected By the Debt Crisis Student loan debt can take a toll

Women Feel the Student Loan Debt Pain

According to an analysis by the American Association of University Women (AAUW), women own nearly two-thirds of student loan debt in the U.S., totaling almost \$929 billion.<sup>8</sup> Compared to men, women are more likely to finance a college degree and they tend to borrow more money to do so. That in itself isn't necessarily problematic, but the real student loan debt crisis happens when those same female grads have to start repaying their loans.

while working women have a median of \$23,000.<sup>12</sup> Minorities Also Bear the Brunt of Student Loan Debt

Women aren't alone in the student loan struggle. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 71% of Black students borrow federal loans to pay for attendance at four-year colleges, compared to 56% of white students.<sup>13</sup> Hispanic and Black students are more likely to graduate with higher levels of debt than white students, and they're also more likely to



# Is the U.S. Student Loan Program Facing a \$500 Billion Hole? One Banker Thinks So.

Government sees it as a moneymaker. Former JPMorgan executive sees a giant loss looming due to rosy repayment hopes.

In 2018, Betsy DeVos, then U.S. education secretary, called JPMorgan Chase & Co. Chief Executive Jamie Dimon for help. Repayments on federal student loans had come in persistently below projections. Did Mr. Dimon know someone who could sort through the finances to determine just how much trouble borrowers were in?

Months later, Jeff Courtney, a former JPMorgan executive, arrived in Washington. And that's when the trouble started. According to a report he later produced, over three decades, Congress, various administrations and federal watchdogs had systematically made the student loan program look profitable when in fact defaults were becoming more likely.

The result, he found, was a growing gap between what the books said and what the loans were actually worth, requiring cash infusions from the Treasury to the Education Department long after budgets had been approved and fiscal years had ended, and potentially hundreds of billions in losses.

The federal budget assumes the government will recover 96 cents of every dollar borrowers default on. That sounded high to Mr. Courtney because in the private sector 20 cents would be more appropriate for defaulted consumer loans that aren't backed by an asset.

He asked Education Department budget officials how they calculated that number. They told him that when borrowers default, the government often puts them into new loans. These pay off the old loans, and this is considered a recovery, even though in many cases the borrowers haven't repaid anything and default on the new loans as well.

In reality, the government is likely to recover just 51% to 63% of defaulted amounts, according to Mr. Courtney's forecast in a 144-page report of his findings, which was reviewed

by The Wall Street Journal.

"If you accounted this way in the private sector, you wouldn't be in business anymore," Mrs. DeVos said in a December interview. "You'd probably be behind bars."

Former Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos commissioned an outside analysis of the student loan program's finances.

Mr. Courtney's calculation was one of several supporting the disclosure in a Journal article last fall that taxpayers could ultimately be on the hook for roughly a third of the \$1.6 trillion federal student loan portfolio. This could amount

to more than \$500 billion, exceeding what taxpayers lost on the saving-and-loan crisis 30 years ago. If Mr. Courtney is right, there are big implications for taxpayers and families alike. While defaulted student loans can't cause the federal government to go bankrupt the way bad mortgage lending upended banks during the financial crisis, they expose a similar problem: Billions of dollars lent based on flawed assumptions about whether the money can be repaid.

Were his model to be adopted, watchdogs such as the Congressional Budget Office could force the federal government to recognize the losses, deepening deficits and adding hundreds of billions of dollars to the national debt. That would put pressure on the government to take action to narrow the losses. Some government officials and advocates of student loans fear it would create pressure to curtail the program. The assumptions in Mr. Courtney's model faced challenge by some career

officials at the White House Office of Management and Budget during the Trump administration, according to Diane Auer Jones, who was deputy under-secretary of education. The Education Department under President Biden killed Mr. Courtney's project in late February, meaning that his model won't be

used to a large degree in modeling the program's future. The program quirks Mr. Courtney analyzed resulted from a series of decisions by Congress and presidents of both parties dating back to 1990, many of them rooted in accounting. Before then, the budget treated student loans as an expense. If the government lent \$1 billion, the deficit rose by that amount, absent offsetting measures. The law changed in 1990 to incorporate expected future repayments. Suddenly, loans became a potential source of profits, by assuming that most borrowers would repay with interest. This created an incentive for Congress to expand student lending. Doing so would increase access to higher education either at no cost to the government or with a gain in federal revenue, at least on paper. Changes in 1992 made loans

available for the first time to students from upper-income households, and provided that interest would start accumulating while borrowers were still in school, instead of after graduation. Congress also lifted a ceiling on how much parents could borrow for their children. In 1993 the government introduced "Income-contingent" loans, under which monthly repayments were set as a share of borrowers' income instead of fixed, and repayment could be spread over 25 years instead of 10. This encouraged bigger loans. Congress and the Obama administration later expanded these kinds of loans. In all, the changes, by making nonpayment of student loans seem less likely, were justified as preventing losses from student lending. One instance of how accounting drove policy came in 2005 with Grad Plus, a program that removed limits on how much graduate students could borrow. It was included in a sweeping law designed to reduce the federal budget deficit, which had become a concern in both parties as the nation spent on wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and as baby-boomer retirement was set to raise Social Security and healthcare outlays. A key motive for letting graduate students borrow unlimited amounts was to use the projected profits from such lending to reduce federal deficits, said two congressional aides who helped draft the legislation. Each change was publicly justified as a way to help families pay for college or to save the taxpayer money, said Robert Shireman, who helped draft some of the laws in the 1990s as an aide to Sen. Paul Simon (D., Ill.) and later was deputy under secretary of education in the Obama administration. But how agencies such as the Congressional Budget Office "score" such changes—determine their deficit impact—is a key factor in deciding whether a policy is adopted or not,"

announcing the decision, reviewed by the Journal, cited criticism by OMB asserting that the "analysis used incomplete, inaccurate data and suffered from significant methodological shortcomings, including a dubious method for predicting borrowers' future income."

Biden officials never saw Mr. Courtney's report, and have dismissed his project on grounds that they believe it was motivated by a political agenda by Mrs. DeVos to kill the student loan program. A spokeswoman for the Education

Department said his analysis was also based on incomplete data.

"One of the many reasons we have a model of record is to ensure valuation of the student loan portfolio is not subject to political interference," the spokeswoman said. She said the agency has refined its model over time to improve accuracy, and Biden officials

believe it is more accurate than the one spearheaded by Mr. Courtney.

President Biden is a proponent of student lending and supports the federal government's remaining principal source of the loans. He has asked Congress to write off \$10,000 of each student borrower's debt.

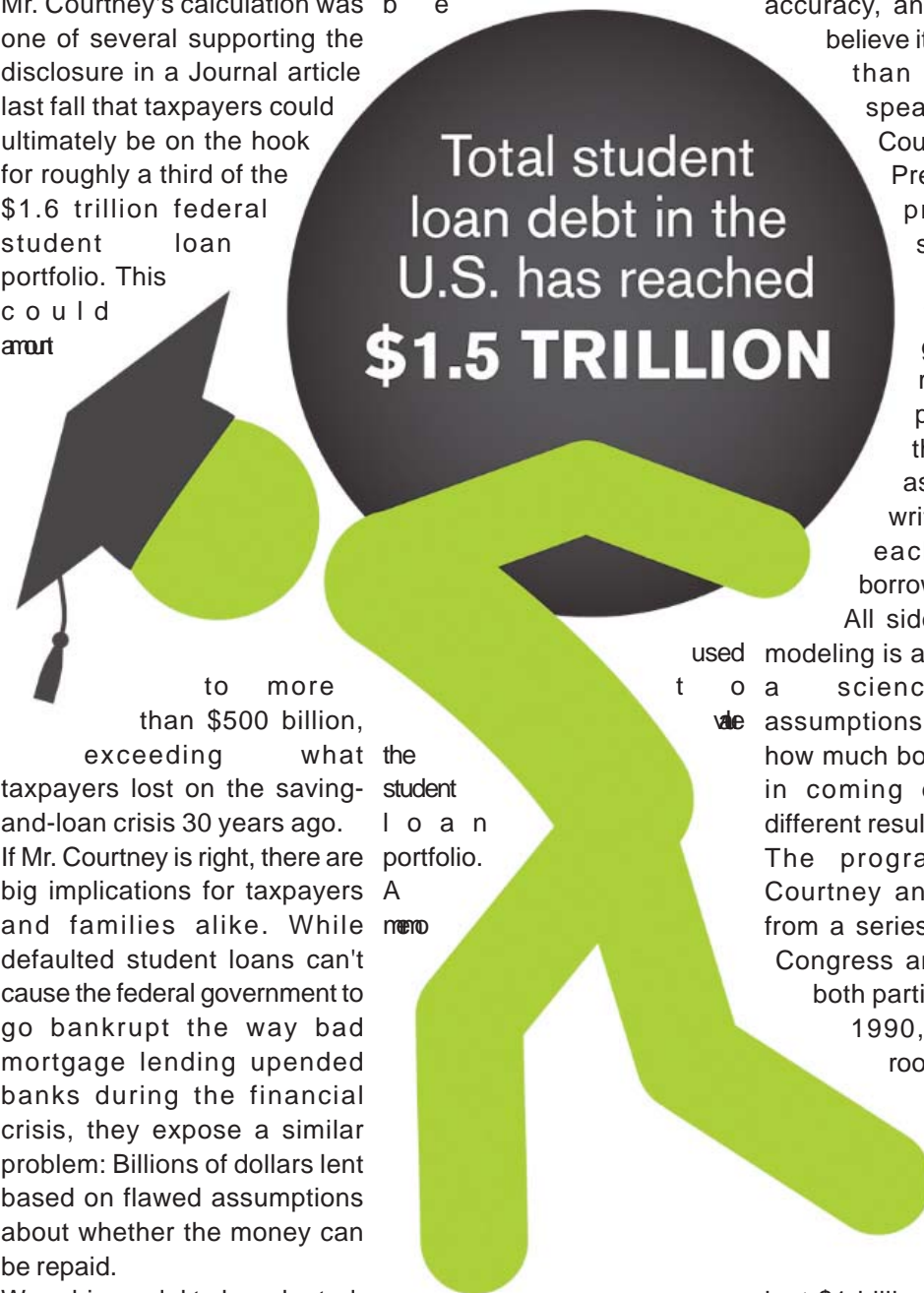
All sides agree budget modeling is as much an art as a science. Different assumptions, such as about how much borrowers will earn in coming decades, yield different results.

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Mr. Shireman said. "The fact that it saved money helps enact it." Some expectations came true. Households did borrow more, and borrowers were less able to escape repayment. By 2014, five million Americans owed at least \$50,000 in student debt, according to a Brookings Institution study. A majority of the big-balance borrowers earned graduate degrees.

Borrowing by parents for their children also surged. In 2016, for the first time, most new federal student loans went to parents and graduate students rather than to undergraduates. The assumption that all this student lending would mean growing profits for the federal government and savings for taxpayers has been consistently off the mark. The federal government extended \$1.3 trillion in student loans from 2002 through 2017. On paper, these would earn it a \$112 billion in profit. But student repayment plummeted. In response, the government revised the projected profit down 36%, to \$71.5 billion. The revision would have been bigger except for the fall in interest rates that let the U.S. borrow inexpensively to fund loans. The phenomenon is worsening in recent years. For the fiscal year ending September 2013, the government projected it would

earn 20 cents on each dollar of new student loans. For fiscal 2019, it projected it would lose 4 cents on each dollar of new loans, federal records show. Congress approves the student loan program each year, doing so based on a profit assumption. Then, in subsequent years, it revises those profit estimates based on the repayments that actually arrive.

If repayments come in lower than expectations—as has happened successively in recent years—the Treasury Department fills the gap with cash infusions to the Education Department.

This process takes place outside of the budget review and outside of congressional oversight. Ever-larger cash infusions from the Treasury have been needed.

In 2018, more than a year after Mrs. DeVos became Education Secretary, she looked for someone to sort through this, and JPMorgan's Mr. Dimon recommended Mr. Courtney, who had just retired from the bank after heading its private student-loan branch. He joined the administration and started going through documents.

According to his report a year later, students who took out federal loans in the 1990s had repaid, on average, 105% of the

original balance a decade later, including interest. Since 2006, they had repaid an average of just 73% of their original balance after a decade.

He looked into why government projections seemed so far off. One thing he found was that Education Department budget officials didn't look at basics such as borrowers' credit scores to estimate the likelihood they would repay. Not checking credit would be unthinkable in the private sector.

With the help of a contractor that does statistical modeling, FI Consulting of Arlington, Va., he ran some numbers. The credit scores of four in 10 borrowers would qualify them as "distressed"—double the rate on all types of private consumer loans, his analysis found.

He also saw that when borrowers defaulted, the government continued to charge interest, allowing balances to keep rising, which also differs from private lenders' practice.

Then, the government typically put those defaulting borrowers into new loans, and the accrued interest was wrapped into a new balance. The borrowers' loans were no longer "nonperforming."

A substantial number of borrowers go on to default on these new loans, according to Mr. Courtney's report, which was part of why he estimated so

much lower a recovery of defaulted amounts.

Another source of what he considered faulty projections: Borrowers unable to make regular monthly payments sometimes lowered them by switching to income-based repayment. President Barack Obama made this move widely available, which his administration could do by itself on the understanding it wouldn't widen the deficit.

The accrual of unpaid interest caused loan principals to rise instead of decline, making the loans appear more profitable to the government, even though the accrual stemmed from borrowers' difficulty in repaying. Mr. Courtney's conclusions, outlined in a presentation to Mrs. DeVos in May 2019, also said Education Department budget officials overestimated how much borrowers would earn and thus be able to pay back. The department is blocked by law from reviewing individual borrowers' tax records. Its estimates of how much borrowers' incomes would rise were consistently wrong, he concluded.

All told, his analysis led to his estimate that taxpayers would be left with the bill for around a third of all outstanding loans when they reach the end of their repayment

cycles. Some OMB staffers voiced concern Mr. Courtney's project would undermine the president's budget proposals, potentially forcing the government to come up with hundreds of billions of dollars to balance the books, said Ms. Jones, the former deputy under secretary of education. OMB takes data from the Education Department to project how much student loans will earn for taxpayers or cost them. The agency has final say on accounting procedures, and Ms. Jones said some staffers expressed concern that private-sector officials with no experience with the federal budget process were doing a task the law gives to OMB.

Mr. Courtney left shortly after giving Mrs. DeVos his report, which was based on an alternative student loan budget model developed with the help of FI Consulting and audited by the consulting firm Deloitte. While the Biden administration has rejected his analysis, the status quo creates problems both for borrowers and for the government, according to Mr. Shireman, the former aide to Sen. Simon and President Obama. Mr. Shireman said the projected profits from student lending discourage making changes that would help borrowers, such as lowering interest rates.

**By Josh Mitchell, Courtesy WSJ**

## COMMUNITY

# Indian-Origin Ex-Postmasters Win Stealing Scandal Case In UK

*These former sub-postmasters were hit by a faulty IT system, called Horizon, that led to accusations of them of stealing funds from the UK's Post Office Ltd.*

(Insider Bureau)- Indian-origin postal managers are among a group of 39 people who won a Court of Appeal case in the UK on Friday that dismissed their convictions for allegedly stealing money and false accounting following the installation of a new computer system in local post offices in a historic scandal dating back several years.

These former sub-postmasters were hit by a faulty IT system, called Horizon, that led to accusations of them of stealing funds from the UK's Post Office Ltd. In 2019, a High Court ruling had approved a 57.8-million pounds settlement between hundreds of claimants and the Post Office, with many then left to overturn their convictions. Among the group of 39 are the likes of Seema Misra and Vijay Parekh, who had maintained their innocence. Ms Misra took over her

post office in Surrey in 2005 and was pregnant when she was wrongly handed a 15-month sentence 10 years ago after being accused of stealing 75,000 pounds from her branch.

"I would definitely have killed myself if I hadn't been pregnant," said Ms Misra, a mother of two who hailed Friday's Court of Appeal verdict as a "huge moment".

Sub-postmasters like her had appealed their convictions on two grounds: that they had been denied a fair trial, and that the circumstances in which the prosecutions went ahead "represents an affront to public conscience". In a ruling at the Royal Courts of Justice in London, a three-judge bench granted the appeal on both grounds.

"Post Office Limited's failures of investigation and disclosure were so egregious as to make the prosecution of any of the 'Horizon

cases" an affront to the conscience of the court," said Lord Justice Timothy Holroyde, sitting with Justice Simon Picken and Justice Judith Farbey.

He said the Post Office "knew there were serious issues about the reliability of Horizon" and had a "clear duty to investigate" the system's defects.

The ruling means the former postmasters could bring new civil cases for malicious prosecution, which could mean the Post Office having to pay out more in compensation.

"I am in no doubt about the human cost of the Post Office's past failures and the deep pain that has been caused to people affected," said Post Office chief executive Nick Read.

"The quashing of historical convictions is a vital milestone in fully and properly addressing the



past as I work to put right these wrongs as swiftly as possible and there must be compensation that reflects what has happened," he said.

The Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC), which referred the sub-postmasters' convictions to the Court of Appeal, termed it as "serious miscarriage of justice" which has had a devastating impact on these victims and their families. "Every single one of these convictions has clearly had a profound and life-changing impact for those involved. The Post Office has rightly

acknowledged the failures that led to these cases and conceded that the prosecutions were an abuse of process," said CCRC chair Helen Pitcher. The controversial Horizon system, developed by the Japanese company Fujitsu, was first rolled out in 1999 to some post offices to be used for a variety of tasks, including accounting and stocktaking. But it appeared to have significant bugs, which could cause the system to misreport, sometimes involving large sums as was the case in the case of these sub-postmasters.





# Right To Life: Dead In India?

***Constitution and national health policies should have been the guiding philosophy for leaders and planners. But did we even read them?***

I have been in healthcare and I always felt so happy being in the healthcare sector for a quarter of a century (despite not being a clinician), as it provides so many opportunities to serve people in need. Also, sometimes, being able to save lives too, by helping in organizing the right care at the right time. There cannot be a bigger satisfaction in life than to see a smile on the face of a person who came in distress. Hence, for me, healthcare is the most satisfying and rewarding sector to be in. However, the last week has been terrible, where I have seen people losing lives, desperately searching for a bed, oxygen and even medicines, even though India was known as the 'Pharmacy of the East'. India's present crisis has forced one to ask some crucial questions. Did Covid-19 stress healthcare unduly? Undoubtedly, Yes! But, was there a 'healthcare system' in place, and did we have a plan? NOT AT ALL! We need to go back in time to understand the origin of the problem and find a solution so that in the future, we don't have to lose our near and dear ones.

Constitution and Health: Article 21 of the Constitution of India states that "No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law".

'Life' in Article 21 of the Constitution is not merely the physical act of 'breathing'. The constitution broadened the ambit to include the right to live with human dignity, right to livelihood, right to health, right to pollution-free air, etc. - the idea behind being that the state shall provide for the basic minimum necessities critical to the 'right to live'. But today, the very act of breathing is non-existent for want of oxygen.

The numerous calls on the phone, the flash of news in print and TV is agog with the horrid stories of struggle to save lives, and deaths due to lack of infrastructure. Despite the guarantee in the constitution, what brought us here? It is time to look back and introspect.

Constitution and national health policies should have been the guiding philosophy for leaders and planners. But did we even read them? Leave alone understanding or implementing it. In the past seven decades, we could not even build an infrastructure that can care about the health of our people?

I was involved in drafting the National Health Policy (NHP) 2017, and it has been four years since NHP 2017, but have we really understood the thinking behind the NHP and tried its stock-taking? How many times has the Central Council of Health

and Family Welfare met to discuss Covid? What is the commitment of the people in the government and administration in implementing the policy and the mandate of the constitution? Should we not question it and fix the accountability? Also, it is time to make health a concurrent subject, if not a central subject. The deadly combination of uneducated leaders, greedy corporates, ignorant public, and the contemptuous disregard for science has wreaked havoc. Our priorities are misaligned and actions ill-intentioned.

Reckless and unaccountable bureaucracy has been the biggest impediment. I recall, during my tenure as advisor to the Union Health Minister, the PM-JAY was launched. A lot of other projects and ideas were also approved that would have come in handy in handling this pandemic. For instance, the Healthcare Information Exchange, national registries, expansion of AMRUT & Jan Aushadhi stores on a franchisee model, building more hospitals and expanding our network of health and wellness centres, health helpline, etc.

Some projects were scuttled, despite the availability of funds by an IIT-trained bureaucrat. Trying to reform MCI is a clear example of the rampant corruption in the healthcare system, and at the top

of it, we are planning to give gold, silver, and bronze accreditation through the Quality Council of India (QCI) for healthcare? It is a classic case of shoddy implementation of well-intentioned policies.

Political Proximity

AIIMS Delhi is another culprit. Senior doctors at AIIMS get connected to powers in Delhi and occupy key positions and I don't have to mention the names. Every top Covid management position is held by doctors from AIIMS. What did we expect from such people who got positions as a political quid pro quo? Why could they not pick people from different parts of the country and not only from AIIMS?

Failed judiciary

Last week, the judiciary made bizarre statements like; 'Beg, Borrow and Steal' to 'Will hang those who come in the way'. Were they sleeping all this while? When the judiciary makes a call to 'steal', it is an indication of how broken the system is!

We Indians are religious people and believe that since we pray religiously, God will take care of us. In fact, we have rather started to believe, 'Worship is Work'. We have forgotten that we need to work to get results. Another problem is that we celebrate victory too soon. A vast country like India cannot be run on hope, optimism and optics. We need

swift and ground-level actions based on multiple scenario planning models for every state based on the demographics, economic and educational factors.

Now that we know where we have reached, we need to take definite actions. In Outlook, an article in March of 2020 called for forecasting multiple scenarios and making preparations for the same in light of Covid. Why did we not do it? Why do we not hold people in the government accountable? Shouldn't the Health Minister resign for the number of deaths and disband the current Covid management task force which has been in place for one year. Let them give the opportunity to a new team. The message will go loud and clear that you cannot stay in your seat if you don't deliver outcomes.

Also, our model of relying on big business houses for everything is faulty. Even in the case of oxygen, we have a few players who account for about 90 percent of the oxygen generation. District-level systems are also not in place for this critical resource. Why hospital clusters can't be encouraged to generate as per need? Oxygen rates have gone up by 40 percent in the past few weeks, so will removing GST be enough?





# After 7 years, deprivation, disease & death

***The quality of governance has sunk to an abysmal low. The result is what we see around us - deprivation, debt, disease and death.***

Two years ago, the country voted the BJP to office with a thumping majority - 303 seats for the BJP alone and 353 seats for the NDA. As we enter the third year, it would be appropriate to ask what kind of governance have we got and what are the outcomes.

An overwhelming number of the 26 crore families want, foremost, food on their plates every day. That leads to other needs like security, jobs, living wages/income, homes, healthcare, education for their children and other things.

## Malnutrition Worsens

India is a large producer of cereals (the staple food), pulses, millets, milk, vegetables and fruit apart from meat and fish. The goal is that everyone should have enough food on his/her plate and, if we are progressing, things should get better every year. If children do not get adequate food, they will be victims of anaemia, stunting and wasting. The last complete data is NFHS-4 (2015-16). According to NFHS-4, 58.6 per cent of children were anaemic, 38.4 per cent were stunted and 21 per cent were wasted, a marked improvement over NFHS-3 done 10 years earlier. NFHS-5 was started in

2019-20 but could not be completed because of the pandemic. However, data for 22 states that have been released shows that out of the 22 states anaemia had increased in 18 states, stunting had increased in 13 states and wasting had increased in 12 states.

The conclusion is painful: despite mountains of food grain and other food, our children do not get enough food, the poor getting the least quantities. All other things flow logically. Let me indicate some metrics of today. Since the beginning of NDA-2, GDP, GDP growth rate and per capita income have declined; the labour participation rate has declined while the unemployment rate has increased; WPI inflation and food inflation are on the rise; and gender inequality has widened. Made Worse by Incompetence The pandemic has made the situation worse. At the risk of repetition, let me state that the economic slide preceded the detection of the first case of Covid-19 on January 30, 2020. The economic slide and recession were man-made. The pandemic was a natural disaster made worse by man. In both cases, men and women in power were responsible, not the people

who voted them to power.

As we begin 2021-22, it is apparent that the economy will suffer another horrendous year. Jobs will be lost, more women will lose jobs than men, and the irregular/casual workers will suffer more than the regular workers; wages and incomes will be hit; thousands of MSMEs will be closed down or scaled down; there will be more reverse migration; and more people will be pushed into poverty and debt. Everyone will be worse off than what he/she was at the same time in 2019-20 or even 2020-21.

A lockdown - God forbid - seems inevitable. I wonder why after "we won the war against Covid in 2020" (so claimed the Prime Minister on April 17), a lockdown has become inevitable. This time, however, the buck has been passed to the state chief ministers who, having no other option, will close down step by step until all activity is shut down one day. Meanwhile, lakhs of people will be infected and hundreds will die without access to vaccines, oxygen cylinders, ventilators, ICU beds and anti-viral medicines.

Bluff, Bluster & Trolls

So far, the economic crisis and

the pandemic have been tackled by the government with bluff, bluster, abuse and an army of paid trolls. Can you imagine - a prime minister taking off every other day to address election rallies and not available to take desperate calls of chief ministers;

- a health minister repeating ad nauseam that there is no shortage of vaccines or oxygen cylinders or remdesivir or hospital beds, and then vanishing from public sight;

- a minister mocking the suggestion that foreign-made approved vaccines should be allowed to be imported ("he is lobbying for foreign pharmaceutical companies") and not tendering an apology for the crude remark when the government decided to do exactly that;

- a finance minister observing silence on the demand for Rs 3,000 crore by the Serum Institute of India for capital investment to ramp up manufacturing capacity of its vaccine, Covishield;

- a government not invoking the provision of compulsory licensing to allow the manufacture of Covishield and Covaxin in multiple facilities in a country

that boasts of the largest vaccine manufacturing capacity in the world;

- state governments faking the infection and death toll in the face of the hard truth of ambulances with patients lined up outside hospitals and mortuary vans with bodies lined up outside crematoriums (e.g. Gujarat, Delhi);

- the government allowing vaccine manufacturers to fix multiple prices and leaving the 18-44 age group out of the public-funded programme; and - ruling party MPs continuing to be mute spectators and afraid to speak when a catastrophe is descending on the country.

Governance - forecasting, scenario-building, planning, activity-mapping, resource allocation, provisioning, coordinating and implementing - has gone back to the primitive days of the chalk and blackboard, typewriter and ITI-made black telephones. The quality of governance has sunk to an abysmal low. The result is what we see around us - deprivation, debt, disease and death. Did the people who voted the government to power in 2019 deserve this? I would say NO.



# Voting In The Time Of Corona: The 'Bhot' Did It!

*You might almost call it a non-event - afterwards I found none of the usual groups loitering on street corners, the roads around Gariahat were in almost lockdown mode, peppered with bored policemen.*

knew that Assembly elections were round the corner. The flags had been battling it out on the tramlines, a flutter of lotuses one day and grass flowers the next. Because the colours were the same you had to wait for the wind to hold them out before you could be sure what was what.

My galli was on the corner of Gariahat and Rashbehari, very much in the thick of things. Any dialogue on the crossing floats through my windows distorted by the south breeze - though shouts of Jai Shri Ram and Bande Mataram do manage to cut through the hoots and the shouts of the hawkers. Coronavirus or no, it was business as usual - rival rallies, Chaitra sale, since Baisakh was round the corner, with high profile TMC members jack knifing from one side to another. All very well and of no concern barring a few sniggers at the teashops.

Then a police SUV with UP number plates started materialising next to my front door. Two commandos armed with AK-47s appeared one afternoon at the extreme dead end of my lane. I asked one of the hawkers who

was being arrested but was told that they had come to visit someone. He kept his expression carefully blank when he answered. My driver told me impressively that very important ex-TMC leader had moved in.

By then corona was taking out its own rallies and shooting down people far more effectively than any political party --- without minority discriminations. All kinds of conspiracy theories surfaced, including one which declared that the spike was engineered to hijack the elections and which began to take precedence over the wheelchair-for-sympathy one.

I was tired of arguing that an import from Wuhan was not possible besides which judging by the way the Battle for Bengal for going, no one was going to let a virus get in the way. I was also beginning to be secretly worried about the voting business because, judging by the way figures were spiking, going anywhere that involved people was likely to be injurious to health. Places like art galleries were fine - they were the most isolated spaces I knew.

Nursing homes where I went to take my jabs had to be tolerated. But election booths?

"Don't," my Naxalite friend told me firmly. I felt that was sort of letting the side down - in any case certain election chants were doing bad things to my blood pressure and something had to be done about that. I remembered having seen N95 masks on sale and wondered whether I should invest in those. As the Rashbehari elections drew close, a white car with a Member of Parliament number plate appeared in my lane and more commandos and AK47s --- who were often deep in conversation with my driver and Bihari sweeper. By now I had a name for the man who was staked out at the end of my galli - though no clue as to his constituency or why he was there.

Then the N95 arrived and the party slips and there was no more time for speculation. "Go early in the morning," everyone said, "As the gates open." I thought that if everyone did that, there was going to be quite a crowd. Nonetheless, on my morning walk, I swung by



to check out the situation with the N95 augmented by a dupatta wound hijab style over nose and mouth. Thus prepared, I walked down to find two generous groups in shorts, flip flops and jeans with a few saris thrown in lined up on either side of the gate. The Rashbehari bhadro voter population of my area was out in morning force.

No go, I thought, did an about turn and embarked on Plan B. That entailed going to vote at high noon and high noon was scorching, so scorching that when I reached the centre my temperature was high. "Can I vote?" I asked the commandos doubtfully. The ladies on duty told me to wait till I cooled down then handed me a glove and I walked into the booth, was thumb printed,

pressed the button and was out in five minutes. Though I do confess to a fit of irrational panic when I looked at the EVM.

You might almost call it a non-event - afterwards I found none of the usual groups loitering on street corners discussing who was giving biryani in exchange for votes or who was paying Rs 500 for a phone shot of a finger pressing the right button, conversations I had heard in other, less volatile years. The roads around Gariahat were in almost lockdown mode, peppered with bored policemen.

Well, the die is cast, the button pressed. "There was no milk today," my cook announced gloomily in the evening. "The voting stopped it." A taste of things to come?

## Elon Musk on Mars: 'You might not come back alive'



There may not be a bigger promoter of the idea that humanity should go to Mars than Elon Musk. But Musk is once again in the news for admitting, though not for the first time, the truth about his dream: "A bunch of people probably will die" in the process. Musk made the comments during an interview with XPrize founder Peter Diamandis last week, adding about the journey: "It's uncomfortable. It's a long journey,

You might not come back alive." "We won't make anyone go," he added. "Volunteers only." Musk has been talking about his interplanetary ambitions for two decades: The founding mission of his hard-driving - and thus far largely successful - rocket company SpaceX was to eventually create the technology necessary to shuttle humans to and from Mars. The company is currently testing (and so far

blowing up) early, uncrewed iterations of a vehicle called Starship, that Musk hopes will be capable of the arduous trek, though no one has been injured. But Musk has frequently talked about the inevitable dangers of his plans for Mars travel, saying at a virtual conference in August that there's a "good chance you'll die" on an early SpaceX mission to Mars. Such risk predictions track with historical human spaceflight initiatives: Three astronauts died in a fire during ground tests during NASA's Apollo program last century, and 14 other astronauts were killed during the Space Shuttle era in the Columbia and Challenger disasters.

Musk has previously said he hopes to one day live on Mars but has not indicated he would be part of any early settlement missions. He acknowledged, however, that

assembling the crews for the first Mars missions will be "like that ad for Shackleton going to the Antarctic," referring to a newspaper ad that British explorer Ernest Shackleton supposedly placed in a newspaper at the turn of the 19th Century when he sought to assemble a crew for the first-ever excursion to the Antarctic.

"Men wanted for hazardous journey, small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful, honor and recognition in case of success," the purported advertisement, to which Shackleton is said to have received more than 5,000 replies, read. But historians have questioned the legitimacy of the advertisement and its surrounding lore.

SpaceX's plans for a Mars

settlement bring up numerous technological, political and ethical questions. One of the most challenging hurdles may also be financial, and SpaceX is likely still many, many years from developing all the technology such a settlement would require.

The planet is also an exceedingly lethal place to visit: Humans could be killed by radiation exposure, and the planet's surface is so low in atmospheric pressure that a person's blood would literally boil if they were exposed to the elements. That means settlers would permanently need to live in air-tight habitats or clunky spacesuits to keep them alive. NASA and others have been researching possible Mars habitats and survival methods for decades, but there is no clearly defined path forward as of yet.



# How fasting during Ramzan reinforces the humility and gratitude integral to Islam

**Men and women, rich and poor, master and servant all experience hunger pangs, a parity of experience that can shatter arrogance**

I started fasting this Ramzan for the first time in my life. It was an experiment in putting mind over matter and as a mark of solidarity with fasting in Africa, Arabia and many countries of Asia. For years I had wondered: Why would a religion make its people starve and suffer? The answer was clear by the end of my day of fasting. It teaches humility and gratefulness that is at the heart of Islam. Karen Armstrong, the historian of comparative religions, offers theological and practical insights about Islamic practices. She reminds us that the word Islam in Arabic means "total surrender" - to that one God, who is creator, provider and destroyer. When Muhammad, a merchant from Mecca, first received the call from Al Lah (The God) in 612 AD, he was meditating on the problems that plagued Arabia, where tribal warfare and bloodshed was on the rise and religiosity had deteriorated to mere ritualism. His people, the Quraish, were a proud tribe that ruled the city of Mecca. In early

7th century Mecca, the rich clans occupied the land around the Kaba and the poor lived on the outskirts of the city. The infirm, orphans and widows were exploited, the weak viewed with disdain. Ideas of honour were inflated. Any slight, real or imagined, would invite blood feuds. We use the word jahil in Hindi/ Urdu for an ignorant person. Muslims understand it as the pre-Islamic "time of ignorance" or jahiliyyah.

The new religion of Muhammad urged its followers to follow jilm, an ancient Arab virtue, which meant living life temperately, responding patiently and peacefully. The biggest struggle, jihad, is with one's own self, as one must fight anger and arrogance lurking within oneself. The Prophet proclaimed after winning a skirmish with a Quraish caravan once, "We are returning from the lesser jihad (battle) and going to the greater jihad", referring to the immensely difficult struggle to reform their own society and hearts. This idea of

inner transformation seems to resonate with Mahatma Gandhi's concept of satyagraha that urges individuals to win their opponents with patience, compassion and self-suffering.

Self-suffering is integral to surrender. In Ramzan, as the day passes without food and water, we enter a most vulnerable state. A glass of water becomes more valuable than piles of gold. Men and women, rich and poor, master and servant all experience hunger pangs, a parity of experience that can shatter arrogance. When we are hungry and thirsty, we tend to think of those who are poor and have no food. We feel obliged to share our good fortune and pay jakaat/zakat. What does the obligation to pay jakaat mean for current times? In Arabia, when food was scarce and survival tough, food could suffice as jakaat. But as modern Indians, we can pay for the education of children or finance projects that help intergenerational mobility of lower classes of all religions, not just Muslims. Many may be



surprised to realise that Prophet Muhammad did not use the word kaffir for non-believers or non-Muslims. He called the previous prophets, Moses, Abraham and Jesus, his brothers. He was aware that all Abrahamic religions are genealogically bound. Then who were the Kaffirs? The word kufr means defiant ingratitude. It applied to the Prophet's own people, the Quraish, who wanted to continue the life of jahiliyyah and whose hearts were locked or sealed against the new message of humility.

Jahiliyyah and kafirun are very much present in our times. From those running the Islamic State, using violence to terrorise and torture, to those showing off their wealth by lavish iftaar parties. Several people in all religions, nations and political parties have

their hearts sealed against appeals of equity and justice.

In Mecca, the new religion of Islam became popular amongst women, youth, slaves and weaker clans. Arabia had the same custom of killing infant daughters that India struggles with even today. The first pledge the new converts took was of no lying, no stealing, no infanticide. They freed their slaves. The call for prayer from the first mosque in Medina was given by a former slave. They treated the weak and infirm with respect and care.

Today when I see Hindu and Muslim mothers lighting candles to Mount Mary, and people of all faiths kneeling before Haji Ali, I remember that Karl Marx said religion is the "opium of the masses" but also the "sigh of the oppressed".

## *My aunt died waiting for her Covid result. Mortuaries were full. A gurudwara rescued us*



the family but never imagined the ordeal that would follow later. In Covid times, you don't grieve, you run pillar to post for a place at the mortuary and then for burial. With hundreds of people dying each day, where do you bury your loved ones if there's no space left? My aunt died at 4 pm and several hours later, we were still frantically searching for a mortuary to keep her for the night. Since burials happen during the day, the hospital was overbooked, and dead bodies aren't allowed in the society, imagine the trauma that the deceased's family has to go through. As they say, every cloud has a silver lining. At 11 pm, ours came from a gurudwara. A family friend put us in touch with them and in a matter of minutes, a mortuary was arranged. The seven-hour ordeal

was put to rest in hardly a few minutes. What is segregation of religion during the Covid era? Nothing! During a time when people are charging thousands of rupees for the whole process, they did it for free. All the pains and sorrows and timeless suffering eventually gave way to relief as the selfless Sikhs helped us through the ordeal.

Satbir Singh, from the NGO Shaheed Bhagat Singh, who helped us, said, "We have our mortuary in Trans Yamuna. Jatinder Singh, the founder of the NGO, and S Vikram Singh Rohini, a member from the Delhi Sikh Gurudwara Managing Committee, actively handle the cremations of the dead. It is sad to see that their families are unable to attend the last rites. We do it all for free because our

religion has taught us to serve others selflessly." Satbir adds that they don't see the religion of the dead before performing their last rites. "It will be wrong to see the religion of the dead while serving them. Be it a Hindu, Muslim or Christian, we try to perform the last rites according to their customs. We even provide PPE kits to their family members who wish to join us. However, if there is no space for burials, we are left with no choice but to cremate them." Satbir said that they have helped hundreds of people till now. He said, "Whenever a call comes to us, we leave all our work and go to help the family in need. Be it providing food to Covid-infected patients or filling oxygen cylinders, we are ready to help everyone without expecting anything in return."

Beg, borrow, cry - my family endured the 'now normal' pleas for an oxygen cylinder a whole day for my aunt, who was gasping for breath at a nearby hospital. We made calls to everyone we knew, begged a clinic and cried in grief at the helplessness of the situation. That time, I knew I lost her. The world looked almost minuscule, the air in the room waiting for 'the

bad news' heavy with despair, as if all the grief on earth was condensed. So, when the silence of the room was filled with shrieks and despair, I knew the time had finally come to say a silent goodbye. She had died of cardiac arrest while her Covid results were still awaited. The Covid results were delayed. In what has become a ruthless memory now, I stood strong for





# The Takeaway from the Most Political Oscars Ever? Political Movies are Hard.

When the presenters rip open the climactic envelope at this year's pandemic-delayed Oscars on Sunday night, the Best Picture winner will be selected from the most overtly political pool of nominees in the ceremony's history.

Since last year - when the surprise Best Picture win for "Parasite" was seemingly our Last Good Moment before the madness of 2020 - Americans have experienced the Covid-19 pandemic, last summer's Black Lives Matter protests and the 2020 presidential election and its bloody aftermath in the January 6 riots. Amid all this, Americans have been largely barred from actual theaters, making moviegoing a more contemplative, intimate experience than ever, just as the world we're contemplating has grown more inescapably political. It would have seemed unthinkable for the Academy to nominate blockbusters like "Black Panther" or "A Star Is Born" for the night's biggest award, given the pensiveness and tension that have defined the past year.

This year's nominees tackle live-wire social issues like the suppression of speech and protest, the struggle for Black civil rights, #MeToo feminism and the Amazon-ification of the U.S. economy. Following years of debate and activism around the

perceived aloof whiteness of Hollywood - including the "#OscarsSoWhite" campaign, which shook the foundation of the awards-industrial complex - they grapple, whether head-on or implicitly, with the political issues that define this era.

Which isn't to say that they're all great. Or even, in some cases, good.

This group might not suffer from the stodgy grandeur that "political" Oscar-bait movies often cloak themselves in (hello, "The Ides of March"), but they have plenty of their own flaws on display. Even the best of them illuminate how difficult it is to simultaneously pull off both trenchant social critique and emotionally satisfying storytelling.

Historical dramas like "Judas and the Black Messiah" and "The Trial of the Chicago 7" stumble over genre tropes that blunt their impact. "Nomadland," adapted from journalist Jessica Bruder's nonfiction 2017 book about mostly retirement-age American transients, is the runaway Best Picture favorite, but suffers from a narrative indecisiveness that many critics have mistaken for profundity. "Promising Young Woman" is heavy-handed, to say the least, in its commentary, the textbook definition of style over substance.

As flawed as some of the films in

the group are, however, they're all at the very least compelling in some way, which can't always be said of the Academy's choices. With this year's Oscar slate, the Academy has done an impressive job of showcasing the diversity - across every dimension, from style to demographic - of modern cinema (as well as, of course, burnishing its own bruised social credentials). They've also unintentionally pulled back the curtain on just how difficult it is to make great art that speaks to both the issues facing America and the world today, as well as the viewer's aesthetic eye and emotional heart.

Filmmakers throughout history have, occasionally, struck a perfect balance when it comes to the tricky alchemy that great political art requires. Best Picture nominees (some of them winners) like "Judgment at Nuremberg," "In the Heat of the Night," "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner," "M\*A\*S\*H," "All the President's Men," "Network" and "The Insider," among others, dealt with political and social issues to great narrative success; they're remembered as signposts in American pop culture for the statements they made about the liberal international order, or race relations, or the media's role in speaking truth to power.

Two of this year's Best Picture

nominees follow closely in such films' footsteps, analyzing American society through discrete historical incidents: Aaron Sorkin's "The Trial of the Chicago 7" and Shaka King's "Judas and the Black Messiah." "The Trial of the Chicago 7" both suffers and benefits in turn from the "West Wing" auteur Sorkin's artistic tics: witty, hyper-verbal sparring between its characters, a keen eye for historical detail, and a square-jawed, pre-Watergate liberal idealism. It adopts the well-worn trappings of the courtroom drama to convey the political tensions of the 1960s New Left, as rabble-rousers including Abbie Hoffman and Tom Hayden are prosecuted for their roles in inciting a riot outside the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Along with King's film and other recent critical smash-hit historical dramas ("Dunkirk," "The Post," "Selma," Netflix's "The Crown," etc.), it fits comfortably into a genre that might be called Wikipedia Theatre: shoebox history lessons, frequently peppered with archival footage that makes their ripped-from-yesterday's-headlines narratives all the more immersive. Sorkin's film is charming in its sensibility as a talky, middle-brow courtroom drama - something now all too infrequent in an era dominated by either Marvel blockbusters or

buzzy indie features. But it's overly wedded to its historical minutiae, aimlessly meandering down narrative cul-de-sacs (like one featuring a cameo from Michael Keaton as LBJ's attorney general, Ramsey Clark) that distract from any current-day resonance it might have. The film ultimately succumbs to Sorkin's crowd-pleasing instincts; as its end titles roll, describing the various, seemingly contradictory paths each of the defendants' lives took post-'60s, one is left with the unshakable impression that a film about those events would be infinitely more compelling to watch - and that it would say far more about the complex motivations behind personal activism.

"Judas and the Black Messiah" suffers equally from a misplaced narrative focus. It's a textbook undercover-cop drama that doubles as a portrait of Bill O'Neal, an FBI informant who infiltrated the Black Panthers and fed information to law enforcement agents that led to their assassination of Fred Hampton. King uses O'Neal's arc, masterfully portrayed by the "Atlanta" and "Sorry to Bother You" actor Lakeith Stanfield, to depict the complicated relationship between Black Americans and a state that alternately offers them protection and brutal violence.



# As China's defence minister heads for Sri Lanka, should India be worried?

**> Wei Fenghe's visit follows trip by foreign policy chief Yang Jiechi and comes amid rising military tensions between Beijing and New Delhi**  
**> But experts say Beijing's real aim may be shoring up support for controversial Chinese projects, including Port City Colombo**

The Chinese Defence Minister Wei Fenghe's visit to Sri Lanka on Tuesday is as much about boosting political and economic cooperation as it is about military links, experts say.

Wei will become the second senior Chinese official to have visited the country since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic when he arrives for the three-day visit, which follows a trip by China's foreign policy chief Yang Jiechi in October 2020. Wei is expected to hold talks with President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and other senior officials. Wei is also to visit Dhaka. "But while the visit is likely to raise hackles in India which has been locked in a military confrontation with China along their disputed Himalayan border for the past year, experts say the timing suggests military issues might not be the main thing on Beijing's agenda. Wei's visit is likely to coincide with a ruling by Sri Lanka's Supreme Court on Port City Colombo, a controversial Chinese-funded US\$1.4 billion development project to be built on reclaimed land that opponents - who have lodged 19 petitions against it - say violates the country's sovereignty, constitution and labour laws.

The project is the latest in a string of Chinese investments in the country that some believe are aimed at gaining influence among South Asian nations and luring them away from India's orbit.

## NOT ABOUT THE MILITARY?

Ranjan Mathai, a former Indian foreign secretary, said there was nothing to suggest Wei was coming to clinch a significant military deal.

"The visit is aimed at strengthening bilateral ties at a time when Sri Lanka is saying it does not want to get drawn into military confrontation between great powers," he said.

Rather, said Mathai, who was India's top diplomat from 2011 to



2013, the visit was aimed at ensuring Sri Lanka stayed "neutral" in regards to tensions over China's increasingly assertive actions in the Indo-Pacific. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a four-nation group comprising the United States, India, Japan and Australia that is aimed at countering Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific, has been increasing the pressure on Beijing in recent months by seeking a common front with other coastal states in the region.

The Japanese ambassador in New Delhi, Satoshi Suzuki, said in February that India and Japan were cooperating with other countries, including Sri Lanka, to strengthen the Quad under the Indo-Pacific framework.

However, the Quad's overtures to Sri Lanka have not always been entirely welcome, with the Sri Lankan Foreign Secretary Jayanath Colomboge expressing concerns about the grouping in October last year.

"We are observing the rise of the Quad as an exclusive military alliance. That is the problem," he said at a seminar, though he added: "If the Quad is aiming at economic revival, there are no

issues." Mathai said Sri Lanka and other nations in South Asia shared China's concerns about the Quad. He said the recent passage of an American warship through India's exclusive economic zone without Delhi's consent could be highlighted during Wei's visit as a way of illustrating US double standards. "It also ensures India's Quad-based strategies will find critics in India's neighbourhood," Mathai added.

'A WRONG SIGNAL TO INDIA' China's efforts to expand its influence in South Asia in recent years have followed a two-pronged approach.

In addition to deepening defence cooperation, it has poured billions of dollars into infrastructure projects under its Belt and Road Initiative.

Both approaches have led to concerns in New Delhi that Beijing is trying to make inroads into India's traditional sphere of influence.

The rising India-China rivalry has been compounded by a year-long face-off between their militaries along their disputed border in Ladakh, and the clash has in turn increased New Delhi's

sensitivities to defence deals between China and India's neighbours. Wei visited both Nepal and Pakistan "Hosting the Chinese defence minister when India and China are locked in a military stand-off sends the wrong signal," said Rajiv Bhatia, distinguished fellow at the Mumbai based think-tank Gateway House.

Bhatia, a former Indian diplomat, said relations between India and Sri Lanka had been strained since March, when Delhi abstained from voting on a UN Human Rights Commission resolution that sought a mandate to collect evidence of human rights violations during the Sri Lankan civil war.

The UN believes up to 100,000 people died in the 26-year conflict between government forces and the Tamil Tiger rebels. Both sides are accused of atrocities in the fighting, which ended in 2009, but the UN resolution accused the Sri Lankan government of "obstructing accountability".

During the war, China had backed the Sri Lankan government against the Tigers, supplying it with weapons.

However, defence cooperation largely dried up after the war. The

presence of a Chinese submarine and a warship at Colombo harbour in 2014 led to strong protests from New Delhi. In 2019 Beijing supplied Sri Lanka with a refitted frigate but its plan to set up an aircraft repair factory was subsequently dropped following India's objection.

George Cooke, a former Sri Lankan diplomat, said India needn't be concerned over Wei's visit.

Sri Lanka had assured India it would not allow any country to have a military base on its soil and it would not encourage activities that could jeopardise Delhi's security interest, said Cooke, who pointed out the two countries had strong military links of their own.

India and Sri Lanka have enhanced cooperation on counterterrorism since the 2019 Easter bombings

, in which Islamist suicide bombers targeted three churches and three luxury hotels, and their two navies (along with that of the Maldives) hold regular joint exercises and security dialogues to ensure peace and stability in the region.

"Sri Lanka is not going to bargain away its unique position of having good relations with both India and China," Cooke said.

## CHINA'S INFLUENCE RISING

But China's influence in Sri Lanka has grown since Beijing lent its support to Colombo on the UNHRC resolution, in sharp contrast to India's abstention. Sri Lanka recently negotiated a US\$500 million loan from China Development Bank and a US\$180 million loan from the Beijing-headquartered Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. The two countries have also agreed a US\$1.5 billion currency swap. Some experts said China's relations with Sri Lanka were predominantly based on economic cooperation and the development of infrastructure. Defence cooperation would deepen only if the Indian Ocean



# Covid hits economy: Labor participation falls, unemployment rises

**As restrictions become tighter across states to prevent rising Covid-19 cases, several key economic indicators like production, sales, labour participation and employment have fallen.**

The second wave of Covid-19 has already triggered a health crisis in the country and may soon derail all efforts undertaken to revive the economy. As restrictions become tighter across states to prevent rising Covid-19 cases, several key economic indicators like production, sales, labour participation and employment have fallen.

## LOCKDOWNS WEAKEN ECONOMY

Almost all states in the country have imposed some restrictions in the wake of the second wave of the pandemic. The strict lockdowns have deeply hurt businesses across many sectors including restaurant, tourism, travel and consumer goods.

A study conducted by the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) suggests that retail and wholesale traders in the country

are facing massive losses due to the tighter restrictions. Traders across the country have already lost a massive amount of business over the last few days, said CAIT.

The traders' body has estimated the total trade loss due to Covid-19 restrictions at Rs 5 lakh crore. In Delhi alone, traders have lost business worth Rs 25,000 crore in just 25 days.

As a result of the restrictions, people have already started losing jobs, especially those who were part of the informal economy, where there is no job or social security.

It is worth mentioning that key economic indicators that had improved quickly after the first wave of Covid-19 in India have again started sinking.

**LABOUR PARTICIPATION DIPS** Mahesh Vyas, MD & CEO of Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), has written an

article where he suggested that labour market conditions have been deteriorating in India since the start of this month.

He said the daily 30-day moving average estimates and weekly estimates of three major labour market ratios are evidence of deterioration. Vyas wrote that the labour participation rate (LPR), employment rate and unemployment rate have been impacted by the restrictions imposed across various states. Labour participation rate is likely to fall further as several migrant workers have returned to their home towns after governments started imposing restrictions. Most of these informal workers are now without employment and income.

## UNEMPLOYMENT RISES IN APRIL

Not only has the LPR fallen but the unemployment rate has also increased this month. In the first



week of April, the unemployment rate jumped to 8.2 per cent from 6.7 per cent in the last week of March, according to CMIE data.

The unemployment rate further increased to 8.6 per cent in the second week of April. In the third week, the unemployment rate settled at 8.4 per cent and then 7.4 per cent. CMIE predicts the unemployment level to touch eight per cent in April after closing at 6.5 per cent in March.

There are high chances that April could become the third consecutive month when there is deterioration in terms of fast-frequency labour statistics including LPR, employment and unemployment rate. There were 43.8 million people in India who were unemployed and willing to work in March 2021, said Vyas of CMIE. According to him, the number is likely to have gone up in April as the LPR is expected to remain stable while the unemployment rate continues to go up. Employment opportunities are already declining due to strict lockdowns imposed in some states and the situation could worsen quickly if the spread of Covid-19 is not limited by the end of May.

## A 30-year-old website designer bought Google Argentina's domain for just Rs 415

Google is the biggest search engine in the world and its country-specific domains follow the lead in almost every nation. Google Argentina is no different and you would think that would make its web domain exclusive for all purposes. For a few minutes though, that wasn't the case.

That is because Google Argentina's domain name was bought by an individual last Wednesday. Now before you start wondering how that could possibly have happened, know that the website was down

more, Kurona mentioned that he purchased the domain - Google.com.ar through a normal, legal process. So what happened here?

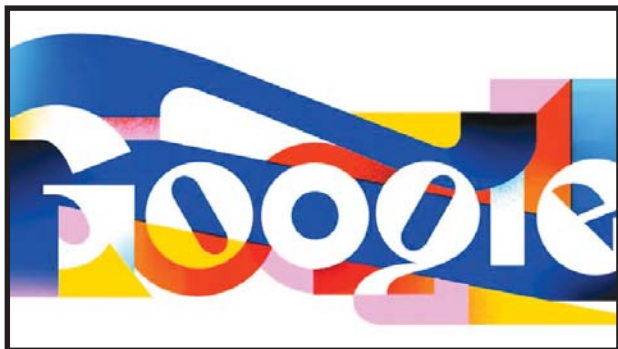
Google's Argentina domain was down for around two hours in the country on Wednesday. Kurona, outskirts of Buenos Aires on Wednesday night, designing a

website's domain on the Network Information Center Argentina (NIC). NIC is responsible for operating all the country code domains for Argentina with .ar.

To his, and now to the surprise of all of us, Google's Argentina domain was available for purchase. Nicolas acquired Google Argentina's domain name for 270 pesos (Rs 415).

"I was frozen," he said, having never imagined completing the transaction. To check its authenticity, he opened www.google.com.ar into his search bar and pressed enter. "My personal data appeared," he said.

Google Argentina confirmed the same to BBC, saying "for a short term, the domain was acquired by someone else." It, however, mentioned that it regained control of the domain very quickly. Kurona confirmed that the domain name was taken away from him shortly by the NIC. But his 270 pesos have not been returned, either by the NIC or Google.



for two hours in the country on the night.

The epic sale was made by a 30-year-old web designer named Nicolas Kurona. Kurona shared an image of the purchase on his Twitter account, quickly gathering a massive number of reactions from the Twitterati.

After all, it is not every day that an individual gets to claim Google's web domain. What's

website for a client, got to know about this through some messages on his WhatsApp. That is when he decided to check it himself.

"I entered www.google.com.ar into my browser and it didn't work," he said, in an interaction with BBC. "I thought something strange was happening."

Kurona then made a rather heroic attempt. He looked for the

## Tata Vs Mistry: Shapoorji Pallonji Group challenges SC verdict, files review petition



The Shapoorji Pallonji (SP) Group has filed a review petition in Supreme Court challenging the March 26 verdict in connection with the dispute between Tata Sons and Cyrus Mistry. The top court has ruled in favour of Tata Sons, upholding the ouster of Cyrus Mistry as the executive chairman of the company.

While the fresh development is yet to be confirmed by either party, the SP Group was reportedly unhappy with the top court's verdict favouring the Tatas. The review petition adds another twist to the prolonged legal tussle between Cyrus Mistry and Tata Sons. The Supreme Court had on March 26 set aside the NCLAT order from December 2019 that asked Tata Sons to reinstate

Cyrus Mistry as the executive chairman of the company.

"We find all the questions of law are liable to be answered in favour of the appellants, Tata Group and the appeals file by the Tata Group are liable to be allowed and Shapoorji Pallonji group is liable to be dismissed," SC said.

The SP Group had said in court that the removal of Mistry as Tata Sons chairman was an "ambush" and that the 52-year-old had not got any prior notice regarding the decision taken by the board.

Appearing on behalf of Mistry, senior advocate Shyam Divan said the removal was in complete violation of principles of corporate governance.



# Covid positive during pregnancy? Doctors say don't panic, here's what you should do

*In India, the number of pregnant women testing positive for Covid-19 is more in the second wave, doctors said. However, they also said there is nothing to panic about. Here's what you should be doing in case you are pregnant and Covid positive.*



There have been inconclusive conversations around the risk associated with testing positive for Covid while pregnant. A recent study by the Oxford university said pregnant women infected with Covid-19 and their newborn children face higher risks of complications than was previously known. There are numerous such studies being conducted on smaller groups. These do not necessarily hold true for all pregnant women. IndiaToday.in spoke to gynecologists, obstetrician and a nutritionist to get a detailed understanding of such cases. On the Oxford study, Dr. Bandhana Sodhi, Senior consultant Obstetrics and Gynecologist said, "The data is small to be saying these are happening, but I would say we need to be more careful because we are dealing with two lives. But as of now, there's really nothing to panic if there is no severity is involved."

**THERE'S NOTHING TO PANIC**  
All the doctors we spoke to said

there's nothing to panic about if one tests positive for Covid-19 during pregnancy. Doctors said Covid-19 does not always take a severe turn just because of pregnancy, especially in the early stages. Mild cases can be cured at home with proper rest, diet and exercise. In advanced stages of pregnancy, there could be complications as a woman's immunity is compromised, however, even that can be solved with proper medical care without birth complications.

Dr. Loveleena Nadir, Senior consultant Obstetrics and Gynecologist said, "It is wrong to say pregnant women are more vulnerable to Covid. The immunity is normally compromised in pregnant women and hence they are more vulnerable to any virus and not just Covid."

She also said it is recommended that pregnant women limit their hospital visits to not get exposed to the virus.

**MORE PREGNANT WOMEN TESTING POSITIVE FOR COVID**

Dr. Shelly Singh, Senior Consultant Obstetrics and Gynecologist at Rosewalk Hospitals, Delhi said, "In the first wave we did not see many pregnant women getting affected by the virus, however, in the second wave, almost every second patient walking in has Covid. Especially those who have comorbid conditions like gestational diabetes, asthma, or respiratory complications, these women are getting more affected by the virus. It is more severe than it was in the first wave. The effect on the baby is the amniotic fluid around it reduces in many cases. She said in the first wave cases were mild, but in the second wave, "it's like a tsunami" with the oxygen levels dipping in several cases.

**NEW STRAINS RESPONSIBLE**  
The news strains are responsible for the increase in the number of Covid cases among pregnant women, Dr. Shelly said. "This time it's much more transmissible and sometimes escaping the RT-PCR test. Sometimes the women

show all the symptoms but test negative. In such cases, we start with Covid treatment."

## BIRTH COMPLICATIONS

Dr. Shelly said doctors are having to do premature deliveries at times when the condition of the mother is very serious. But she said, "Pre-maturity is not only because of Covid."

Dr. Loveleena Nadir said, "There are no birth complications as such due to Covid. It depends on the severity of the cases. As long as the oxygen saturation is fine and there is no comorbidity involved, there is no risk involved. Dr. Bandhana Sodhi said, "One has to ensure that the birth process does not affect the saturation. A caesarian birth is also for the same reason not really because of covid but to

avoid the impact of labour during normal delivery which might impact the saturation levels.

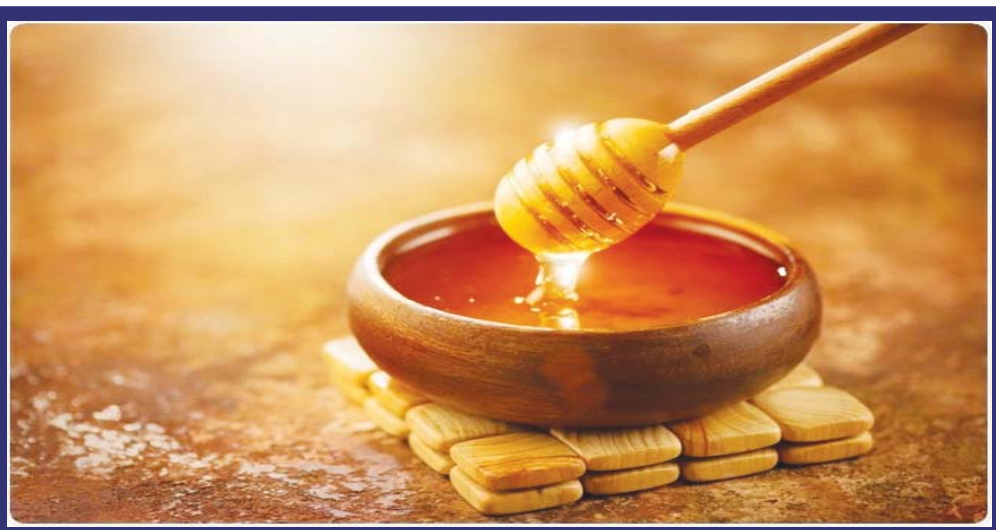
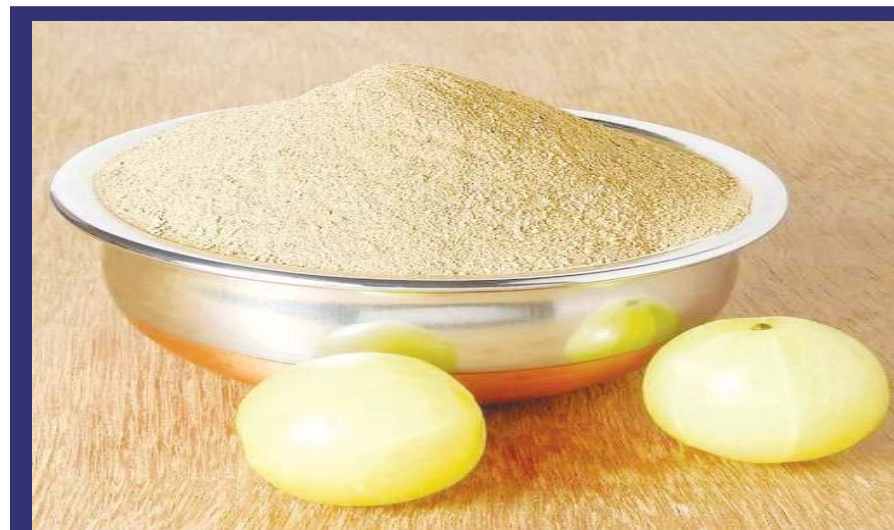
Even during the antenatal period, it is important to monitor - fever, oxygen saturation and blood parameters." **DOCTORS SHARE TIPS**

"Prevention is better than cure, make sure you are following Covid safety protocol. Don't go out into crowds.

"Take vitamins and zinc and have a good diet. Moderate exercise is also recommended. Stay as positive as possible. Don't run for hospitalisation as soon as you get positive as most cases can be treated at home with teleconsultation with doctors. Never self-medicate, always consult your doctor before taking any medication.

## Build Your Immunity to Fight Covid: Amla powder and honey paste

*A simple paste of amla and honey can help boost your immunity, which is essential to fight Covid.*



The food that we eat plays a big role in building our strength and immunity. And now, as India battles the second wave of Covid crisis, it is most important to focus on health and learn about ingredients that can boost immunity. In today's segment of Build

Your Immunity to Fight Covid, Dr Ila Tanna, MD, Associate Professor at Uttarakhand Ayurveda University, tells us about a simple recipe that will help boost your immunity.

## INGREDIENTS

1 tsp Indian gooseberry powder or amla powder  
1/2 tsp honey

## HOW TO MAKE

Mix 1 tsp of amla powder with 1/2 tsp of honey. Consume it on an empty stomach once in the morning every day.

## BENEFITS

Amla:

Amla powder supports natural immunity and digestive functions. Consuming amla

regularly is associated with better action of macrophages and the immune system.

It is the richest source of vitamin c, which boosts the production of white blood cells in the body that help in fighting several infections. Also, amla is rich in iron, calcium and several other minerals, which

makes it a complete nutritional fruit that enhances immunity.

Honey:

Honey induces leukocytes to release cytokines, which helps in repairing damaged tissues. Furthermore, it contains high antioxidants, thus, it helps to build your immune system.



## Stowaway movie review:

### The most vital film 'aatmanirbhar' Indians can watch right now, out on Netflix

**Stowaway movie review: Netflix's new space drama, starring Anna Kendrick and Toni Collette, is a film about folks who go on a daring mission to find oxygen to save others, while those in charge leave them in the lurch. Gut-wrenchingly relevant..**

" Stowaway  
" Director - Joe Penna  
" Cast - Anna Kendrick,  
Toni Collette, Daniel Dae Kim,  
Shamier Anderson  
"

No one could have predicted this, least of all the people who made it, but Stowaway, a new science-fiction survival drama on Netflix, is perhaps the most thematically relevant and emotionally resonant film that Indians will watch this year. It's about a three-person crew, whose two-year mission to Mars is interrupted when they discover a stowaway in the hold. His name is Michael, and he has no idea how he got there. But his presence presents a problem - there isn't enough oxygen onboard for four people. The crew, led by a curt veteran astronaut played by Toni Collette, is faced with a moral quandary. Should they dispose

of Michael, thereby ensuring that the mission proceeds as per plan and they remain unharmed, or should they risk retrieving the spare oxygen that lies, unattended and unaccounted for, a 20-minute spacewalk away on the other side of the station?

Anna Kendrick plays a doctor named Zoe, the moral centre of the crew. She insists that they do everything in their power to save Michael, with whom she has developed a fast bond. But there's a sense that even if she hadn't, she'd have advocated for his survival. David, a biologist played by Daniel Dae Kim, on the other hand, believes that wasting even another day trying to retrieve the oxygen is putting the rest of them, and the mission, in jeopardy.

After a series of deliberations, humanity prevails, and the crew decides to stage the daring retrieval attempt. In a thrilling 30

minute third act, wonderfully paced and excitingly staged, we accompany David and Zoe as they make the 450-metre journey to the other side of the space station, while Michael and the commander stay behind.

Director Joe Penna, who broke onto the Hollywood scene after a hugely successful career as a YouTuber, isn't merely trying to make a spectacle. He is more concerned with how these characters react to the psychological turmoil they find themselves in. He highlights their entrapment by ramping up the claustrophobia in the first couple of acts, and then, makes grand statements about the insignificance of humanity by framing sweeping vistas of space in that final set piece.

Stowaway isn't the sort of mainstream entertainment that Ridley Scott's The Martian was, but it isn't meant to be. It's more



like a classic episode of Star Trek; self-contained, thematically ambitious, and deeply humanistic. It is also reminiscent of Explorers on the Moon, the first Tintin album to truly contemplate mortality. But it is that final mission that adds an unexpected emotional heft to the film. What would, in virtually any other time in history, have been nothing more than a solid action set piece, has been transformed by the ongoing pandemic into a something infinitely more meaningful. Zoe and David's independent quest to find oxygen mirrors the mass mobilisation of common men and women that we

are witnessing right now, all around us, while the representatives chosen to lead fail both the crew, and our country. Mission control in the film is never seen. Nor is it heard. We are allowed to listen only to one side of the conversation, heightening the sensation that the crew of the Hyperion spacecraft is, as the Prime Minister would say, 'aatmanirbhar'. But they face their problems head on, with kindness, not hate; with empathy, not suspicion; with hope, not fear. And that is why Stowaway is the movie of the moment.

## Minari movie review:

### A magnificent masterpiece that strikes universal chord, deserves all the Oscars

**Minari movie review: Director Lee Isaac Chung's Oscar-nominated film is a magnificent masterpiece that strikes a universal chord.**



Minari  
Director - Lee Isaac Chung  
Cast - Steven Yeun, Han Ye-ri,  
Alan Kim, Youn Yuh-jung, Noel  
Kate Cho, Will Patton

The small screen does not do justice to Minari, a rich, expansive film about the human condition. It is a film that refuses to conform, in nearly every way, to the tropes and traps that normally ensnare Oscar-bait movies. In rejecting these rules, its attitude isn't reckless, but tender. It's a film about farming that reveals new layers as you scratch beneath the

surface - dust away the topsoil of family drama, and you'll discover a Biblical allegory underneath. Steven Yeun and Han Ye-ri play Jacob and Monica, a Korean couple who relocate from California with their two young children - Anne and David - to rural Arkansas. Fed up with his dead-end job, Jacob dreams of running a successful farm that specialises in Korean produce. One of the earliest signs of his staunch self-reliance is when he turns down the services of a water diviner. Scoffing at the man's quote

of \$300, Jacob uses it as a teachable moment for David. "Korean people use their heads," he tells his son, and the two set about locating underground water themselves.

Minari is full of moments such as this - it is a movie about the minutiae.

Chung, who has partially based the story on his own childhood with first generation immigrant parents, is a humanist of the finest order. The story he is telling might seem very specific, but his ideas about family, about masculinity and motherhood, are infinitely accessible.

As Jacob and Monica embark on their uncertain new journey, their relationship strains. To ease some of the pressure, Monica's mother, Soon-ja, moves in with them. Her arrival from South Korea is met with apprehension by the kids, who are struggling

with displacement, just like their parents; California was their 'home'.

"Grandma smells of Korea," David complains, refusing to share his room with her. Monica, on the other hand, weeps when Soon-ja pulls out a surprise package of gochujang, straight from Korea. But in addition to unfamiliar odours and fermented chilli paste, Soon-ja brings with her something else, the titular minari - an uncommonly resilient herb from the homeland, which serves as a rather obvious metaphor. She quietly plants it on the banks of a nearby pond, occasionally tracking its assimilation into American soil, which unfolds in parallel to the family's own. Equally potent, symbolically, is the Mountain Dew that David chugs for breakfast, lunch and dinner - a reminder of the American dream that his family was perhaps promised, only to find

themselves stuck in a capitalist rut.

Minari is a dreamy film - unlike fellow Oscar-hopeful Nomadland, it doesn't romanticise the misfortunes of the misfits. The tone, however, rarely takes itself seriously. The film strikes profundity not through technical feats such as its magnificent score or its Malickian view of Americana, but through quiet moments of memory - like Monica lining the insides of drawers with paper, or the family joylessly watching an old Korean sitcom. Chung alternates between 'protagonists'. You are just as likely to empathise with Jacob's determination to live up to some Biblical idea of a 'provider' - there are references to the Garden of Eden, a scene in a church, and an apocalyptic event towards the end - as Monica's exasperation with his single-



## Christine McGuinness flashes her side as she poses in a TINY green minidress... after revealing she won't be celebrating her 10th wedding anniversary



She keeps her fans entertained with stunning snaps on social media.

And Christine McGuinness didn't disappoint with her latest as she flashed her side boob in a tiny green dress.

The former *Real Housewives Of Cheshire* star, 33, took to her Instagram on Tuesday to flaunt her sensational physique.

Christine posed beside a black door in the racy backless dress which showed off her ample assets.

The TV personality put her svelte pins on display as she added a pair of towering gold heels to her look. She cast a coquettish look over her shoulder as she posed, letting her curled golden tresses cascade down her back. The mother-of-three struck another pose in the halter neck dress, as she drew attention to her beauty with a heavy make-up palette.

Christine penned: 'I'ma leave the door open' alongside a green love heart as she posed up a storm.

The star also took to her Instagram

Stories to share a video of her pretty features as she fixed the camera with a smile.

Christine recently reflected on her



imminent 10th wedding anniversary with her presenter husband Paddy McGuinness.

The blonde joked she had endured '10 long years of marriage' with Take Me Out host Paddy before admitting they

had nothing romantic planned for their anniversary.

She told host Steph McGovern: 'I was 19 when I met him so it's 14 years ago and this year will be our tenth wedding anniversary. He won't know that unless he's watching.' 'We've never had an anniversary together until last year when we were forced to... We've got no romantic plans, I don't know what we'll be doing. 'We tend not to do a lot together, because of our situation at home with the children we don't have help or babysitters... It will probably be a takeaway at home. We're together and everything's going well. It's been 10 long years of marriage!' Christine also addressed rumours about her taking part in the next series of *Strictly Come Dancing*, with Steph's *Packed Lunch* regular Anton du Beke admitting: 'I'm pretty convinced she won't be dancing with me.' 'I think you'll probably get one of the unfirm ones. If I had any say at all, I think we'd make a perfect couple and we'd do very well.'

## Kareena Kapoor urges people to understand gravity of Covid-19 situation: 'Now more than ever, India needs you'

Actor Kareena Kapoor Khan on Wednesday penned a note urging people to understand the gravity of the Covid-19 situation in India. She chided those still flouting the coronavirus rules and asked them to consider the condition of the medical fraternity. Taking to Instagram, she shared the post and said, "It's unimaginable for me to know that there are still many people who do not understand the gravity of the situation our country is in. The next time you step out, or wear your mask

under your chin, or flout the rules; spare a thought for our doctors and medical staff. They are at a breaking point both mentally and physically. Each one of you reading this is responsible for breaking the chain. Now more than ever, India needs you." Her husband actor Saif Ali Khan reportedly took the second dose of the Covid-19 vaccine couple of days back. Earlier, Saif was spotted in March queuing up for the vaccine. Last week the couple visited a clinic in Mumbai. Kareena and Saif were seen

out after a long period as they have been staying indoors amid a major spike in coronavirus cases in the country. In February this year, they welcomed their second son but haven't revealed his face or name yet. After the birth of their first child Taimur, they had experienced mass media attention. Kareena returned to work a few weeks after giving birth. She shot an episode of the celebrity cooking show *Star vs Food*.

## The Falcon And The Winter Soldier creator on Captain America 4 rumours: 'Did Kevin Feige say it?'

The *Falcon and The Winter Soldier* ended with Sam Wilson (Anthony Mackie) wielding the shield and accepting his duty as Captain America. While fans celebrated his appointment on social media platforms, news



broke that *Captain America 4* was in the making. However, the Marvel show's creator Malcolm Spellman has now downplayed the *Captain America 4* rumours. In a recent interview, Spellman

said not to believe in these rumours until Marvel Studios head Kevin Feige himself makes the announcement.

"Who said it? Did Kevin say it? I would not put faith in anything

you do not hear directly from the man himself," Spellman told [Comicbook.com](http://Comicbook.com). Previously, *The Hollywood Reporter* stated that *Captain America 4* in the making. It was reported

that Spellman has been roped in to co-write the script with *Dalany* Musson.

Kareena  
Kapoor





## 'America is rising anew': Biden lays out ambitious, expensive plan to emerge from pandemic

(SAI Bureau)- President Joe Biden on Wednesday night outlined an optimistic vision after a year wracked by a deadly virus and incalculable struggles in America and abroad.

Biden said he "inherited a nation in crisis," one that is now "on the move again," and "turning peril into possibility. Crisis into opportunity. Setback into strength."

"America is rising anew, choosing hope over fear, truth over lies and light over darkness," Biden continued.

The speech marked an early victory lap for a White House fashioning itself as having one of the most consequential starts to a presidency in American history. It is also an opportunity to build momentum for two proposals - the American Jobs Plan and the American Families Plan - that, if enacted, would alter the course of the country for decades to come.



Biden is framing the spending blueprints, which carry a combined price tag of about \$4 trillion over the next decade, as a necessary corrective in order to rebuild the foundation of the middle class and society writ large at a time when trust in government is on the wane.

"We have to prove democracy still works - that our government still works and can deliver for the people," he said.

The president's speech focused on his first 100 days in office, including the progress the country has made in vaccinating residents against the coronavirus, and it will outline his multitrillion-dollar infrastructure and social welfare proposals.

Biden is attempting to enact a generation-defining agenda at a time when Democrats hold all the levers of power in Washington, albeit by the narrowest of margins.

(Contd on page 30)

## Is Pakistan's Leadership Turning It Into A Pariah?



(SAI Bureau)- The destruction of important institutions is going on blatantly in Pakistan under the patronage of state at a pace faster than deforestation. Yesterday, the timber mafia chopped the trees. Today, the crime is a legal and lucrative business. The land mafia purchases agricultural land at throwaway prices, converts it into a posh housing society and makes a killing overnight. The art has been best mastered by the Pakistani Army, that runs a network of huge elite-class housing societies in different cities under its Defense Housing Authority (DHA) scheme.

(Contd on page 29)

## Tycoon Sanjeev Gupta's Father Leaves UK As Group Battles For Survival



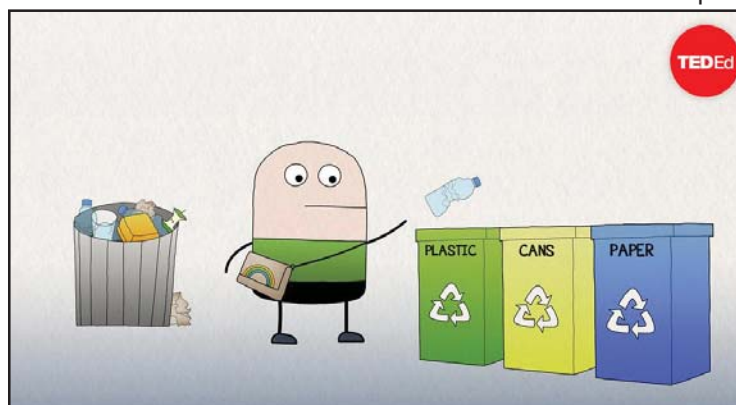
(SAI Bureau)-Parduman Gupta, father of embattled metals tycoon Sanjeev Gupta, has moved out of the U.K., just as the pair's GFG Alliance teeters on the brink following the collapse of its largest lender Greensill Capital. The senior Gupta has changed his country of usual residence from Britain to India, according to several

(Contd on page 29)

## What really happens to the plastic you throw out

(SAI Bureau)-Our planet is facing a crisis of catastrophic proportions, with the potential to impact life for generations to come. It is not the Covid-19 pandemic -- which the US is making great progress toward managing. It is also not the climate crisis, though it is related. We are talking about the plastic pollution crisis. Many people think of plastic pollution as merely litter, but the reality is that plastic is an ongoing contributor to climate change. More than 99% of plastic is made from fossil fuels and plastic production is expected to more than double over the next three decades, according to the Center for International Environmental Law. Moreover, one report predicts that plastic pollution in the sea is

likely to triple over the next decade -- putting our plastic consumption on an unsustainable collision course with our future on this planet. Driving this crisis



is the fact that many plastics are manufactured to be used once and then thrown away -- spewing pollution, burdening our communities and ecosystems, and overwhelming systems designed to

handle waste.

That's why we are introducing the Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act, a comprehensive national strategy to reform the entire plastics life cycle so that we are producing less new plastic, recycling more, and

(Contd on page 30)